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*How to Liberate Marx from His
Eurocentrism:*

*Notes on African/Black Marxism /
Wie man Marx von seinem
Eurozentrismus befreit:*

*Anmerkungen zum afrikanischen/
schwarzen Marxismus*

PRÉSENCE AFRICAINE
1^{er} CONGRÈS DES ÉCRIVAINS ET ARTISTES NOIRS
19-22 SEPTEMBRE 1956
SORBONNE - AMPHITHÉÂTRE DESCARTES - PARIS



...ce que je veux
c'est pour la faim universelle
pour la soif universelle
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la succulence des fruits.

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Poster for the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, organized by *Présence Africain*, 1956 / Plakat des Ersten Kongresses schwarzer Schriftsteller und Künstler, organisiert von *Présence Africain*, 1956

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How to Liberate Marx from His Eurocentrism: Notes on African/Black Marxism

There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the “universal.”

—Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” Paris, October 24, 1956

When approached about the idea of contributing to DOCUMENTA (13)’s notebook series, I proposed to its Artistic Director, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the idea of focusing on African Marxism. I thought it would be interesting as a way of liberating Marx from his Eurocentrism. I also thought it would be relevant to DOCUMENTA (13) because it revisits the exhibition’s founding years, which coincided with decolonization in Africa and other parts of the Third World, and with corollary landmark events that shifted world politics and created a new international order.

Among these events was the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, where non-aligned and newly independent nations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East met and defiantly declared an independent course at the climax of the Cold War. Bandung remains an incomplete project, but as an event it certainly signaled the potential of ending Western hegemony, and the possibility of a more pluralistic world. Extending such potential to the domain of knowledge production allows us to think of modernity and modern thought as more than

just a post-Enlightenment Western project. This made possible the critique of Western modernity and facilitated the move toward less Eurocentric modes of thinking in the humanities and social sciences within and outside the academy. Today, it is impossible to think about the mid-twentieth century and decolonization without remembering gatherings such as the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956 in Paris or the Second Congress in 1959 in Rome. Organized by the Paris-based quarterly *Présence Africaine*,¹ these two meetings hosted discussions of issues ranging from decolonization to slavery and signaled the rise of new schools of thought and movements such as Négritude, Pan-Africanism, and African Socialism.²

In all these events, the specter of Karl Marx loomed large. Decolonization and the liberation movement in the Third World were struggles in which Marxism played an important role as an ideology. Hence, revisiting Marxism from an African/Black perspective would also be a way to pay homage to one of the most influential German thinkers in the twentieth century. After all, this is also relevant to the most recent efforts to redeem Marx and overcome his blind spots vis-à-vis the non-Western world through the global impact of his ideas, which have been appropriated, rethought, and localized in different settings in ways that Marx himself could not have anticipated or imagined.

Most of the current scholarship on Marxism and the non-West has focused on redeeming Marx by recovering his writings on the non-Western world, which have been widely perceived as Eurocentric. An example is the recent work of Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, which sheds new light on Marx as a thinker.³ Through thorough and careful analysis of his lesser-known writing, including his journalistic work as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, we discover a Marx who is less of a class-based thinker and more of a global theorist, and who was sensitive to nationalism and issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity of human and social experiences across the globe.

Such efforts are welcome contributions to our view of Marx and his ideas regarding the non-West. However, in spite of his visionary work and enduring legacy, Marx was a product of his time and of Europe as a rising colonial empire with ambitions of conquest and domination, and the larger framework of his analysis was bound by the evolutionary thinking of that time. Moreover, such contributions ignore non-Western (including African) contributions to Marxism as it has been appropriated and reshaped in the context of decolonization and postcolonial struggles, and to some degree bear the character of navel-gazing prevalent among Western scholars in the field of critical theory.

Benita Barry draws our attention to the indifference among Marxist theorists in Europe to the “roads taken by Marxism in anticolonial

1 | *Présence Africaine* is a Paris-based, Pan-African quarterly journal that focuses on culture, politics, and literature. It was founded in 1947 by Alioune Diop (1910–1980), a Senegalese writer and major figure in anticolonial and Pan-African struggles. The journal expanded in 1949 to become a publishing house and a bookstore in the Latin Quarter in Paris and has been a highly influential forum in the Pan-Africanist movement and decolonization struggle, as well as an incubator for what came to be known as the Négritude movement.

2 | The congresses were organized by Alioune Diop (with Léopold Cédar Senghor). They attracted major figures of African and African-diaspora art, literature, and politics, such as Frantz Fanon, Jacques Stephen Alexis, George Lamming, Édouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, and Richard Wright, as well as others including Pablo Picasso, André Malraux, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Diop also initiated with Senghor the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (First World Festival of Negro Arts) in Dakar in 1966, which brought together figures from across the African continent and the African diaspora such as Ibrahim El-Salahi, Duke Ellington, and Langston Hughes.

3 | Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

domains,” and by extension to the contribution of African and African-diaspora intellectuals to Marxism in general. Such indifference, as she points out, takes place “within the wider and longstanding exclusion of non-Western knowledge from a canon compiled by [Western] metropolitan scholars.” While crediting a few Western Marxist thinkers such as Göran Therborn with acknowledging that Marxism became “the main intellectual culture of two major movements of the dialectic of modernity: the labour movement and the anticolonial movement,” Barry also criticizes them—with the exception of recognizing Frantz Fanon and his contribution to the study of violence and trauma associated with modernity in the colonial context—for underestimating the creativity and innovations of Asian and Latin American Marxism and for rejecting Africa as a “player in the discourses of Marxism and Modernity.”⁴

Hence, the urgent call to revisit African/Black Marxism and to rethink its immense innovation and creativity in the context of DOCUMENTA (13) as it celebrates its beginnings in the mid-1950s in the aftermath of World War II, which as a period also ushered in the rise of anticolonial struggles in Africa and other parts of the Third World. This I intend to do by paying homage to two key figures in African/Black Marxism: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub (1927–1971), the founder of the Sudanese Communist Party, who was a brilliant mind and an innovative Marxist thinker, and Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), the Martinican philosopher, poet, critic, and member of the French Communist Party, from which he later resigned, as pointed out below. Reproduced in this notebook are two texts by these figures, who represent Marxism in the context of Africa (Mahgoub) and of the African/Black diaspora (Césaire).⁵

The first text, Mahgoub’s “By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor,” is an abbreviated translation (made by myself and my colleague Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf) of Mahgoub’s political defense (a tradition in Sudanese left politics) in front of a military tribunal in 1959.⁶ This text provides a glimpse into the thinking of the founders of one the strongest leftist movements in African politics, the Sudanese Communist Party. It helps explain the enduring legacy and perseverance of this party to the present day, despite the violent repression it has faced from successive regimes in Sudan, which ended with the execution (surely the assassination) of Mahgoub, along with several other leading members of the party, after a farcical military trial in July 1971. Mahgoub dedicated his short life, as Abusharaf puts it, to “considering how socialism, which he described as the noblest cause that humanity had ever known, could be advanced within the struggle for national liberation and tailored to meet the needs of ordinary citizens.” As she further explains, “Turning a critical eye on both legacies

4 | Benita Barry, “Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity,” in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 125.

5 | It is worth mentioning here that the scholarship on African/Black Marxism has recently morphed into a considerable body of literature that sheds light on the diverse and immensely rich world of African and African-diasporic contributions to Marxist critique. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999 [orig. 1983]), Grant Farred, *What’s My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), and Carole Boyce-Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

6 | See *Defense before Military Courts* (Khartoum: Azza Publishing House, 2001 [orig. 1966]). Among Mahgoub’s publications are *Rectifying the Wrongs in Working amongst the Masses: Report Presented to the Central Committee of the Sudanese Communist Party* (Khartoum: Dar Al Wasilah, 1987 [orig. 1963]), *Marxism and the Quandaries of the Sudanese Revolution* (Khartoum: Azza Publishing House, 2008 [orig. 1967]), and

of European colonialism and the repressive traditions within Sudanese culture, he posed the perennial question: How can Africans utilize Marxist thought to create a progressive culture that embodies a systematic critique of all that is reactionary within their societies?”⁷

The second text, by Césaire, is known as “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” in which he basically tendered his resignation from the French Communist Party on October 24, 1956. “Besides its stinging rebuke of Stalinism,” Robin Kelley has written, the heart of the letter “dealt with the colonial question,” and not just the French Communist Party’s policies toward “the colonies but the colonial relationship between the metropolitan and the Martinican Communist Parties.”⁸ In other words, it is a call for self-determination for Third World people, and African/Black people more specifically. Interestingly, it was written in the same year that Mahgoub penned his book *New Horizons*, in which he expressed his disappointment with Third World Marxists for their blindness regarding Stalinism. It is a well-known fact that several African/Black Marxist artists and writers have had a contentious relationship with the politics of the Western Communist Party (as the official manifestation of Marxism) in two areas: its subordination of racism to class struggle, and the rigidity of its highly centralized structure of operation and decision making, which was hard for independent thinkers, and more specifically writers and artists, to tolerate.⁹ Césaire’s letter must be read in relationship to his earlier seminal text, which evolved into what is now known as *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), and in which he fleshed out his critique of colonialism and race.¹⁰ What is most important is the fact that Césaire’s “Letter” is, as pointed out by Cilas Kemedjio, a “sad commentary on the controversial and uneasy relationship between the Marxist Internationalist Left and Third-world anticolonial activists.” As Kemedjio further argues, the letter “forcefully reintroduces race and the colonial question at the heart of battles that were being waged mainly on ideological lines.”¹¹

In the wake of the downfall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of official Soviet Marxism and the Soviet Union around the same time, Jacques Derrida reminded us in his seminal work *Specters of Marx* that the spirit of Karl Marx is more relevant today than ever before. For, he laments,

it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the “end of ideologies” and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect . . . [this fact]: no degree

On the Program (Khartoum: Azza Publishing House, 2001 [orig. 1971]). He also translated several texts including Joseph P. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Khartoum: Azza Publishing House, 2008 [orig. 1950]).

7 | Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, “Marx in the Vernacular: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub and the Riddles of Localizing Leftist Politics in Sudanese Philosophies of Liberation,” *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly* 108, no. 3 (Summer 2009), p. 483. For a more comprehensive review of Mahgoub’s intellectual legacy and the Sudanese Communist Party’s impact on Sudanese culture and politics, see the special issue of *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (Winter 2010), entitled “What’s Left of the Left? The View from Sudan.”

8 | Robin Kelley, “A Poetic of Anticolonialism,” an introduction to Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 25.

9 | For one of the most interesting texts on this subject, besides Césaire’s “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” see Richard Wright’s famous essay published in the anti-Communist anthology *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard Grossman (London: The Right Book Club, 1949), pp. 121–66.

10 | See Brent Hayes Edwards, “Introduction: Césaire in 1956,” *Social Text* 103, vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010), p. 115.

of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on the earth.¹²

What Derrida sought to recuperate was of course not Communism as it was experienced in the Soviet Union or China, but Marx's spirit of radical critique, which I wish to interpret in the context of this essay as a new type of Left politics—one that would take into consideration the failure of Marxist political practice in Europe. At a time when neoliberal policies espoused by Euro-American hegemonic powers are decimating the economies of many Third World countries and, more specifically, of Africa; at a time when most of the killing, starvation, and subjugation of men, women, and children referred to by Derrida is taking place in Africa; and at a time when colonial violence has been revisited with a vengeance on Third World people, especially in Palestine and the Muslim world, including North Africa and South Asia, I wonder how such a recuperation of Marxist radical critique can be made without revisiting the contribution of non-Western Marxism to the discourse of liberation and colonialism. Hence, my insistence on doing so here should be perceived as a first step toward broadening Derrida's call. The two texts included in this notebook offer a glimpse of the potential of such a strategy and, in the process, of expanding the narrative of Marxism as a more global school of thought in theory and praxis.¹³ I end my critique of the exclusionary narrative of the historiography of Marxism with an enlightening quotation from Césaire's "Letter":

Provincialism? Not at all! I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the "universal." My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars. And so? So we need to have the patience to take up the task anew; the strength to redo that which has been undone; the strength to invent instead of follow; the strength to "invent" our path and to clear it of ready-made forms, those petrified forms that obstruct it.¹⁴

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11 | Cilas Kemedjo, "Aimé Césaire's *Letter to Maurice Thorez*: The Practice of Decolonization," *Research in African Literature* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 87.

12 | Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994 [orig. 1993]), p. 85.

13 | The notebook also includes a facsimile of the original letter to Maurice Thorez as obtained from the archives of the French Communist Party in Paris.

14 | Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez, Paris, October 24, 1956," trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text* 103, vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010), p. 152.

