

PAN-AFRICANISM OR CLASSICAL AFRICAN MARXISM?

by
Ntongela Masilela

For it is perfectly consistent with the spirit of Marxism - with the principle that thought reflects its concrete social situation – that there should exist several different Marxisms in the world today, each answering the specific needs and problems of its own socio-economic system: thus one corresponds to the postrevolutionary industrial countries of the socialist bloc, another - a kind of peasant Marxism - to China and Cuba and the countries of the Third World, while yet another tries to deal theoretically with the unique questions raised by monopoly capitalism in the West.

Fredric Jameson , *Marxism and Form*

Marxism aspires in principle to be a *universal* science - no more amenable to merely national or continental ascription than any other objective cognition of reality.

Perry Anderson , *Considerations on Western Marxism*

Colonialism and its derivatives do not, as a matter of fact, constitute the present enemies of Africa . In a short time this continent will be liberated. For my part, the deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles the surer I am that the great danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology.

Frantz Fanon , *Toward the African Revolution*

The ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the national liberation movements - which is basically due to ignorance of the historical reality which these movements claim to transform - constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all.

Amilcar Cabral , *'The Weapon of Theory'*

The development in Africa in recent years of an intellectual system known as Classical African Marxism, historically originating and logically finding legitimacy in Classical Marxism, is a phenomenon that has fundamentally transformed the structure of African intellectual history as well as altered our understanding of African history. Although its mutations and meta- morphoses have taken place within the historical coordinates of the African revolution, principally the Algerian Revolution (1954-62) and the Guinean revolution (1961-74), the historical lineages of Classical African Marxism traverse the whole twentieth century from their origins in the African dias- pora (the Americas,

North and South, and the Caribbean).

The formation of Classical African Marxism thus bespeaks of the spiritual unity of the Black world, stretching from Soweto to Dakar , and from Georgetown through Havana to Atlanta ; that is, the movement of the historical forces behind the formation of Classical African Marxism has been in the opposite and oppositional direction to imperialism, which politically, culturally and economically devastated Africa .

We can thus trace the intellectual inspiration of Classical African Marxism in Pan-Africanist philosophy, but without doubt the structure of this materialist philosophy was determined by the opening to investigation of the continent of African history by African Marxist historians. It was the aim of Classical Pan-Africanism, which originated in the Americas in the late nineteenth century, to liberate Africa from imperialist domination. It also sought to bring about the historical unity of African people in Africa and in the African diaspora. The emergence of Classical Pan-Africanism was thus a direct response to the Berlin Conference of 1885, at which Africa was divided among various imperial powers. From the moment of its founding, Classical Pan-Africanism waged an unrelenting war to defeat colonialism.

The greatest triumph of Classical Pan-Africanism came in 1960, when nearly half the countries on the African continent attained their political independence. This victory was an outcome of a century-long political and cultural struggle. Yet paradoxically, at the very moment of its greatest triumph Classical Pan-Africanism suffered its fatal defeat, which was to destroy the political legitimacy of this philosophy on the-African continent. This defeat was the Congo Crisis of 1960-61, which resulted in three things: the murder of the great African patriot, Patrice Lumumba, whom Jean-Paul Sartre was to memorialize as a Black Jacobin and as a revolutionary without a revolution in his brilliant essay on the crisis. This crisis was also the signal that classical colonialism has assumed a new form, that of neocolonialism, which was even more vicious than its predecessor. And it was the first humiliating defeat of the newly independent African countries, signaling the historical imperative of their political unification. From this moment onwards, Classical Pan-Africanism was superseded by the development, of Classical African Marxism.

The aim of Classical Pan-Africanist philosophers and political leaders, among whom were C.L.R. James (Trinidad), George Padmore (Trinidad), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) and WE.B. Du Bois (United States of America) was to expel European imperialism and its various forms of colonialism from Africa , which meant also the expulsion of European history (and all its national variations) that had superimposed itself, intellectually, ideologically and culturally, on African

national histories. The fundamental issue for classical Pan-Africanists was to intellectually dynamize the movement of African history and resurrect its past glories. The effect of European imperialism and colonialism had been to break the dialectical movement of African history. In other words, European domination had rendered African history static and petrified, and the task of the Classical Pan-Africanists was to render it more dynamic again. But for this intellectual task to be achievable, colonialism had to be combatted politically on the material plane of social existence. We see, then, that unity of theory and practice was essential for the success of Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy.