Salah M. Hassan *Wie man Marx von seinem Euro- zentrismus befreit: Anmer- kungen zum afrikanischen/ schwarzen Marxismus*

Es gibt zwei Arten, sich zu verlieren: durch eine Segregation, die sich im Besonderen einmauert, oder durch eine Verwässerung im »Universellen«.
– Aimé Césaire, »Brief an Maurice Thorez«, Paris, 24. Oktober 1956

Als die Idee an mich herangetragen wurde, einen Beitrag zur Notizbuch-Serie der dOCUMENTA (13) zu verfassen, schlug ich der Künstlerischen Leiterin Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev mein Vorhaben vor, mich auf den afrikanischen Marxismus zu konzentrieren. Dies würde, so dachte ich, interessant sein als ein Weg, Marx von seinem Eurozentrismus zu befreien. Auch würde es, überlegte ich, für die dOCUMENTA (13) von Belang sein, weil es zu den Gründungsjahren der Ausstellung zurückkehrt, die mit der Entkolonisierung in

Afrika und anderen Teilen der Dritten Welt zusammenfielen und mit bahnbrechenden Begleitereignissen, die die Weltpolitik veränderten und eine neue internationale Ordnung schufen.

Eines dieser Ereignisse war die Bandung-Konferenz 1955 in Indonesien, wo sich blockfreie und gerade unabhängig gewordene Nationen aus Afrika, Asien und dem Mittleren Osten trafen und auf dem Gipfel des Kalten Kriegs herausfordernd einen eigenständigen Kurs deklarierten. Bandung bleibt ein unvollendetes Projekt, doch als Ereignis signalisierte es sicherlich das Potenzial, die westliche Hegemonie zu beenden, sowie die Möglichkeit einer pluralistischeren Welt. Dieses Potenzial auf das Gebiet der Wissensproduktion auszudehnen gestattet es uns, sich Modernität und modernes Denken als mehr denn lediglich nach-auflklärerisches westliches Projekt vorzustellen. Dies ermöglichte die Kritik der westlichen Moderne und erleichterte den Schritt zu weniger eurozentrischen Denkweisen in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften innerhalb und außerhalb der Hochschule. Heute ist es unmöglich, über die Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts und die Entkolonisierung nachzudenken, ohne sich an Versammlungen wie den Ersten Kongress schwarzer Schriftsteller und Künstler in Paris 1956 oder den Zweiten Kongress 1959 in Rom zu erinnern. Von der Vierteljahresschrift *Présence Africaine*¹ mit Sitz in Paris ausgerichtet, diskutierten diese beiden Treffen Fragen von der Entkolonisierung bis zur Sklaverei und kündigten den Aufstieg neuer Denkschulen und Bewegungen wie die der Négritude, des Panafrikanismus und des afrikanischen Sozialismus an.²

Bei all diesen Ereignissen spielte der Geist Karl Marx' eine große Rolle. Die Entkolonisierung und die Befreiungsbewegung in der Dritten Welt waren ein Kampf, in dem die Ideologie des Marxismus einen wichtigen Part einnahm. Den Marxismus aus einer afrikanischen/schwarzen Perspektive wieder aufzugreifen wäre demnach auch ein Weg, einen der für das 20. Jahrhundert einflussreichsten deutschen Denker zu ehren. Dies ist letztlich auch für die jüngsten Versuche relevant, Marx zu rehabilitieren und seine blinden Flecke angesichts der nicht-westlichen Welt durch die globale Wirkung seiner Ideen zu überwinden, die in Formen, die Marx selbst nicht hätte vorausahnen oder vorstellen können, angeeignet, neu gedacht und an verschiedenen Schauplätzen verortet wurden.

Ein Großteil der gegenwärtigen Forschung zum Marxismus und dem Nicht-Westen konzentriert sich auf eine Wiedergutmachung von Marx durch eine Wiedergewinnung seiner Schriften über die nicht-westliche Welt, die allgemein als »eurozentristisch« wahrgenommen wurden. Ein Beispiel ist das neueste Werk von Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margin*, das ein neues Licht auf Marx als Denker wirft.³ Durch gründliche und sorgfältige Analyse seiner weniger bekannten Schrif-

1 | *Présence Africaine* ist eine panafrikanische, vierteljährlich erscheinende Zeitschrift mit Sitz in Paris mit den Schwerpunkten Kultur, Politik und Literatur. Sie wurde 1947 von Alioune Diop (1910–1980), dem senegalesischen Schriftsteller und einer der Hauptfiguren in den antikolonialen und panafrikanischen Kämpfen, gegründet. Die Zeitschrift expandierte 1949 zu einem Verlag und einer Buchhandlung im Pariser Quartier Latin. Sie stellte ein höchst einflussreiches Forum in der panafrikanischen Bewegung und dem Entkolonisierungskampf dar und war eine Brutstätte dessen, was als Négritude-Bewegung bekannt wurde.

2 | Die Kongresse wurden von Alioune Diop (mit Léopold Cédar Senghor) organisiert. Sie zogen bedeutende Figuren der afrikanischen Kunst, Literatur und Politik des 20. Jahrhunderts und der afrikanischen Diaspora an, wie Frantz Fanon, Jacques Stephen Alexis, George Lamming, Édouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, Richard Wright und andere, einschließlich Pablo Picasso, André Malraux und Claude Lévi-Strauss. Diop rief 1966 mit Senghor auch das *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (Erstes Weltfestival der Negerkunst in Dakar) ins Leben, das Persönlichkeiten quer über den afrikanischen Kontinent und aus der afrikanischen Diaspora wie Ibrahim El-Salahi, Duke Ellington und Langston Hughes zusammenbrachte.

3 | Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and*

ten einschließlich seines journalistischen Werks als Korrespondent für die *New York Tribune* entdecken wir einen neuen Marx, der weniger auf das Klassendenken aufbaut als vielmehr ein global orientierter Theoretiker ist und der hellhörig war in Bezug auf Nationalismus und Fragen der Rasse, Ethnie und der Vielfalt menschlicher und sozialer Erfahrungen quer über den Globus hinweg.

Solche Unterfangen sind willkommene Beiträge zu unserer Sicht auf Marx und seine Vorstellungen bezüglich des Nicht-Westens. Doch trotz seines visionären Werks und bleibenden Vermächtnisses war Marx auch ein Kind seiner Zeit und Europas als aufsteigender Kolonialmacht mit dem Streben nach Eroberung und Herrschaft; der weiter gefasste Rahmen seiner Analyse blieb dem evolutionären Denken dieser Zeit verhaftet. Überdies lassen solche Ansätze nicht-westliche (einschließlich afrikanische) Beiträge zum Marxismus unbeachtet, wie dieser im Kontext der Entkolonisierung und der postkolonialen Kämpfe angeeignet und umgeformt wurde, und weisen zu einem gewissen Grad den unter westlichen Wissenschaftlern im Feld der kritischen Theorie weit verbreiteten Charakter einer Nabelschau auf.

Benita Barry lenkt unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf die Gleichgültigkeit unter marxistischen Theoretikern in Europa gegenüber den »Verläufen, die der Marxismus in anti-kolonialen Bereichen genommen hat«, und des Weiteren gegenüber dem Anteil afrikanischer Intellektueller und jener der afrikanischen Diaspora am Marxismus im Allgemeinen. Wie sie zeigt, erfolgt eine solche Indifferenz »innerhalb des weitreichenden und seit Langem bestehenden Ausschlusses nicht-westlichen Wissens aus einem Kanon, der von [westlichen] großstädtischen Wissenschaftlern aufgestellt wurde.« Während sie einigen wenigen marxistischen Denkern aus dem Westen wie etwa Goran Therbon zugutehält, erkannt zu haben, dass der Marxismus zur »intellektuellen Leitkultur zweier bedeutender Bewegungen der Dialektik der Moderne [geworden ist]: der Arbeiterbewegung und der Antikolonialismus-Bewegung«, kritisiert Barry sie zugleich dafür – mit Ausnahme Frantz Fanons, dessen Beitrag zur Untersuchung der mit der Moderne im kolonialen Kontext verbundenen Gewalt und Trauma sie würdigt –, die Kreativität und Innovationen des asiatischen und lateinamerikanischen Marxismus zu unterschätzen und Afrika als einen »Mitspieler in den Diskursen des Marxismus und der Moderne« abzuweisen.⁴

Daher der dringende Aufruf, den afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus wieder aufzusuchen und seine ungeheure Innovationskraft und Kreativität im Zusammenhang der dOCUMENTA (13) zu überdenken, die ihre Anfänge nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg Mitte der 1950er Jahre feierte, einer Zeit, die auch die Heraufkunft der antikolonialen Kämpfe in Afrika und anderen Teilen der Dritten Welt einleitete. Dies beabsichtige ich zu tun, indem ich zwei Schlüsselfigu-

Non-Western Societies, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2010.

4 | Benita Barry, »Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity«, in: *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, hrsg. v. Crystal Bartolovich und Neil Lazarus, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 2002, S. 125.

ren des afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus huldige: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub (1927–1971), dem Gründer der Sudanesischen Kommunistischen Partei, der ein brillanter und innovativer marxistischer Denker war, und Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), dem martiniquinischen Philosophen, Dichter, Kritiker und Mitglied der Kommunistischen Partei Frankreichs, aus der er später, wie weiter unten dargelegt, austrat. In diesem Notizbuch werden zwei Texte dieser Persönlichkeiten wiedergegeben, die den Marxismus im Kontext Afrikas (Mahgoub) und der afrikanischen/schwarzen Diaspora (Césaire) repräsentieren.⁵

Der erste Text, Mahgoubs »By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor«, ist eine gekürzte Übersetzung (von mir und meinem Kollegen Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf) von Mahgoubs politischer Verteidigungsrede (einer Tradition in der Politik der sudanesischen Linken) vor einem Militärtribunal 1959.⁶ Der Text vermittelt einen Einblick in das Denken der Gründer einer der stärksten linken Bewegungen in der afrikanischen Politik, der Sudanesischen Kommunistischen Partei. Er hilft das bleibende Vermächtnis und das Durchhaltevermögen dieser Partei bis zum heutigen Tag zu erklären, trotz der brutalen Unterdrückung, der sie sich seitens aufeinanderfolgender Regime im Sudan ausgesetzt sah und die im Juli 1971 nach einem farcenhafte Militärgerichtsverfahren mit der Hinrichtung (zweifelloso der Ermordung) Mahgoubs und mehrerer anderer führender Mitglieder der Partei endete. Mahgoub widmete sein kurzes Leben, wie Abusharaf es formuliert, »der Überlegung, wie der Sozialismus, den er als das erhabenste Anliegen, das die Menschheit je kannte, beschrieb, innerhalb des Kampfes um nationale Befreiung vorangetrieben und so zugeschnitten werden könnte, dass er den Bedürfnissen des gewöhnlichen Bürgers entsprach.«⁷ Wie sie weiter erläutert, stellte er, indem »er ein kritisches Auge sowohl auf das Vermächtnis des europäischen Kolonialismus als auch auf die repressiven Traditionen innerhalb der sudanesischen Kultur warf, [...] die immer wiederkehrende Frage: Wie können Afrikaner das marxistische Denken nutzen, um eine fortschrittliche Kultur zu schaffen, die einer systematischen Kritik dessen Ausdruck verleiht, was innerhalb ihrer Gesellschaften reaktionär ist?«⁸

Der zweite Text von Césaire ist als »Brief an Maurice Thorez« bekannt, in dem er am 24. Oktober 1956 im Grunde seinen Austritt aus der Kommunistischen Partei Frankreichs formulierte. »Abgesehen von seiner beißenden Kritik des Stalinismus«, schreibt Robin Kelley, handelt der Kern des Briefs »von der kolonialen Frage«, nicht bloß von der Politik der Kommunistischen Partei Frankreichs gegenüber »den Kolonien, sondern von dem kolonialen Verhältnis zwischen der großstädtischen und der martiniquinischen kommunistischen Partei.«⁹ Anders formuliert ist er ein Ruf nach Selbstbestimmung für die Völker der Dritten Welt und spezifischer für Afrikaner/Schwarze.

5 | Hier ist erwähnenswert, dass sich die Forschung zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus in letzter Zeit zu einem beachtlichen Literaturbestand gewandelt hat, der Aufschluss über die verschiedenartige und enorm ergiebige Welt der afrikanischen Beiträge und die der afrikanischen Diaspora zur marxistischen Kritik gibt. Siehe Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2. Aufl. 1999 [Orig. 1983]; Grant Farred, *What's My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals*, St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press 2003; Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams. The Black Radical Imagination*, Boston: Beacon Press 2003; und Carole Boyce-Davies, *Left of Karl Marx. The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press 2008.

6 | Siehe *Defense before Military Courts*, Khartum: Azza Publishing House 2001 [Orig. 1966]; unter Mahgoubs Veröffentlichungen finden sich: *Rectifying the Wrongs in Working amongst the Masses: Report Presented to the Central Committee of the Sudanese Communist Party*, Khartum: Dar Al Wasilah 1987 [Orig. 1963]; *Marxism and the Quandaries of the Sudanese Revolution*, Khartum: Azza Publishing House 2008 [Orig. 1967]; und *On the Program*, Khartum: Azza Publishing House 2001 [Orig. 1971]. Mahgoub übersetzte auch mehrere Texte, einschließlich: Josef V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, Khartum: Azza

Interessanterweise wurde er im selben Jahr verfasst, als Mahgoub sein Buch *New Horizons* niederschrieb; in diesem verliert er seiner Enttäuschung über die Marxisten der Dritten Welt Ausdruck wegen ihrer Blindheit bezüglich der Zweifel am Stalinismus. Es ist eine wohlbekannte Tatsache, dass einige afrikanische/schwarze marxistische Künstler und Schriftsteller auf zwei Gebieten ein streitbares Verhältnis zur Politik der westlichen kommunistischen Partei (als offizieller Manifestierung des Marxismus) pflegten: in Bezug auf ihre Unterordnung des Rassismus unter den Klassenkampf und hinsichtlich der Unbeweglichkeit ihrer hoch zentralisierten Handlungs- und Entscheidungsfindungsstruktur, die für unabhängige Denker und insbesondere für Schriftsteller und Künstler nur schwer zu ertragen war.¹⁰ Césaires Brief muss in Verbindung mit seinem früheren wegweisenden Text gedeutet werden, der sich zu dem entwickelte, was heute als *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) bekannt ist, und in dem er seine Kritik an Kolonialismus und Rasse ausarbeitete.¹¹ Am bedeutendsten ist die Tatsache, dass Césaires Brief, wie Cilas Kemedjo betont, ein »trauriger Kommentar zur kontroversen und prekären Beziehung zwischen der marxistischen internationalistischen Linken und den antikolonialen Aktivisten der Dritten Welt« ist. Der Brief, argumentiert Kemedjo weiter, »führte die Frage von Rasse und Kolonialismus eindringlich wieder mitten ins Herz von Kämpfen, die hauptsächlich entlang ideologischer Linien geführt wurden.«¹²

Im Gefolge des Berliner Mauerfalls 1989 und des Zerfalls des offiziellen Sowjetmarxismus wie auch der Sowjetunion um die selbe Zeit erinnerte uns Jacques Derrida in seinem einflussreichen Werk *Marx's Gespenster* daran, dass der Geist Karl Marx' heute mehr denn je von Belang sei. Denn, klagt er,

in dem Augenblick, wo einige es wagen, Neo-Evangelisierung zu betreiben im Namen des Ideals einer liberalen Demokratie, die endlich zu sich selbst wie zum Ideal der Menschheitsgeschichte gekommen sei, muß man es herausschreien: Noch nie in der Geschichte der Erde und der Menschheit haben Gewalt, Ungleichheit, Ausschuß, Hunger und damit wirtschaftliche Unterdrückung so viele menschliche Wesen betroffen. Anstatt in der Euphorie des Endes der Geschichte die Ankunft des Ideals der liberalen Demokratie und des kapitalistischen Marktes zu besingen, anstatt das »Ende der Ideologien« und das Ende der großen emanzipatorischen Diskurse zu feiern, sollten wir niemals diese makroskopische Evidenz vernachlässigen, die aus den tausendfältigen Leiden einzelner besteht: Kein Fortschritt der Welt erlaubt es, zu ignorieren, daß in absoluten Zahlen noch nie, niemals zuvor auf der Erde so viele Männer, Frauen und Kinder unterjocht, ausgehungert oder ausgelöscht wurden.¹³

Selbstverständlich suchte Derrida nicht den Kommunismus, wie er in der Sowjetunion oder in China erlebt wurde, wiederherzustellen, sondern vielmehr Marx' Geist der radikalen Kritik, den ich im Zusammenhang dieses Essays gerne als eine neue Form von linker

Publishing House 2008 [Orig. 1950].

7 | Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, »Marx in the Vernacular: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub and the Riddles of Localizing Leftist Politics in Sudanese Philosophies of Liberation«, in: *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly*, 108, Nr. 3, Sommer 2009, S. 483.

8 | Ebd., S. 483. Für eine umfassendere Besprechung zu Mahgoubs intellektuellem Vermächtnis und dem Einfluss der Sudanesischen Kommunistischen Partei auf die sudanesischen Kultur und Politik siehe die Sonderausgabe von *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109, Nr. 1, Winter 2010, mit dem Titel »What's Left of the Left? The View from Sudan«.

9 | Robin Kelley, »A Poetic of Anticolonialism«, eine Einführung zu Aimé Césaires *Discourse on Colonialism*, übers. v. Joan Pinkham, New York: Monthly Review Press 2002, S. 25.

10 | Für einen der neben Césaires »Brief an Maurice Thorez« interessantesten Texte zu diesem Thema siehe Richard Wrights berühmten Essay, veröffentlicht in der antikomunistischen Anthologie *The God That Failed*, hrsg. v. Richard Grossman, London: The Right Book Club 1949, S. 121–166 (dt.: *Ein Gott, der keiner war*, Zürich: Europa Verlag 2005).

11 | Siehe Brent Hayes Edwards, »Introduction: Césaire in 1956«, in: *Social Text*, 103, Bd. 28, Nr. 2, Sommer 2010, S. 115.

Politik deuten möchte – eine Politik, die das Scheitern marxistischer politischer Praxis in Europa berücksichtigt. In einer Zeit, in der von hegemonialen euro-amerikanischen Kräften verfochtene neo-liberale Strategien die Wirtschaft vieler Länder der Dritten Welt und genauer Afrikas stark schwächen, in einer Zeit, in der sich der größte Teil des Tötens, Verhungerns und der Unterwerfung von Männern, Frauen und Kindern, auf die Derrida verwies, in Afrika ereignet, und in einer Zeit, in der koloniale Gewalt über die Menschen der Dritten Welt, insbesondere in Palästina und der muslimischen Welt, einschließlich Nordafrikas und Südasiens, wieder vehement ausgeübt wird, frage ich mich, wie eine solche Wiederherstellung radikaler marxistischer Kritik ohne das Überdenken der Beiträge des nicht-westlichen Marxismus zum Diskurs der Befreiung und des Kolonialismus unternommen werden kann. Daher sollte mein Insistieren hier als ein erster Schritt zu einer Ausweitung von Derridas Aufruf gesehen werden. Die beiden in diesem Notizbuch enthaltenen Texte ermöglichen einen Blick auf das Potenzial einer solchen Strategie und das einer Ausdehnung der marxistischen Erzählung im Laufe der Zeit zu einer in Theorie und Praxis weltumspannenderen Denkschule.¹⁴

Ich beende meine Kritik an der ausschließenden Geschichtsschreibung des Marxismus mit einem aufschlussreichen Zitat aus Césaires Brief.

Provinzialität? Keineswegs! Ich vergrabe mich nicht in einem engstirnigen Partikularismus. Ebenso wenig möchte ich mich in einem ausgezeigten Universalismus verlieren. Es gibt zwei Arten, sich zu verlieren: durch eine Segregation, die sich im Besonderen einmauert, oder durch eine Verwässerung im »Universellen«. Meine Vorstellung des Universellen ist die eines Universellen, das durch all das, was besonders ist, bereichert wird, ein durch alle Besonderheiten bereichertes Universelles: Vertiefung und Nebeneinander allen Besonderen. Und nun? Nun müssen wir die Geduld haben, die Aufgabe von Neuem anzugehen; die Kraft, das wieder aufzubauen, was zunichte gemacht wurde; die Kraft zu erfinden, statt zu folgen; die Kraft, unseren Weg zu »erfinden« und von vorgefertigten Formen zu bereinigen, jenen versteinerten Formen, die ihn blockieren.¹⁵

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12 | Cilas Kemedjio, »Aimé Césaire's *Letter to Maurice Thorez*: The Practice of Decolonization«, in: *Research in African Literature*, 41, Nr. 1, Frühjahr 2010, S. 87.

13 | Jacques Derrida, *Marx' Gespenster. Der Staat der Schuld, die Trauerarbeit und die neue Internationale*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1995 [Orig. 1993], S. 121.

14 | Das Notizbuch enthält auch ein Faksimile des Originalbriefs an Maurice Thorez aus dem Archiv der Kommunistischen Partei Frankreichs in Paris.

15 | Aimé Césaire, »*Letter to Maurice Thorez*«, Paris, October 24, 1956«, übers. v. Chike Jeffers, in: *Social Text*, 103, Bd. 28, Nr. 2, Sommer 2010, S. 152.

Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub

By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor

This is a translated portion of the statement made by Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub before a Sudanese military court in 1959.¹ Limitations of space have prompted us to abbreviate somewhat in places where there was reiteration. Translation has also played a role in a shorter narrative than the Arabic original. We have tried to the best of our ability to preserve the integrity of both content and language.

—Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf

With the massacre of Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub, a page of beauty and tolerance was turned in Sudanese politics.

—Mohamed Ahmed Mahgoub, a prominent Sudanese intellectual and politician, and former minister of foreign affairs of Sudan

1 | See Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub, *Defense before Military Courts* [in Arabic] (Khartoum: Azza Publishing House, 2001 [orig. 1961]).

To my mind these incidents provoke me personally as someone who is guided by Marxism as culture, politics, and a way of life. I believe in scientific socialism, an idea that I have embraced since I was a youngster. Those who were close to me, friends and relatives, were cognizant of this fact. I am also personally liable to friends who are in agreement with my convictions. Some of them are devout Muslims, staunch Christians; others, not unlike the majority of humanity, unsettled in their unremitting probing for answers to the constant problems of philosophy and being. I have the paramount moral responsibility to elucidate the culture and the idea that I have chosen to take up. Significant wars have erupted between opponents and proponents of Marxism, wars that are getting more vehement and violent as the days go by. My keen interest in the future of my ideas also puts additional demands on me and requires sustained clarification of my



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position vis-à-vis these accusations. I hope in so doing I am not rendering simple what is extremely rich and complex in my own personal experiences as to how and why I became a Marxist.

By the end of World War II, when some level of nationalism started to come into view, I, like many others, desired to emancipate our society from the ravages of colonial dominance and transgression. I wanted to turn dreams into lived experiences that embody bright futures and restore the rights to dignity and autonomy. At the time, great expectations hung on the Al-Ashiqaa Party.² Our hope started to fade away as leaders started to surrender to personal comfort and indulged themselves in believing that our national problems could have been solved in Egypt by Sidqi Amin and the like. As a freethinking individual, I asked: what is the mystery that lies behind our Sudanese leaders' total about-face and duplicity that our people would not understand? My modest experience politically, intellectually, and personally led me to recognize that these leaders do not carry within their chests a consistent political theory with which to challenge colonialism. The outcome was such that as soon as they set foot in a complicated society like Egypt's, they were confused and overcome with competing views and theories. While the colonists possessed their own advanced capitalist theories with which they subjugated and objectified entire populations in different parts of the world, the Sudanese nationalists did not. Rather, they searched for ways to serve material interests, appease the colonizers, and further personal aggrandizement. If our beleaguered people were to be liberated in the fullest sense of the term, they, too, must be guided by a theory to amalgamate their efforts and defeat the colonial project in the Sudan. On the basis of this theory, no leader will reap the benefits of the toil and suffering of the people. Steered by this political theory, our people will save themselves from the alarming ignorance and intellectual laziness that combined to turn them into mere objects, chess pieces to be positioned, manipulated, and moved in every direction on a whim.

It was this unassuming intellectual quest that led me to Marxism, that theory which stipulates that politics and political struggle are elaborate fields of knowledge that must be scrupulously examined and painstakingly pursued. For the first time I began to comprehend that colonialism is not an eternal, inevitable fate. Instead, it exemplified an economic system born out of complex capitalist processes, which are themselves susceptible to radical change and perfectly replaceable by other modes of knowledge and praxis. I realized that political leadership that did not apprehend the science behind colonialism and rather resorted to inflaming sentiments against foreigners did not have either the vision to actualize aspirations and hopes or the tools to effect sustainable, far-reaching liberation.

2 | Al-Ashiqaa Party is now the Democratic Unionist Party, which called for reunification with Egypt (Unity of the Nile Valley) at the time of independence in 1955 from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, as British colonial rule in Sudan was known.

As someone whose life's circumstances did not place him as either a farmer or a lord but as an educated person, it behooved me to seek ways to augment my culture and expand the horizons of my thought. I was not targeting the problem of culture for culture's sake—rather, insofar as it provides a settled body of knowledge for analyzing social and natural phenomena. Many who read Western culture think of it as lacking in consistency, unsettled, shaken. But Marxism is a distinguished epistemology both in its coherence and consistency and in its unsurpassed capacity for the holistic analysis of multiple dimensions of culture and society, universal values, politics and aesthetics, literature, philosophy, and economy. As someone who thrives on the constant pursuit of answers and new pathways to explore, I found Marxism to be both the purest idea and the best culture in and of itself. My experience had proved that my acceptance of a Marxist culture was not a religious conversion but a mirror for my yearnings for liberatory politics that challenges the arguments behind power structures and foreign influences. I longed for independence and for ridding our people of the oppression that had weighed them down since 1898. I longed for their welfare and happiness and for all that would render life in the Sudan worth living. I longed for a culture that makes one settled and tantalizes the mind, one that leads to modernity and human progress.