It was in this historical circumstance of theoretically interconnecting the various components of African history and politically combatting the presence of colonialism in Africa that Classical Pan-Africanist philosophy encountered Classical Marxism. It was historically impossible for Classical Pan-Africanism to avoid coming to an understanding with Classical Marxism, for after all historical materialism was and is the only science of history, as well as the only philosophy that unites theory and practice in a dialectical movement. And it is only historical materialism that postulates the concrete structural forces and agents or subjects, the working class, through which capitalism can be defeated and as it has been defeated in the great Russian Revolution of 1917. To articulate the forms of African history and implement the means by which colonialism and imperialism could be defeated, Classical Pan-Africanism felt compelled to utilize the intellectual and political instruments available in the historical materialism of Classical Marxism. The Classical Pan-Africanist thinkers thus discovered Classical Marxism as what Jean-Paul Sartre thirty years ago called the living philosophy of our time, or the `unsurpassable horizon.

Having discovered historical materialism, all the Classical Pan-Africanist philosophers to a man embraced Classical Marxism. But at the moment they adopted historical materialism, Classical Marxism was deeply imbricated in the complications of European history, where in the Soviet Union Marxism broke into the dominant factions of Stalinism and Trotskyism. This violent factionalism in the interpretation of Classical Marxism was to affect an understanding of Marxism for generations. In Europe, for instance, while Georg Lukács gravitated towards Stalinism, Karl Korsch vacillated in between, hoping to formulate an independent position free from Stalinism and Trotskyism. Within the galaxy of Classical Pan-Africanist thinkers and political leaders, C.L.R. James moved in the direction of Trotskyism, while George Padmore moved in counterdirection towards Stalinism.

It was at the moment of this attempted synthesis of Classical Pan-Africanism and Classical Marxism that two of these brilliant thinkers produced two great historical works: C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* and W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black*

Reconstruction. In *The Black Jacobins*, James analyzed the success of one of the slave revolts in the context of the history of slave rebellions from antiquity to the present. Much more concretely, he sought to draw historical lessons from the Haitian Revolution for the then continuing resistance to colonialism and imperialism. It should be remembered that the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) was one of the few defeats of Napoleon Bonaparte before 1815. In other words, the first great defeat of bourgeois France was at the hands of its Black slaves. Bonapartism, which was the mixture of bourgeois democracy and French imperialism and colonialism, was then terrorizing the whole of Europe from Spain to Russia. That Napoleon was disseminating the achievements of the French revolution throughout Europe by the sword cannot be doubted, but he was also the defender of French colonialism. C.L.R. James sought to explain the success of the Haitian Revolution in defeating France where Europe had for some time failed. In a later book, *The History of Pan-African Revolt*, James interconnected the series of Black revolts and rebellions against European imperialism from the Haitian Revolution through the slave revolts in Brazil and America in the nineteenth century, passing through the Bambaata rebellion of 1906 in South Africa and the Maji-Maji rebellion in 1907 in Tanganyika against German imperialism to the Algerian Revolution in the 1950s. James's task was thus to trace the configurations of the forms of African history through the moments of armed resistance to European domination and imperialism. It was a new way of writing a Marxist African history.

Du Bois's book *Black Reconstruction*, one of the monuments of American historiography, explained the failure of the attempt to incorporate black Americans into democratic institutions following the American Civil War of 1860-65. There can be little doubt that the construction of capitalist America was on the basis of the exploitation of Black labor and on the dead bodies of Native Americans. Du Bois put the blame for the continuing discrimination against the people of African ancestry and for their continued exploitation on the failure of the unity of the African-American working class and the European-American working class; this failure was the result of the latter's racism. On the international plane, Du Bois emphasized the need of the Black working class in America to identify and solidarized with the Black working classes in other parts of the African world, particularly in South Africa. In one of his later books, *The World and Africa*, Du Bois convincingly argued through empirical evidence and brilliant theoretical formulations that Egyptian civilization had been constructed by Black Africans, notwithstanding European historiography's racist attempt to incorporate it within white civilization. Without doubt, Egyptian civilization had been the creation of the African genius. Greek civilization, which is the basis of European culture, had schooled itself in Egyptian civilization.