Is Marxism in the Sudan fighting religion? No. This is a preposterous and bizarre notion.³ The idea, which I accept as true, unifies Sudanese people irrespective of their religions and ethnicities against colonization and exploitation in their varied multiplicity and complexity. The purpose was to attain independence so as to introduce a system that responds to the worries and concerns of our people in a sustained fashion. Marxist thought as I envision it in the Sudan has a deeper aim, which commences with liberating society from colonialism and its followers. Where in this context do you find “fighting Islamic religion” as one of the planned agenda? Indeed, Marxism requires the utilization of the mind to meet the needs of humanity in scientific advancement, in medicine and literature. It therefore ends the indissoluble fear of the future that permeates the lives of a people in distress. Obliterating grinding poverty and its accompanying trepidation and panic that push people to lie and steal is not an objective that calls for blasphemy. Once more, where in this objective can you locate invitations for combating religion? What is left for me to say on the subject to those who produced these deceitful rumors is that an honest man combats an idea with another idea. He objects to opposing opinion by argument and logic. The falsification of your opponents' views or of those whom you have invented as enemies is petty, shameful, inexcusable conduct. It is a sign of the trivial-mindedness

3 | The fact that several Muslim imams became members of SCP neighborhood branches is often cited as an example of how the question of religion was handled. Journalist Fouad Matter writes admiringly about an imam who had just concluded his sermon at Friday prayers before rushing off to catch his SCP meeting. Fouad Matter, “The Sudanese Communist Party: Did They Massacre It or Did It Massacre Itself?” [in Arabic] (n.d.). No contradiction existed at the level of ideology or practice. The SCP was entirely different from Arab communist parties, in which ideological links to Moscow and the Marxist condemnation of religion figured prominently.

of those who perpetuated these damaging misrepresentations and lies regardless of the size of their body or height.

Since I was arrested on the morning of June 18, 1959, we have continued to witness an organized effort by the security apparatus to repeat destructive tales so as to encroach on the course of my trial. I have been presented as a threat. The noise that is being produced therein is strikingly artificial. I will proceed here, Your Honor, to continue my elucidation of my position to the court, and to the court of public opinion. Why the row? Within the security apparatus there are mendacious, dishonest individuals who have targeted my personal freedom in the past few months. They developed psychological complexes against me, and that is why demonstrations are being put together. My arrest and that of my comrade Waseela were very satisfactory to them because in essence the arrests appeased Scotland Yard and West Germany.

Your Honor, this case touches my political activism and that of my comrades, those honorable freedom fighters on whose shoulders the anticolonial liberation front stood. I do not wish herein to embark on tooting my own horn; alas, the nature of this trial compels me to do so in search of fairness and the truth.

I belong to a generation of young persons whose minds were opened and their ears trained to hearing the voice of nationalism. Since we were pupils, our thinking of this quandary leaped over the walls of classrooms and the frontiers of schoolyards. We thought about the nation as a whole. We grasped fully that the suffocating atmosphere and the cultural deprivation we lived in were attributable to the eschewed education and the glorification of the past that saturated it. These predicaments were an embodiment of prevalent shortcomings that colonists had exploited to oppress our nation. When pupils come to appreciate the deep meanings of such seemingly simple reality, then there is no doubt they would not be passive victims vis-à-vis the barriers and shackles that encircled them. We, therefore, spread our wings as we formed groups and debated nationalism. I offered my modest efforts to build a student movement and organized a rally in 1946 as a start. This was the first opportunity to express ourselves since the massive blow that the British dealt to the 1924 anticolonial uprising. It was this event that shaped our commitment to the struggle well into independence. Nationalist activism of these student groups, especially the one I referred to in 1946, was a chance to formulate ideas about practical matters affecting the Sudan. Hundreds had watched attentively the honest attempts that were made to unify parties and create a sense of *taradi*,⁴ consensus around nationalism, and sovereignty that topped the Cairo negotiations that were held at the time. Sorrow overwhelmed our hearts when

4 | The term *taradi*, although coined by Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub, is appropriated by major political actors in the Sudanese scene, almost with no credit or honorable mention. Yet, Mahgoub's expansion of the Sudanese political repertoire remains one of the most powerful legacies of leftist thought.

we learned about how some parties have sold the cause short because of personal jealousy and competition. They opted to stand by British interests, a position they made crystal clear. These people were very compliant even though they were turned into tools of exploitation to wage war against their own citizens and block the path of real national liberation. It is not surprising in this context that threats were directed at students and other nationalists who diverged from this self-serving strategy. Why the insistence on this position? Many questions have roamed in my mind, questions that dissipated our imagined promises and settled deep down within our consciousness. It was made obvious that not everyone within Sudanese national borders was necessarily a nationalist supporter of Sudan's independence. As one of hundreds of students, I started to examine these questions and of course could not reach a satisfactory explanatory frame emanating from logic or truth. Our concepts of nationalism were regarded as nothing but a fierce war between freedom fighters and rapists. At this critical juncture, I paused to think. I started to read everything I could get my hands on relevant to histories of nationalism in India, Egypt, and Europe. I located what I was looking for. How elated was I when I completed Stalin's *The Problem of the Colonies*? Here, I began to explore conditions of possibility and to read in depth about empire, colonial desire, dominance, violence, and governmentality. I also understood the mechanics of colonialism and the ability for the colonial project to absorb national classes to extirpate them from their roots. These progressive ideas and writings opened a window of opportunity from which we observed the world. These writings, which were passed on from hand to hand, were Marxist-Leninist. We understood their depth as we espoused Marxism as an organizing principle in our own lives. We searched for ways to adapt them to our needs and to our material circumstances. My own personal history will prove that I did not knock on the door of Marxism for fleeting or transient gains, for these are ephemeral and are bound to come to an end. Instead I was faithful to the cause of emancipation through building a sovereign, dignified Sudanese republic, in which its sons and daughters will enjoy its abundance and plenty. When I look back, I cannot help but feel an enormous sense of pride in a thought that I have wholeheartedly embraced and one that had sculpted my convictions and activism. I am comforted by the mere thinking of a question I ask myself: had I not become a Marxist, what would I have become? Here I must note that I did not reach Marxism through political struggle alone, though it suffices. Instead, I reached it after the longest quest for a culture that coordinates the mind with the psyche and a philosophy that distances one from the contradictions and fluctuations that lie beneath and that afflict many Sudanese intellectuals.

With the rise of nationalism in the 1940s, two currents pervaded discourse on identity and governance. First, a romantic return to a past imagined as predominantly Arab and markedly conservative. This seemingly unyielding commitment to Arabism did not take into account our very futurity; it did not even think about it. Second, there was a current that saw in Europe both an alluring and a sacred model to follow. Although these people lived in the country as Sudanese bodies, their minds and passions were totally European.

Between the two we stood independently, watching these situations in great puzzlement and perplexity. Our school curricula, media, and culture were all flooded by these obsolete ideas, and so the journey of discovery on our part continued undaunted. We were hungry for an intellectual, satisfactory argument, one that necessitates our choice of a difficult path. In Arabic traditions, I found a glorious past, one that neither had answers for post-World War II predicaments nor was it equipped to respond to the intellectual and political evolution that occurred in the modern era. This discourse had ceased to evolve in the Arab world years and years ago in relation to new ways that could take stock of the significant shifts in epistemology and political power, questions about humanity, natural laws, and forms of governance. The return to the past in light of modern complexity is tantamount to burying one's head in the sand and is reflective of a startling rigidity vis-à-vis landmark occurrences and developments. Yesterday's culture alone will not restore a modern society with mounting and urgent existential dilemmas. Then the roving persisted in investigating what the West had to offer, especially British culture, which many had unequivocally accepted and were enamored of. Indeed, plenty could be gleaned from British experiences regarding history, poetry, and literature and from other Western writings on topics of freedom, politics, and aesthetics. Standing in awe of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, some have chosen to live with vast paradoxes in ivory towers that they had constructed in their imaginations and emotions. It is very true that speaking of beauty and freedom is a great way of articulating epistemologies that defy suppression, but in the end it is the critique of received modes of knowledge that matters the most.

We continued our methodical analysis to pinpoint ways in which individuality and collectivity may be bridged. We tried to circumvent the kinds of ideas that get stored in people's minds, without any possibilities for empirical applicability, in lived realities and in contexts where attainment of democratic rights is an absolute must. We defied colonialism's culture by posing questions as to what horrible maladies may have troubled the British to make them wander around in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. A ghastly condition must have afflicted them to the marrow. There is no doubt that their notions of freedom

should not have unfolded in the ugliness perpetuated in the colonies. These were the issues that invited us to think deeply about colonialism both as culture and as politics, when we found Marxism, through which the ostensibly mysterious paradoxes were decoded in the most powerful of expositions once and for all. Like many comrades, I approached questions of justice and equality from a modernist, humanist view. I was convinced that these values cannot be reclaimed from an irretrievable past. Seeking social justice is a value that matters to people in this temporal world, and neither nostalgia nor romanticism about past glories is going to fulfill it. As for the British, it is critical to think about empire and the ways it had undermined the dreams and aspirations of the majority of the populations it had subjugated. We found in Marxism an oasis, a healing formula for suffering, an enabling epistemology that brings personal integrity, intellectual stimulation, and positive emotions into a single field of thought and praxis. Hence, it brought significant satisfaction in circumstances that illustrate the responsibilities of Sudanese intellectuals. These responsibilities are as heavy as crushing mountains, and those who fail to come to grips with them and confine themselves in cages of personal gain are paralyzed members of our society. They are biting the hand that feeds them. Had it not been for the support of the Sudanese people, these intellectuals would not have been able to rise to prominence. Marxism has compelled us to take our debt to society very seriously by embracing it as philosophy and conduct. Our motive in following it was deeply rooted in how we felt about the welfare of our nation. It was by virtue of Marxism, Your Honor, and by virtue of dialectical materialism, its beating heart, that we succeeded in narrating our story. This story was about emancipation and thus should not in any shape or form be tainted and twisted by the sick imagination and exaggeration that the security personnel had resorted to in desperation. This is the story of a Marxist generation that delivered independence to its people. The inflammatory propaganda waged against it is useless and irrelevant, save maybe for horror films and cowboy movies.

★

By way of preparing myself to serve my country I accepted the role that the pen demanded of me as an educated Sudanese. I departed for Egypt in 1946, searching for a more progressive environment from which to learn. My Sudanese friends and I are indebted to the Egyptian people, from whose activism we drew the most momentous of lessons in revolutionary struggles. In Egypt we continued to agitate for our self-determination, and our years there witnessed the earnest efforts undertaken to challenge the multiple forces of reac-

tion. We organized our exemplary student union, which mirrored the honesty and courage of its youthful members. We were harassed, and our freedoms and rights were mercilessly violated by Egyptian police. Our friend Salah Bushra's murder in prison was a proof of what I am speaking about. His death was an unforgettable tragedy. We continued unfazed to defend what was sacrosanct to us amid waves of violence. We endured till our demands were integrated in the Egyptian policy in the Sudan.

My history and that of my fellow Marxists for the length of time we spent in Egypt bears witness to our sacrifices and to our solidarities with Egypt, our sibling nation. Thanks to Marxism and to our deep understanding of the quandaries of national liberation, the role of these honest individuals will be written with letters of light as Marxist students come to occupy their due place at the forefront of a celebrated record. They were harassed, displaced, and embattled. They were also dismissed from university because of their activism toward their nation's future and prosperity. Their sweat, toil, and sacrifice will remain forever ingrained in our memory. Whatever lessons we drew from the Egyptian experience, we shared them with our people. On the first occasion I had during my school holidays, I left for Atbara to help contribute to the building of the Sudan Railways Workers' Union in 1947. I stayed well over a year. This was indeed a dear time in my life, when the vitality of the Sudanese working class was revealed to me. I grasped their enormous strength and appreciated their vision as the class that held the key to the emancipated Sudan of tomorrow. I felt their values in al-Shafi, who built the laborers' glory in spite of the dark clouds that shrouded their lives. By virtue of their struggles, the clouds had dispersed and the sun had risen on the horizon of one of the most progressive political movements in our country. Any honest historiographer must account for how modern Sudan was built by the democratic, progressive forces within our society, as exemplified in the labor unions. I salute their endurance and the heavy prices they paid. What a tremendous honor that one of them was to rise to the post of vice president of the most renowned organization, the World Federation of Trade Unions. His name is al-Shafi, and he is a pioneer, a railway worker, an ambassador, and a peace builder.

These are glimpses from my life, one that has been inextricably linked to Marxist thought, the roots of which are original, pure, and celebratory of honesty and sacrifice. Expressions of concern over my experiences since 1948 and up to independence have been voiced by this court's prosecutor. During the past years, I have been—especially during the reign of Abdalla Khalil and until this regime—subjected to hassle and harassment. The investigator posed the question as to what I have been doing for a living and how I have survived all this time

without a job. He is correct to wonder. I, too, have asked myself: what do I do? To begin my response, thinking did not take too much of my time. To start, I have been consecrating my life to the cause of freedom, using Marxism and my faith in the nation as my primary tools. Isn't this a task that requires some level of focus and concentration? Isn't it worthy of my giving up my life for its fulfillment? How magnificent are the words of Nikolai Ostrovsky when he commented that the most valuable gift that everyone possesses is life, and it is given once—there is no turning back. If we realize this fact, we must not be dominated by bitterness and regret on our deathbeds. Rather, we say, we spent our life for the greatest and noblest cause, the cause of liberating humanity. Today, I look back at the years past, and I see that I have spent my life on the noblest cause of my country's sovereignty and its reorienting toward a progressive path. No material interests or personal investments were to be had. I live my life simply and do not harbor any regrets as to what I have done or what my life could have been. Although those who benefited the most from independence were passive and skeptical of our anticolonial resistance, they are the ones who are issuing our arrest warrants. Those are also the very ones who stood by the colonizers at the expense of their fellow citizens.

Since the first day when I returned to my country, I embarked on expounding the power of Marxism. Despite mounting hostilities and continued arrests, I managed to create a sustained scholarship when I translated *Marxism and Linguistics*. I published widely on the subject. There is no evidence to suggest that in so doing I had resorted to terrorism and bloodshed. I did not walk on the road that many had chosen for themselves, that of bribery, temptation, greed, and decadence. Rather, my path was focused on reclaiming our place as a party that fights for democratic rights, instead of an illegal and destructive organization.

The history of our nationalist movement testifies to the integrity of Marxists who gave to the welfare of Sudan's independence and became role models in self-denial and effacement. When opposition to the repressive legislative assembly was voiced, they were at the forefront. I am not exaggerating when I say that they were the first to lead the great demonstration in Omdurman in 1948 that represented the flame that ignited the fires of nationalism. In that bold event, our comrade Qurashi al-Tayeb was massacred. Our victory in shaking up the colonial Legislative Assembly had no doubt led to turning the British plans upside down. It was the stepping-stone for independence. By virtue of Marxism, the sphere of national liberation had expanded considerably. Those who followed it as an organizing principle of their lives formed strong labor unions. With this development, the colonists were not only dealing with intellectuals but with those affiliated with

large sectors of the economy and industry. The years witnessed general strikes that had no doubt shaken the very foundations of colonial rule, but in the process high prices were paid with decades of incarceration. To those Marxists working on all fields of social, political, and economic life, we say you played an instrumental role in the mobilization of the masses under the banner of self-determination. This is the picture that I wish to convey about communist theory's contribution to our homeland. I am proud of the record and of my own role in illuminating this humanist theory—this is the record that is being presented to this court under laws that have been instituted by the colonists and are redolent with vengeance, hatred, hurriedness, and ignorance of the true meanings of our concerns. My comrades and I formed the Anti-Colonial Front, which I had the tremendous honor to head. The birth of this party was a corollary of a vast movement of our people who supported the right to organize and the freedom of opinion and expression. This party had triumphantly shaken colonialism to its core. In 1953, we organized a party with clear objectives and a clear vision, which we expounded in reference to the country's political economy, despite the fear being spread by the British among the masses vis-à-vis our party. We insisted on the existence of an international committee for elections to grant our right to exist. Since its declaration, the party expressed its partiality to the causes of our suffering masses. I do not wish to repeat myself, but I must express my gratitude to this party, which effected deep political transformations; it supported the majority of the Unionist Party, which announced independence. Had it not been for this collaboration, independence would never have been achieved. After independence we called for a structure that would accommodate all those who had fought gallantly to help in the great leap that our country had taken toward the future. History will pass harsh judgment on those who forfeited their opportunity to unify our people. The Anti-Colonial Front was the first nationalist party to defend democracy and liberty. When the country was approaching self-determination in 1953, the British in haste passed a law, calling it the Destructive Activity Law. It laid the foundation of the police state that robs our society of the meaning and spirit of liberation. Our party is credited with the historical fact that it halted the passing of this cruel law. We insisted that the word of the legislative branch should supersede that of the executive. The results of this democratic practice appeared during the months that preceded the advent of the military. The political history of our country is the best witness to how we resisted alliances with colonialist and militarist bodies. This was the gist of how independence was gained, and no single ruler can discard this reality. We were the only party that possessed a positive program for postindependence Sudan, consisting

of our political evolution, economic rehabilitation, social and cultural change. We were not a party that dwelled on the past or one that played with emotions, religion, or superstition. We were a party that shouldered heavy responsibilities for our people. Up to this point we explicated the dangers of American aid. We were convinced that these charities would turn the Sudanese republic into a dog that chases its master to feed him every time it suffers hunger. In brief, we raised the consciousness of our citizens about the danger that encircles the country's autonomy and dignity.

It is with this sustained activity, especially in 1958, and in partnership with honest citizens that deep transformation started to take effect in the parliamentary system. For the first time, those in ruling parties started to take a second look at the cries of the people away from partisan politics. This is how we settled the question of how to solidify a democratic frame of governance in which legislative powers are positioned over executive power. On November 17, 1958, while Parliament was in session, we witnessed the defeat of government in all its projects that denied dignity and autonomy, exemplified by its acceptance of American aid and a gift of military equipment from the British. We bore witness to the rise of a government that despised a multiparty presence for the fight for democracy. Would any party succeed by putting a thick wall between it and the people to escape accountability?

I wish to mention to the court that our party's activism, particularly in the month prior to the coup, was the main motive behind the fabrication of this charge against us. I learned from a reliable source that a coup would take place on the third week of October. I called for a meeting and decided to act in the best interests of democracy and independence. I waged a fierce attack against this conspiracy and wondered whose interest it was serving. My campaign persisted, and we pushed our newspaper, *Al-Midan*, to advise and warn. We embarked on a nonpartisan line of communication with others, including the Democratic People's Party [*hizb al-sha'b al-dimuqrati*], the National Unionist Party, the Umma Party, and Southerners. I sought their cooperation to save Parliament. Had they reckoned with my words seriously, we would have been living today in circumstances at variance with those we are actually under. Those who staged the coup were not ignorant of our ideas and activism, and for this reason we were punished by ugly procedures, and the *Al-Midan* was forced to shut down at a time in which other partisan newspapers were granted free rein. Our comrades were escorted by police as if they were common criminals. At a time when the coup leaders allotted a lucrative pension for former prime minister Khalil, we were targeted with hostile and violent acts.

Why this hostility toward our party when the coup was a week old? Is this attributed to the false circulars that police had attributed to the SCP? Our circulars were distributed, in fact, one month after the coup. Doesn't this action toward our party reflect a prior determination to discriminate against us and confiscate our personal freedom?

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As for the management of the SCP, I ask the prosecution to supply incriminating evidence. What is taking place is a curtain that conceals the alarming reality that our ideas are what is on trial. I, personally, do not harbor any fears of an idea. There is no power on earth that can force a progressive person to become a coward. I made my views about the November coup unequivocal to the Military Council. I denounced hypocrisy, unlike many who chose other paths, for it is not in my principles to humor them. These practices reflect incurable weakness, Your Honor. I am being punished because of an opinion I voiced because of my deep-seated beliefs in democracy and sovereignty. I am being punished because I did not shy away from expressing my honest views to the Supreme Military Council. I will not change my ideas, because a man who would force me to do so has not been created yet. My ideas may change only if a radical change in governance, democracy, and the obliteration of all the chains that are tying up our independence are transformed. For now, the repeated arrests of citizens who are supporting independence are a catastrophe.

These days we hear frequently the expression "Sudanese traditions" parroted by many for no reason and as if it were a breakable glass object or a delicate flower that may even be hurt by a gentle breeze. It is very strange that this artificial sympathy and nostalgia are propagated by those who tread on traditions and act in a manner of speaking like the murderer who kills the victim and attends the funeral. They spread the notion that Marxism is hostile to traditions. It is also fascinating how the same people were completely silent when traditions were subjected to colonial oppression. Where was masculine jealousy then? Sudanese traditions were respected by Marxists when they refused to bow to colonial masters. We consider traditions as love of freedom and dignity, candidness, generosity, and an ability to tell the truth. But we also understand them as values that have been handed down to us by the tribe and settled deep down within our psyches. But these types are susceptible to gradual dismantling, especially if selfishness and rugged individuality collide with them. Those who lead our society toward this situation are no doubt the ones who are ultimately responsible for the disappearance of the wonderful values that we are proud of. I do not believe that any wise human

beings can make such allegations about our thought. I suggest that they should start looking for another charge.

Your Honor, I tell the truth, and in so doing I communicate my deference to the highest Sudanese traditions and human values. However, if our country is turning into a police state, then by telling the truth one must take great risks. It does not sanction our imaginations to realize the spineless retreat from standing by the truth. Many examples in the Sudanese press abound. I was extremely ill at ease, to say the least, when I read an essay by someone praising the humanity of aid, but I was certain that he was writing against his deeply held values and ideas. Those who fight Marxism and build a police state and pass laws to halt the so-called destructive principles are the ones who allow the demise of Sudanese values before their very eyes. The decadence that swept the towns is not a cause for concern, but a Marxist book is a major emergency that calls for incarceration and fingerprints. Crass and offensive language is all right, such as those chants that are repeated in public places: "Oh, professor, come to us with bottles; in lessons, there is no excellence. Oh, hooligan, we are coming to you." Those are the types whom the law protects because they fall within the jurisdiction of Sudanese traditions. What a paradox, what duplicity, is this?

Two ways with no third are before us. For every citizen concerned for the future and in order to preserve tradition, we either choose capitalism, which seems inescapable, or the bright path of socialism. Our Sudanese people have well-established, respected traditions such as in the system of consultation, which lies at the heart of democratic principles. The kings of Kush elected their leaders, so did the Funj and the Abdallab. Tribes were extremely autonomous before the advent of Turkish and British occupation, respectively. They rejected impositions and dictatorship but unfortunately in vain. Those who are stabbing democracy in the back are the very people who are undermining the good traditions about which they pretend to weep. Some mistook democracy and saw it as a Western model. True, parliamentary democracy originated in the West with the rise of capitalism and the demise of feudalism. Notwithstanding, the very essence of democracy was contained within preexistent consultative traditions. The right of the people to elect their leadership is increasingly becoming an inalienable right. Paternalism and the violation of this right are unpardonable. This is the requirement of the age we live in, and the right of the Sudanese to modernism is no exception. I believe strongly in democratic rights and reject dictatorship in any society, let alone ours, which is markedly pluralistic and heterogeneous. Problems like that in Southern Sudan require consensus *taradi* under the shadow of a united Sudan in which all Sudanese enjoy rights and entitlements on

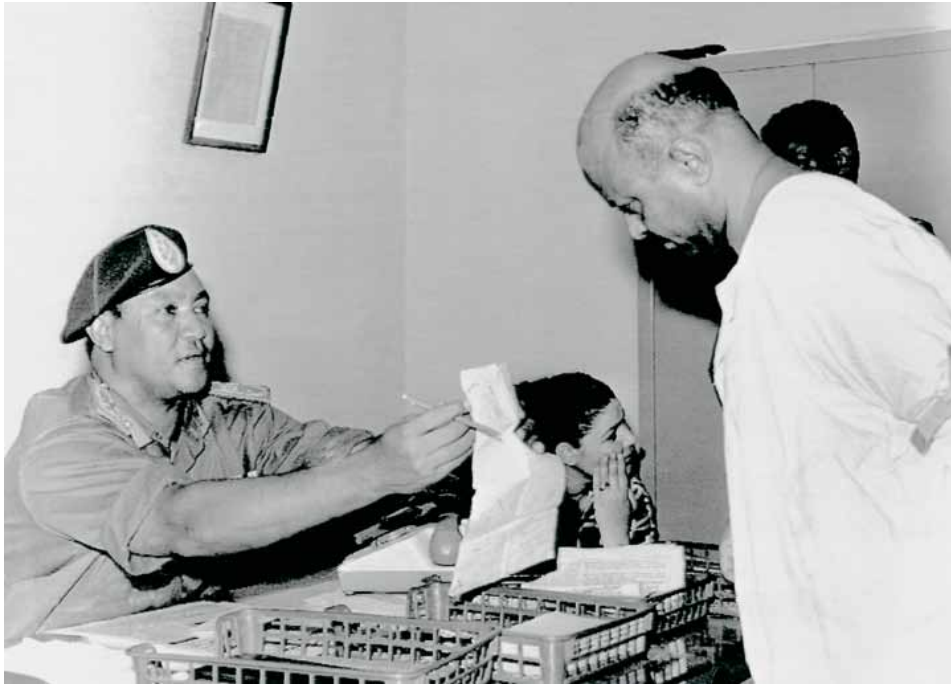
equal footing. The parliamentary system in the Sudan, in spite of corruption, had succeeded somewhat, but that does not mean the system is not corrupt. Bribery and corruption were clear, as evidenced in several press essays about parties thrown by colonists to entertain Sudanese political personalities to influence decision making. Decadence and corruption are also explicable as class issues that turn nationalists into mere follower, yes-man types. The activities of colonizers and their technical local affiliates continue. Parliaments are but mirrors that reflect the ugly and the beautiful in any democracy. The mind dictates the following: if you do not like what you see in the mirror, try to remove it, but don't be like a child and break the mirror, lest you turn into a sore loser.