Simultaneous with the publication of these two books, which attempted to give coherence to the multifariousness of Africa history, Classical Pan-Africanism at the intellectual level split into two wings, one moving in the direction of Stalinism and the other in the direction of Trotskyism. Between them, within an international African context, there was never any hostility, since both aimed to bring about the liberation of Africa from European colonial domination. James embraced Trotskyism in search of possible socialist democratic forms within an African context. Padmore embraced Stalinism in order to bring the power of the Communist International into service on behalf of African peoples in their attempt to overthrow colonialism and imperialism. Both these versions of Marxism were governed by a particular historical principle, first formulated by Aimé Césaire on the occasion of his resignation from the French Communist Party in dispute over the latter's refusal to support the Algerian Revolution: 'Marxism should be put into serving the historical needs of black people, and not that black people should serve Marxism. When both James and Padmore recognized that the institutional forms of Marxism to which each had pledged allegiance no longer served the interests of African people, they broke with those institutional forms. Padmore confused Communism with Stalinism, which led eventually to his abandonment of historical materialism. On the other hand, James never forsook Marxism despite his eventual rejection of Trotskyism.

Meanwhile, there emerged the first serious attempt by African historians to map the social geography and conceptual structure of African history. This process of unveiling, in new and innovative ways, the continent of African history, was made all the more politically imperative by imperialist domination, which had broken the structure of African history and covered in darkness some of Africa's contributions to human culture and civilization. These two great African historians, the Senegalese Marxist historian, Cheikh Anta Diop, and the Burkina Fasoian historian, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, scientifically revolutionized the structure of African history and ideologically enriched our understanding of it.

To understand the significance of Diop's contribution, recall that from the time of the Renaissance, and especially since the Romantic era, European historians had systematically denied that Egyptian civilization was in fact an African civilization - that is, a 'Black civilization'. Philosophers and historians such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Hegel and Ranke took the view that Egyptian civilization was a 'white civilization' and could not be an African civilization because, according to them, we Africans had no concept of history and were living outside history. Cheikh Anta Diop in his book *The African Origin of Civilization*, which was originally presented as a doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne in 1955 and rejected by that institution, argued forcefully with empirical evidence gathered from the writings of Aristotle, Herodotus, Euclid and others, that Egyptian civilization was an African civilization. What was self-

evidently a historical fact during the era of Greek civilization, that Egyptian civilization was an African civilization and that without Egyptian civilization Greek civilization would have been impossible, in the bourgeois era of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, because of racism and the emergence of the modern forms of imperialism, was controverted into a denial of the contribution of the African genius to human civilization. The Marxist praxis of Diop in writing this book was forcefully to reintroduce the contribution of the African genius to human history. In other words, it was a Marxist rectification of a racist bourgeois legacy.

That Cheikh Anta Diop was correct in his critique of the European bourgeois legacy stretching from Hume to Hegel and Ranke has been recently confirmed by Martin Bernal in his book *Black Athena*. This English historian, employing Western scholarly protocols, confirms the thesis of Cheikh Anta Diop that Egyptian civilization was a 'Black civilization'. He shows systematically that Greeks such as Herodotus and Aristotle accepted as in the natural order of things that Egyptian civilization was an African civilization. It is only with the emergence of bourgeois culture that the African was displaced from history. Upon the publication of *Black Athena* in London, a controversy concerning the historical authenticity of its thesis broke out. (By the way, Martin Bernal is the son of the English Marxist historian of science, J. Desmond Bernal.)

Among the various responses to *Black Athena*, the most interesting for us is that of Perry Anderson, the English historian, arguably the most important Marxist historian alive today. In an important review of *Black Athena* in *The Guardian Weekly*, Perry Anderson developed an ingenious thesis that is not as innocent as it appears. Though accepting the arguments of this book as plausible, that Egyptian civilization was instrumental in the emergence of Greek civilization, Anderson argues that the contribution of the former to the latter was not in those fields that went into the making of Western civilization transmitted through the Renaissance leading to the Enlightenment up to the present. Now this is a polite way of denying the contribution of the African genius to the making of human civilization. In other words, Perry Anderson's position is a continuation of the myth of the bourgeois Enlightenment legacy, though in Marxist coloration.