Finally, I wish to elucidate my role in spreading Marxism. Some may insist that it is an imported model. I am puzzled. The people who are speaking of imported ideologies are the ones smoking English tobacco, drinking Johnny Walker and Pepsi, driving Chevrolets, and reading the *Times*. They allow for themselves that which they disallow for others. Progress today necessitates that we learn from one another's utmost best. Human knowledge is a property of all humanity. Current systems of government in the Sudan are also imported models. Marxism was an embodiment of a struggle against narrow individualism; we borrow what is useful for alleviating the suffering of our people. Imported models are the ones supported by certain countries that allocate funds and turn people into puppets of no free will and devoid of any hope for their people. Those types are to be found in abundance outside of Marxist circles.

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Your Honor, this is my path. This is my activism and philosophy. If someone is to persuade me otherwise, bring the goods. I am not convinced of a philosophy that sends honest people to prison and suffocates their liberties. As I have been deposited in a cell in solitary confinement for months on end, I must say, please, search for another philosophy to convince me.

—Translated from the Arabic and edited by Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf and Salah M. Hassan



Left / Links: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub hours before he was hanged, Khartoum, July 28, 1971 / Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub, Stunden, bevor er gehängt wurde, Khartoum, 28. Juli 1971

Above / Oben: Sudanese leader Major General Gaafar Numeiry showing a document to Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub that allegedly proves he had masterminded the quelled coup against the regime, Khartoum, July 27, 1971 / Der sudanesische Führer Generalmajor Gaafar Numeiri (links) zeigt Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub ein Dokument, das angeblich beweist, dass er der Kopf des niedergeschlagenen Coups gegen das Regime ist, Khartoum, 27. Juli 1971

Aimé Césaire

Letter to Maurice Thorez

Aimé Césaire
Député for Martinique

To: Maurice Thorez
General Secretary of the French Communist Party

It would be easy for me to articulate, as much with respect to the French Communist Party as with respect to the Communist International as sponsored by the Soviet Union, a long list of grievances or disagreements.

Lately, the harvest has been particularly bountiful: Khrushchev's revelations concerning Stalin are enough to have plunged all those who have participated in communist activity, to whatever degree, into an abyss of shock, pain, and shame (or, at least, I hope so).

The dead, the tortured, the executed—no, neither posthumous rehabilitations, nor national funerals, nor official speeches can overcome them. These are not the kind of ghosts that one can ward off with a mechanical phrase.

From now on, they will show up as watermarks in the very substance of the system, as the obsession behind our feelings of failure and humiliation.

And, of course, it is not the attitude of the French Communist Party as it was defined at its Fourteenth Congress—an attitude which seems to have been dictated above all by the pitiful concern of its leaders to save face—that will facilitate the dissipation of our malaise and bring about an end to the festering and bleeding of the wound at the core of our consciences.

The facts are there, in all their immensity.

I will cite at random: the details supplied by Khrushchev on Stalin's methods; the true nature of the relationships between state power and the working class in too many popular democracies, relationships that

lead us to believe in the existence in these countries of a veritable state capitalism, exploiting the working class in a manner not very different from the way the working class is used in capitalist countries; the conception generally held among communist parties of Stalinist orientation of the relationship between brother states and parties, as evidenced by the avalanche of abuse dumped for five years on Yugoslavia for the crime of having asserted its will to independence; the lack of positive signs indicating willingness on the part of the Russian Communist Party and the Soviet state to grant independence to other communist parties or socialist states; or the lack of haste on the part of non-Russian parties, especially the French Communist Party, to seize the offer and declare their independence from Russia. All of this authorizes the statement that, with the exception of Yugoslavia, in numerous European countries—in the name of socialism—usurping bureaucracies that are cut off from the people (bureaucracies from which it is now proven that nothing can be expected) have achieved the pitiable wonder of transforming into a nightmare what humanity has for so long cherished as a dream: socialism.

As for the French Communist Party, one cannot avoid being struck by its reluctance to enter into the path of de-Stalinization; by its unwillingness to condemn Stalin and the methods which led him to his crimes; by its persistent self-satisfaction; by its refusal to renounce, for its own part and relative to its own affairs, the antidemocratic methods dear to Stalin; in short, by everything that allows us to speak of a French Stalinism that has a life more durable than Stalin himself and which, we may conjecture, would have produced in France the same catastrophic effects as in Russia, if chance had permitted it to come to power in France.

In light of all this, how can we suppress our disappointment?

It is very true that, the day after Khrushchev's report, we trembled with hope.

We expected from the French Communist Party an honest self-critique; a disassociation with crimes that would exonerate it; not a renunciation, but a new and solemn departure; something like the Communist Party founded a second time. . . . Instead, at Le Havre, we saw nothing but obstinacy in error; perseverance in lies; the absurd pretension of having never been wrong; in short, among these pontiffs pontificating more than ever before, a senile incapacity to achieve the detachment necessary to rise to the level of the event, and all the childish tricks of a cornered priestly pride.

Well! All the communist parties are stirring: Italy, Poland, Hungary, China. And the French party, in the middle of the whirlwind, examines itself and claims to be satisfied. Never before have I been so conscious of so great a historical lag afflicting a great people. . . .

But as serious as this grievance is—and as sufficient as it is by itself, since it represents the bankruptcy of an ideal and the pathetic illustration of the failure of a whole generation—I want to add a certain number of considerations related to my position as a man of color.

Let us say it straight out: in light of events (and reflection on the shameful anti-Semitic practices that have had currency and, it seems, continue to have currency in countries that claim to be socialist), I have become convinced that our paths and the paths of communism as it has been put into practice are not purely and simply indistinguishable, and that they cannot become purely and simply indistinguishable. One fact that is paramount in my eyes is this: we, men of color, at this precise moment in our historical evolution, have come to grasp, in our consciousness, the full breadth of our singularity, and are ready to assume on all levels and in all areas the responsibilities that flow from this coming to consciousness.

The singularity of our “situation in the world,” which cannot be confused with any other. The singularity of our problems, which cannot be reduced to any other problem. The singularity of our history, constructed out of terrible misfortunes that belong to no one else. The singularity of our culture, which we wish to live in a way that is more and more real.

What else can be the result of this but that our paths toward the future—all our paths, political as well as cultural—are not yet charted? That they are yet to be discovered, and that the responsibility for this discovery belongs to no one but us?

Suffice it to say that we are convinced that our questions (or, if you prefer, the colonial question) cannot be treated as a part of a more important whole, a part over which others can negotiate or come to whatever compromise seems appropriate in light of a general situation, of which they alone have the right to take stock.

(Here it is clear that I am alluding to the French Communist Party's vote on Algeria, by which it granted the Guy Mollet-Lacoste government full powers to carry out its North African policy—a circumstance that we have no guarantee will not be replicated in the future.)

In any case, it is clear that our struggle—the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism—is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle.

I have often asked myself whether, in societies like ours (rural and peasant societies that they are, in which the working class is tiny and, conversely, the middle classes have a political importance out of proportion with their numerical importance), political and social con-

ditions in the current context permit effective action by communist organizations acting in isolation (worse yet, communist organizations federated with or enfeoffed to the communist party in the metropole) and whether—instead of rejecting, a priori and in the name of an exclusive ideology, men who are nevertheless honest and fundamentally anticolonialist—there was not rather a way to seek a form of organization as broad and as flexible as possible, a form of organization capable of giving impetus to the greatest number (rather than ordering around a small number). A form of organization in which Marxists would not be drowned, but rather play their role of leavening, inspiring, and orienting, as opposed to the role which, objectively, they play at present: of dividing popular forces.

The impasse at which we find ourselves today in the Caribbean, despite our electoral successes, seems to me to settle the matter: I opt for the broader rather than the narrower choice; for the movement that places us shoulder to shoulder with others rather than the one that leaves us by ourselves; for the one that gathers together energies rather than the one that divides them into chapels, sects, churches; for the one that liberates the creative energy of the masses rather than the one that restricts it and ultimately sterilizes it.

In Europe, unity of forces on the left is the order of the day; the disjointed elements of the progressive movement are tending toward welding themselves back together, and there is no doubt that this drive toward unity would become irresistible if the Stalinist communist parties decided to throw overboard the impediments of prejudices, habits, and methods inherited from Stalin. There is no doubt that, in that case, no reason (or better yet, no pretext) for shunning unity would remain for those in other leftist parties who do not want unity and, as a result, the enemies of unity would find themselves isolated and reduced to impotence.

But in our country, where division is most often artificial and brought from outside (piped in as it is by European divisions abusively transplanted into our local politics), how could we not be ready to sacrifice everything (that is, everything secondary) in order to regain that which is essential: that unity with brothers, with comrades, that is the bulwark of our strength and the guarantee of our hope in the future.

Besides, in this context, it is life itself that decides. Look at the great breath of unity passing over all the black countries! Look how, here and there, the torn fabric is being restitched! Experience, harshly acquired experience, has taught us that we have at our disposal but one weapon, one sole efficient and undamaged weapon: the weapon of unity, the weapon of the anticolonial rallying of all who are willing, and the time during which we are dispersed according to the

fissures of the metropolitan parties is also the time of our weakness and defeat.

For my part, I believe that black peoples are rich with energy and passion, that they lack neither vigor nor imagination, but that these strengths can only wilt in organizations that are not their own: made for them, made by them, and adapted to ends that they alone can determine.

This is not a desire to fight alone and a disdain for all alliances. It is a desire to distinguish between alliance and subordination, solidarity and resignation. It is exactly the latter of these pairs that threatens us in some of the glaring flaws we find in the members of the French Communist Party: their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the West; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo; to sum up, their rarely avowed but real belief in civilization with a capital C and progress with a capital P (as evidenced by their hostility to what they disdainfully call “cultural relativism”). All these flaws lead to a literary tribe that, concerning everything and nothing, dogmatizes in the name of the party. It must be said that the French communists have had a good teacher: Stalin. Stalin is indeed the very one who reintroduced the notion of “advanced” and “backward” peoples into socialist thinking.

And if he speaks of the duty of an advanced people (in this case, the Great Russians) to help peoples who are behind to catch up and overcome their delay, I do not know colonialist paternalism to proclaim any other intention.

In the case of Stalin and those of his sect, it is perhaps not paternalism that is at stake. It is, however, definitely something that resembles it so closely as to be mistaken for it. Let us invent a word for it: “fraternalism.” For we are indeed dealing with a brother, a big brother who, full of his own superiority and sure of his experience, takes you by the hand (alas, sometimes roughly) in order to lead you along the path to where he knows Reason and Progress can be found.

Well, that is exactly what we do not want. What we no longer want.

Yes, we want our societies to rise to a higher degree of development, but on their own, by means of internal growth, interior necessity, and organic progress, without anything exterior coming to warp, alter, or compromise this growth.

Under these conditions, it will be understood that we cannot delegate anyone else to think for us, or to make our discoveries for us; that, henceforth, we cannot allow anyone else, even if they are the best of our friends, to vouch for us. If the goal of all progressive politics is to

one day restore freedom to colonized peoples, it is at least necessary that the everyday actions of progressive parties not be in contradiction with this desired end by continually destroying the very foundations, organizational as well as psychological, of this future freedom, foundations which can be reduced to a single postulate: the right to initiative.

I believe I have said enough to make it clear that it is neither Marxism nor communism that I am renouncing, and that it is the usage some have made of Marxism and communism that I condemn. That what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism. That the doctrine and the movement would be made to fit men, not men to fit the doctrine or the movement. And, to be clear, this is valid not only for communists. If I were Christian or Muslim, I would say the same thing. I would say that no doctrine is worthwhile unless rethought by us, rethought for us, converted to us. This would seem to go without saying. And yet, as the facts are, it does not go without saying. There is a veritable Copernican revolution to be imposed here, so ingrained in Europe (from the extreme right to the extreme left) is the habit of doing for us, arranging for us, thinking for us—in short, the habit of challenging our possession of this right to initiative of which I have just spoken, which is, at the end of the day, the right to personality.

This is no doubt the essence of the issue.

There exists a Chinese communism. Without being very familiar with it, I have a very strong prejudice in its favor. And I expect it not to slip into the monstrous errors that have disfigured European communism. But I am also interested, and more so, in seeing the budding and blossoming of the African variety of communism. It would undoubtedly offer us useful, valuable, and original variants, and I am sure our older wisdoms would add nuance to or complete them on points of doctrine.

But I say that there will never be an African variant, or a Malagasy one or a Caribbean one, because French communism finds it more convenient to impose theirs upon us. I say that there will never be an African, Malagasy, or Caribbean communism because the French Communist Party conceives of its duties toward colonized peoples in terms of a position of authority to fill, and even the anticolonialism of French communists still bears the marks of the colonialism it is fighting. Or again, amounting to the same thing, I say that there will be no communism unique to each of the colonial countries subject to France as long as the rue St-Georges offices—the offices of the French Communist Party's colonial branch, the perfect counterpart of the Ministry of Overseas France on rue Oudinot—persist in thinking of our countries as mission fields or as countries under mandate.

To return to our main subject, the period through which we are living is characterized by a double failure: one which has been evident for a long time, that of capitalism. But also another: the dreadful failure of that which for too long we took to be socialism, when it was nothing but Stalinism.

The result is that, at the present time, the world is at an impasse.

This can only mean one thing: not that there is no way out, but that the time has come to abandon all the old ways, which have led to fraud, tyranny, and murder.

Suffice it to say that, for our part, we no longer want to remain content with being present while others do politics, while they get nowhere, while they make deals, while they perform makeshift repairs on their consciences and engage in casuistry.

Our time has come.

And what I have said concerning Negroes is not valid only for Negroes.

Indeed, everything can be salvaged, even the pseudo-socialism established here and there in Europe by Stalin, provided that initiative be given over to the peoples that have until now only been subject to it; provided that power descends from on high and becomes rooted in the people (and I will not hide the fact that the ferment currently emerging in Poland, for example, fills me with joy and hope).

At this point, allow me to think more particularly about my own unfortunate country: Martinique.

Thinking about Martinique, I note that the French Communist Party is totally incapable of offering it anything like a perspective that would be anything other than utopian; that the French Communist Party has never bothered itself to offer even that; that it has never thought of us in any way other than in relation to a world strategy that, incidentally, is disconcerting.

Thinking about Martinique, I note that communism has managed to slip the noose of assimilation around its neck; that communism has managed to isolate it in the Caribbean basin; that it has managed to plunge it into a sort of insular ghetto; that it has managed to cut it off from other Caribbean countries whose experience could be both instructive and fruitful (for they have the same problems as us and their democratic evolution is rapid); and, finally, that communism has managed to cut us off from Black Africa, whose evolution is currently taking shape in the opposite direction of ours. And yet it is from this Black Africa, the mother of our Caribbean culture and civilization, that I await the regeneration of the Caribbean—not from Europe who can only perfect our alienation, but from Africa who alone can revitalize, that is, repersonalize the Caribbean.

Yes, I know.

We are offered solidarity with the French people; with the French proletariat and, by means of communism, with the proletariats of the world. I do not reject these solidarities. But I do not want to erect solidarities in metaphysics. There are no allies by divine right. There are allies imposed upon us by place, time, and the nature of things. And if alliance with the French proletariat is exclusive; if it tends to make us forget or resist other alliances which are necessary and natural, legitimate and fertile; if communism destroys our most invigorating friendships—the friendship uniting us with the rest of the Caribbean, the friendship uniting us with Africa—then I say communism has done us a disservice in making us exchange living fraternity for what risks appearing to be the coldest of cold abstractions.

I shall anticipate an objection.

Provincialism? Not at all. I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the “universal.”

My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.

And so? So we need to have the patience to take up the task anew; the strength to redo that which has been undone; the strength to invent instead of follow; the strength to “invent” our path and to clear it of ready-made forms, those petrified forms that obstruct it.

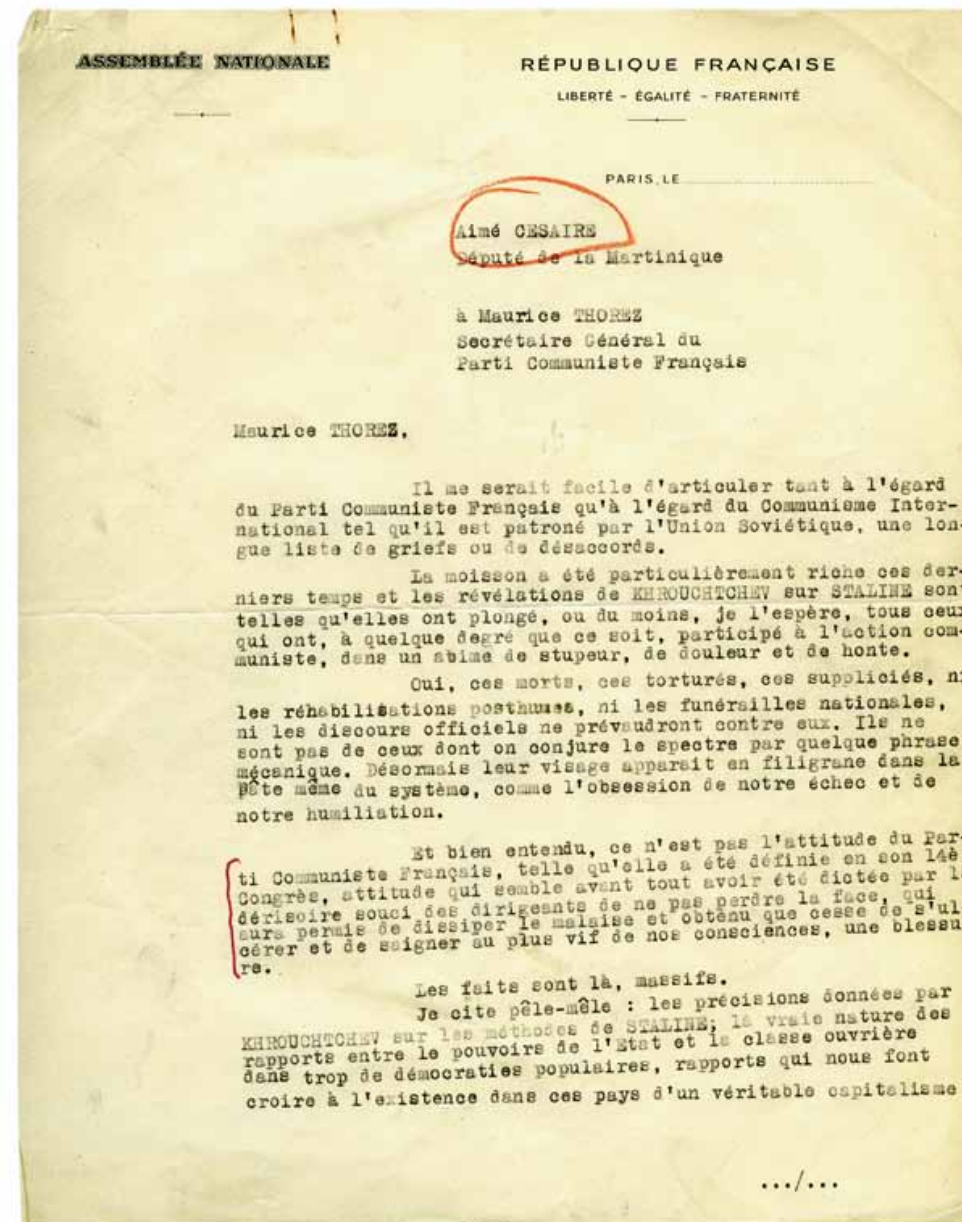
In short, we shall henceforth consider it our duty to combine our efforts with those of all men with a passion for justice and truth, in order to build organizations susceptible of honestly and effectively helping black peoples in their struggle for today and for tomorrow: the struggle for justice, the struggle for culture, the struggle for dignity and freedom. Organizations capable, in sum, of preparing them in all areas to assume in an autonomous manner the heavy responsibilities that, even at this moment, history has caused to weigh heavily on their shoulders.

Under these conditions, I ask you to accept my resignation as a member of the French Communist Party.

Paris, October 24, 1956

Aimé Césaire

—Translated by Chike Jeffers



Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," original manuscript / Originalmanuskript

l'Etat exploitent la classe ouvrière de manière pas très différente de la manière dont on en use avec la classe ouvrière dans les pays capitalistes ; la conception généralement admise dans les partis communistes de type stalinien des relations entre états et partis frères, témoin le tonnerre d'injures déversées pendant cinq ans sur la Yougoslavie coupable d'avoir affirmé sa volonté d'indépendance ; le manque de signes positifs indiquant la volonté de l'Etat soviétique et du parti communiste russe d'accorder leur indépendance aux autres partis communistes et autres états socialistes, ou alors le manque de hâte des partis non russes et singulièrement du parti communiste français à s'emparer de cette offre et à affirmer leur indépendance à l'égard de la Russie, tout cela nous autorise à dire que - exception faite pour la Yougoslavie - dans de nombreux pays d'Europe, et au nom du Socialisme, des bureaucraties coupées du peuple, des bureaucraties usurpatrices et dont il est maintenant prouvé qu'il n'y a rien à en attendre, ont réussi la piteuse merveille de transformer en cauchemar ce que l'humanité a pendant longtemps caressé comme un rêve : le Socialisme.

Quant au Parti Communiste Français, on n'a pas pu ne pas être frappé par sa répugnance à s'engager dans les voies de la destalinisation ; sa mauvaise volonté à condamner Staline et les méthodes qui l'ont conduit au crime ; son inaltérable satisfaction de soi ; son refus de renoncer pour sa part et en ce qui le concerne aux méthodes antidémocratiques chères à Staline, bref par tout cela qui nous autorise à parler d'un stalinisme français qui a la vie plus dure que Staline lui-même et qui, on peut le conjecturer, aurait produit en France les mêmes catastrophiques effets qu'en Russie, si le hasard avait permis qu'en France il s'installât au pouvoir.

Ici comment taire notre déception ?

Il est très vrai de dire qu'au lendemain du rapport Khrouchtchev nous avons tressailli d'espérance.

On attendait du parti communiste français une autocritique probe ; une désolidarisation d'avec le crime qui le disculpât ; pas un reniement, mais un nouveau et solennel départ ; quelque chose comme le parti communiste fondé une seconde fois... Au lieu qu'au Havre, nous n'avons vu qu'entêtement dans l'erreur ; persévérance dans le mensonge ; absurde prétention de ne s'être jamais trompé ; bref chez des pontifes plus que jamais pontifiant, une incapacité sénile à se dépendre de soi-même pour se hausser au niveau de l'événement et toutes les ruses puériles d'un orgueil sacerdotal aux abois.

Quoi ! Tous les partis communistes bougent. Italie, Pologne, Hongrie, Chine. Et le parti français, au milieu du tourbillon général, se contemple lui-même et se dit satisfait. Jamais je n'ai eu autant conscience d'un tel retard historique effligeant un grand peuple.....

.../....

Mais, quelque grave que soit ce grief - et à lui seul très suffisant, car faillite d'un idéal et illustration pathétique de l'échec de toute une génération -, je veux ajouter un certain nombre de considérations se rapportant à ma qualité d'homme de couleur.

Disons d'un mot : qu'à la lumière des événements (et réflexion faite sur les pratiques honteuses de l'antisémitisme qui ont eu cours et continuent encore semble-t-il à avoir cours dans des pays qui se réclament du socialisme), j'ai acquis la conviction que nos voies et celles du communisme tel qu'il est mis en pratique, ne se confondent pas purement et simplement ; qu'elles ne peuvent pas se confondre purement et simplement.

Un fait à mes yeux capital est celui-ci : que nous, hommes de couleur, en ce moment précis de l'évolution historique, avons, dans notre conscience, pris possession de tout le champ de notre singularité et que nous sommes prêts à assumer sur tous les plans et dans tous les domaines les responsabilités qui découlent de cette prise de conscience.

Singularité de notre "situation dans le monde" qui ne se confond avec nulle autre. Singularité de nos problèmes qui ne se ramènent à nul autre problème. Singularité de notre histoire coupée de terribles avatars qui n'appartiennent qu'à elle. Singularité de notre culture que nous voulons vivre de manière de plus en plus réelle.

Qu'en résulte-t-il, sinon que nos voies vers l'avenir, je dis toutes nos voies, la voie politique comme la voie culturelle, ne sont pas toutes faites ; qu'elles sont à découvrir, et que les soins de cette découverte ne regardent que nous ?

C'est assez dire que nous sommes convaincus que nos questions, ou si l'on veut la question coloniale, ne peut pas être traitée comme une partie d'un ensemble plus important, une partie sur laquelle d'autres pourront transiger ou passer tel compromis qu'il leur semblera juste de passer en regard à une situation générale qu'ils auront seuls à apprécier.

(Ici il est clair que je fais allusion au vote du parti communiste français sur l'Algérie, vote par lequel le parti accordait au gouvernement GUY MOLLET-LACOSTE les pleins pouvoirs pour sa politique en Afrique du Nord - événement dont nous n'avons aucune garantie qu'elle ne puisse se renouveler.)

.../...

En tout cas, il est constant que notre lutte, la lutte des peuples coloniaux contre le colonialisme, la lutte des peuples de couleur, contre le racisme est beaucoup plus complexe - que dis-je d'une tout autre nature que la lutte de l'ouvrier français contre le capitalisme français et ne saurait en aucune manière, être considérée comme une partie, un fragment de cette lutte.

Je me suis souvent posé la question de savoir si dans les sociétés comme les nôtres, rurales comme elles sont, des sociétés de paysannerie, où la classe ouvrière est infime et où par contre, les classes moyennes ont une importance politique qui n'a pas de rapport avec leur importance numérique réelle, les conditions politiques et sociales permettaient dans le contexte actuel une action efficace d'organisations communistes agissant isolément (à plus forte raison d'organisations communistes fédérées ou inféodées au Parti Communiste de la Métropole) et si, au lieu de rejeter à priori et au nom d'une idéologie exclusive, des hommes pourtant honnêtes et foncièrement anti-colonialistes, il n'y avait pas plutôt lieu de rechercher une forme d'organisation aussi large et souple que possible, une forme d'organisation susceptible de donner élan au plus grand nombre, plutôt qu'à caporaliser un petit nombre. Une forme d'organisation où les marxistes seraient non pas noyés, mais où ils joueraient leur rôle de levain, d'inspirateur, d'orienteur et non celui qu'à présent ils jouent objectivement, de diviseurs des forces populaires.

L'impasse où nous sommes aujourd'hui aux Antilles, malgré nos succès électoraux me paraît trancher la question : j'opte pour le plus large contre le plus étroit ; pour le mouvement qui nous met au coude à coude avec les autres et contre celui qui nous laisse entre nous ; pour celui qui rassemble les énergies contre celui qui les divise en chapelles, en sectes, en églises ; pour celui qui libère l'énergie créatrice des masses contre celui qui la canalise et finalement la stérilise.

En Europe, l'unité des forces de gauche est à l'ordre du jour, les morceaux disjointes du mouvement progressiste tendent à se ressouder, et nul doute que ce mouvement d'unité deviendrait irrésistible si du côté des partis communistes stalinien, on se décidait à jeter par dessus bord tout l'impédiment des préjugés, des habitudes et des méthodes héritées de STALINE. Nul doute que dans ce cas, toute raison, mieux, tout prétexte de boudier l'unité serait enlevé à ceux qui dans les autres partis de gauche ne veulent pas de l'unité et que de ce fait les adversaires de l'unité se trouveraient isolés et réduits à l'impuissance.

Et alors, comment dans nos pays, où le plus souvent, la division est artificielle, venue du dehors, branchée qu'elle est sur les divisions européennes abusivement transplantées dans nos politiques locales,

.../...

comment ne serions nous pas décidés à sacrifier tout, je dis tout le secondaire, pour retrouver l'essentiel ; cette unité avec des frères, avec des camarades qui est le rempart de notre force et le gage de notre confiance en l'avenir ?

D'ailleurs, ici, c'est la vie elle-même qui tranche. Voyez donc le grand souffle d'unité qui passe sur tous les pays noirs ! Voyez comme, ça et là, se remaille le tissu rompu. C'est que l'expérience, une expérience durement acquise, nous a enseigné qu'il n'y a à notre disposition qu'une arme, une seule efficace, une seule non ébréchée : l'arme de l'unité, l'arme du rassemblement anti-colonialiste de toutes les volontés, et que le temps de notre dispersion au gré du clivage des partis métropolitains est aussi le temps de notre faiblesse et de nos défaites.

Pour ma part, je crois que les peuples noirs sont riches d'énergie, de passion ; qu'il ne leur manque ni vigueur ni imagination ; mais que ces forces ne peuvent que s'étioler dans des organisations qui ne leur sont pas propres ; faites pour eux ; faites par eux et adaptés à des fins qu'eux seuls peuvent déterminer.

Ce n'est pas volonté de se battre seul et dédain de toute alliance. C'est volonté de ne pas confondre alliance et subordination. Solidarité et démission. Or c'est là très exactement de quoi nous menacent quelques uns des défauts très apparents que nous constatons chez les membres du Parti Communiste Français : leur assimilationnisme, leur chauvinisme inconscient, leur conviction présumée - qu'ils partagent avec les bourgeois européens - de la supériorité de l'Occident ; leur croyance que l'évolution telle qu'elle s'est opérée en Europe est la seule possible ; la seule désirable, qu'elle est celle par laquelle le monde entier devra passer ; pour tout dire, leur croyance rarement avouée, mais réelle, à la civilisation avec un grand C ; au progrès avec un grand P (témoignage leur hostilité à ce qu'ils appellent avec dédain le "relativisme culturel" (tous défauts qui bien entendu culminent dans la gent littéraire qui à propos de tout et de rien dogmatise au nom du parti). Il faut dire en passant que les communistes français ont été à bonne école. Celle de STALINE. et STALINE est bel et bien celui qui a réintroduit dans la pensée socialiste, la notion de peuples "avancés" et de peuples "attardés".

Et s'il parle du devoir du peuple avancé (en l'espèce les Grands Russes) d'aider les peuples arriérés à rattraper leur retard, je ne sache pas que le paternalisme colonialiste proclame une autre prétention.

.../...

Dans le cas de STALINE et de ses sectateurs, ce n'est peut-être pas de paternalisme qu'il s'agit. Mais c'est à coup sûr de quelque chose qui lui ressemble à s'y méprendre. Inventons le mot : c'est du "fraternisme". Car il s'agit bel et bien d'un frère, d'un grand frère qui, imbu de sa supériorité et sûr de son expérience, vous prend par la main (d'une main hélas ! parfois rude) pour vous conduire sur la route où il sait se trouver la Raison et le Progrès.

Or c'est très exactement ce dont nous ne voulons pas. Ce dont nous ne voulons plus.

Nous voulons que nos sociétés s'élèvent à un degré supérieur de développement, mais d'elles-mêmes, par croissance interne, par nécessité intérieure, par progrès organique, sans que rien d'extérieur vienne gauchir cette croissance, ou l'altérer ou la compromettre.

Dans ces conditions on comprend que nous ne puissions donner à personne délégation pour penser pour nous; délégation pour chercher pour nous; que nous ne puissions désormais accepter que qui que ce soit, fût-il le meilleur de nos amis, se porte fort pour nous. Si le but de toute politique progressiste est de rendre un jour leur liberté aux peuples colonisés, au moins faut-il que l'action quotidienne des partis progressistes n'entre pas en contradiction avec la fin recherchée et ne détruise pas tous les jours, les bases mêmes, les bases organisationnelles comme les bases psychologiques de cette future liberté, *desquelles* qui se ramènent à un seul postulat : le droit à l'initiative.

Je crois en avoir assez dit pour faire comprendre que ce n'est ni le marxisme ni le communisme que je repousse, que c'est l'usage que certains ont fait du marxisme et du communisme que je reprouve. Que ce que je veux, c'est que marxisme et communisme soient mis au service des peuples noirs, et non les peuples noirs au service du marxisme et du communisme. Que la doctrine et le mouvement soient faits pour les hommes, non les hommes pour la doctrine ou pour le mouvement. Et bien entendu cela n'est pas valable pour les seuls communistes. Et si j'étais chrétien ou musulman, je dirais la même chose. Qu'aucune doctrine ne vaille que repensée par nous, que repensée pour nous, que convertie à nous. Cela a l'air de soi. Et pourtant dans les faits cela ne va pas de soi. Et c'est ici une véritable révolution copernicienne qu'il faut imposer, tant est enracinée en Europe, et dans tous les partis, et dans tous les domaines, de l'extrême droite à l'extrême gauche, l'habitude de faire pour nous, l'habitude de disposer pour nous, l'habitude de penser pour nous, bref l'habitude de nous contester le droit à l'initiative dont je parlais tout à l'heure et qui est, en définitive, le droit à la personnalité.

.../...

C'est sans doute là l'essentiel de l'affaire.

Il existe un communisme chinois. Sans très bien le connaître, j'ai à son égard un préjugé des plus favorables. Et j'attends de lui qu'il ne verse pas dans les monstrueuses erreurs qui ont défiguré le communisme européen. Mais il m'intéresserait aussi et plus encore, de voir éclore et s'épanouir la variété africaine du communisme. Il nous proposerait sans doute des variantes utiles, précieuses, originales et nos vieilles sagesse nuanceraient, j'en suis sûr, ou complèteraient bien des points de la doctrine.

Mais je dis qu'il n'y aura jamais de variante africaine, ou malgache, ou antillaise du communisme, parce que le communisme français trouve plus commode de nous imposer ^{la sienne} le sien. Qu'il n'y aura jamais de communisme africain, malgache ou antillais, parce que le parti communiste français pense ses devoirs envers les peuples coloniaux en terme de magistère à exercer, et que l'anticolonialisme même des communistes français porte encore les stigmates de ce colonialisme qu'il combat. Ou encore, ce qui revient au même, qu'il n'y aura pas de communisme propre à chacun des pays coloniaux qui dépendent de la France, tant que les bureaux de la rue Saint-Georges, les bureaux de la section coloniale du Parti Communiste Français, ce parfait pendant du Ministère de la rue ^{Cadinet} Cadinet, persisteront à penser à nos pays comme à terres de mission ou pays sous mandat.

.../...

Pour revenir à notre propos, l'époque que nous vivions est sous le signe d'un double échec : l'un évident depuis longtemps : celui du capitalisme. Mais aussi l'autre, celui, effrayable, de ce que pendant trop longtemps nous avons pris pour du socialisme et qui n'était que du stalinisme.

Le résultat est qu'à l'heure actuelle le monde est dans l'impasse.

Cela ne peut signifier qu'une chose : non pas qu'il n'y a pas de route pour en sortir, mais que l'heure est venue d'abandonner toutes les vieilles routes. Celles qui ont mené à l'imposture, à la tyrannie, au crime.

C'est assez dire que pour notre part, nous ne voulons plus nous contenter d'assister à la politique des autres. Au piètiement des autres. Aux combinaisons des autres. Aux rafistolages de conscience ou à la casuistique des autres.

L'heure de nous-mêmes a sonné.

Et ce que je viens de dire des nègres n'est pas valable que pour les nègres.

Qui tout peu encore être sauvé, tout, même le pseudo-socialisme installé çà et là en Europe par STALINE, à condition que l'initiative soit rendue aux peuples qui jusqu'ici n'ont fait que le subir ; à condition que le pouvoir descende et s'enracine dans le peuple, et je ne cache pas que la fermentation qui se produit à l'heure actuelle, en Pologne, par exemple, me remplit de joie et d'espoir.

Ici que l'on me permette de penser plus particulièrement à mon malheureux pays : la Martinique.

J'y pense pour constater que le parti communiste français est dans l'incapacité absolue de lui offrir une quelconque perspective qui soit autre chose qu'utopique ; que le parti communiste français ne s'est jamais soucié de lui en offrir ; qu'il n'a jamais pensé à nous qu'en fonction d'une stratégie mondiale au demeurant déconcertante.

J'y pense pour constater que le communisme a achevé de lui passer autour du cou le noeud coulant de l'assimilation ; que le communisme a achevé de l'isoler dans le bassin caraïbe ; qu'il a achevé de la plonger dans une manière de ghetto insulaire ; qu'il a achevé de la couper des autres pays antillais dont l'expérience pourrait lui être à la fois instructive et fructueuse (car ils ont les mêmes problèmes que nous et leur évolution démocratique est impétueuse) : que le communisme enfin, a achevé de nous couper de l'Afrique Noire dont l'évolution se dessine désormais à contre-sens du nôtre. Et pourtant cette Afrique noire, la mère de notre culture et de notre civilisation antillaise, c'est d'elle que j'attends la régénération des Antilles ; pas de l'Europe qui ne peut que parfaire notre aliénation, mais de l'Afrique qui seule peut revivifier et repersonnaliser les Antilles.

.../...

Je sais bien.

On nous offre en échange la solidarité avec le peuple français ; avec le prolétariat français, et à travers le communisme, avec les prolétariats mondiaux. Je ne nie pas ces solidarités. Mais je ne veux pas ériger ces solidarités en métaphysique. Il n'y a pas d'alliés de droit divin. Il y a des alliés que nous impose le lieu, le moment et la nature des choses. Et si l'alliance avec le prolétariat français est exclusive, si elle tend à nous faire oublier ou à contrarier d'autres alliances nécessaires et naturelles, légitimes et fécondes, si le communisme sacro-saint nous émet les plus vivifiantes, celle qui nous unit aux autres Antilles, celle qui nous unit à l'Afrique, alors je dis que le communisme nous a rendu un bien mauvais service en nous faisant troquer la fraternité vivante contre ce qui risque d'apparaître comme la plus froide des froides abstractions.

Je prévois une objection.

Provincialisme ? non pas ! Je ne m'enterre pas dans un particularisme étroit. Mais je ne veux pas non plus me perdre dans un universalisme décharné. Il y a deux manières de se perdre : par ségrégation murée dans le particulier ou par dilution dans "l'universel".

Ma conception de l'universel est celle d'un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers, approfondissement et coexistence de tous les particuliers.

Alors ? Alors il nous faudra avoir la patience de reprendre l'ouvrage ; la force de refaire ce qui a été défectueux ; la force d'inventer au lieu de suivre ; la force "d'inventer" notre route et de la débarrasser des formes toutes faites, des formes pétrifiées qui l'obstruent.

En bref, nous considérons ^{désormais} comme de notre devoir de conjuguer nos efforts à ceux de tous les hommes épris de justice et de vérité pour bâtir des organisations susceptibles d'aider de manière probante et efficace les peuples noirs dans leur lutte pour aujourd'hui et pour demain - lutte pour la justice ; lutte pour la culture ; lutte pour la dignité et la liberté ; des organisations capables d'un mot de les préparer dans tous les domaines à assumer de manière autonome les lourdes responsabilités que l'histoire en ce moment même fait peser si lourdement sur leur épaules.

Dans ces conditions je vous prie de recevoir ma démission de membre du parti communiste français.

A. Liang

100 Notes – 100 Thoughts / 100 Notizen – 100 Gedanken

Nº091: Salah M. Hassan

How to Liberate Marx from His Eurocentrism:

Notes on African/Black Marxism /

Wie man Marx von seinem Eurozentrismus befreit:

Anmerkungen zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus

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