To understand the real meaning of what Anderson is saying it is necessary to look, however rapidly and schematically, at the argument presented in his two great historical works, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* and *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. In both texts, Anderson attempted to answer the question initially posed by Max Weber: Why did capitalism emerge in the Occident - that is, in Europe and not elsewhere? Anderson reposed this Weberian question in relation to his observation about Marxism. The other place where capitalism could have emerged from feudalism was Japan, a possibility that did not

materialize. Anderson argues that it was the synthesis of the Greco-Roman tradition (democracy, philosophy and law), transmitted and transformed by the Renaissance, that made possible the emergence of capitalism and bourgeois civilization. It is to be supposed, then, that in these fundamental spheres Greek civilization learned nothing from Egyptian civilization. In other words, in what was fundamental to 'white civilization,' 'Black civilization' contributed nothing. The whole tenor of Anderson's argument in this review is profoundly questionable. After all, what follows is presupposed, prefigures, finds gestation and genesis in what precedes it. Even if these spheres may not have been important in Egyptian civilization, the very fact that they became the predominant legacy of Greek civilization to human culture today is also partly because of the nature of the contribution of 'Black civilization' to 'white civilization' -just as many of the things that are best in Africa today are the contribution of bourgeois European culture. In saying this, we do not therefore seek to minimize the tragedy of imperialist intervention in Africa. We seek only to indicate the Janus-faced, nature of the historical dialectic. A crucial point to stress here is that beyond class societies and class struggles, that is, in true communism, the distinctions between white and black will lose their historical significance and content; consequently those categories will remain as empty shells.

If we have dwelt so long on Perry Anderson, it is because my Marxist intellectual formation was and is still profoundly influenced by him, and paradoxically, against Trotskyism. Besides being a great historian, he is also a master of the English language. The other reason is that, by this prolonged example, we seek to forestall the possible denial of the contribution of African Marxist culture to international Marxist culture, and the denial of the existence of Classical African Marxism itself.

The other great African historian we mentioned was Joseph Ki-Zerbo. Although he is not a Marxist, Ki-Zerbo's contribution to African historiography has been formidable. His book *Die Geschichte Schwaz-Afrikas* and many of his methodological and historical essays in volume one of the *UNESCO General History of Africa* have formulated new periodizations, configurations and conceptual forms of African history. To indicate his importance in African historiography, it would not be far from the truth to call him the African Ranke. Ki-Zerbo's work is thus a fundamental reference point of African cultural history.

It is dear from what we have said so far that one of the central aims of Classical African Marxism has been to reconstitute the structure of African history, which had been shattered by European imperialism. In other words, the shattering of African history was a dialectical consequence of European capitalist accumulation, which was based on the slave economies in the Caribbean and in

the Americas . It is estimated that about 70 million Africans were taken from Africa in the three centuries of modern slavery. About 35 million of these Africans perished in one form or another. This holocaust is hardly mentioned with any seriousness in the historical works of European scholars, even in the works of European Marxists. In the past thirty years certain forms of European Marxism, especially in the English-- speaking world, have tirelessly preoccupied themselves with the transition from feudalism to capitalism without fundamentally theorizing the forms of capitalist accumulation. The fact of the matter is that modern European bourgeois civilization was constructed on the dead bodies of 70 million Africans. This is an incontrovertible historical fact. In this context, Walter Benjamin's observation that culture is a product of barbarism and civilization takes on a profound historical truth. Those who doubt the veracity of what we are saying should consult the book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the work of the Guyanese Marxist Walter Rodney. This text graphically analyzes the forms of European destruction of African civilization, following which the major European bourgeois states occupied the continent and divided it among themselves. To be sure, we African Marxists have still to explain why Africa was incapable of resisting this European penetration.

The preoccupation of Classical Pan-Africanism with the task of constituting a new social geography of African history and its attempted synthesis with Classical Marxism was in many ways a great intellectual achievement. With the achievement of independence by many African countries in 1960, Classical Pan-Africanism had achieved its greatest political aim: the elimination of classical European colonialism from the African continent. But it would be naive and foolish to have expected that European imperialisms and American imperialism would accept this defeat without a historical response. After all, imperialism is a historical process. When its classical form of colonialism was defeated, imperialism responded with a new form, neocolonialism. This, as already stated, Classical Pan-Africanism was unable to defeat. The failure and demise of Classical Pan-Africanism as *a living philosophy* was its defeat by neoimperialism in the Congo Crisis of 1960. Without doubt, the defeat of Africa in the Congo Crisis was an incalculable catastrophe whose consequences are still present with us in Africa today. One has only to look at the unending chain of neocolonialist regimes stretching from Senegal to Zambia . Kwame Nkrumah's book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, published in 1964, not only announced a new phase in African history but also voiced the historical impracticability of Classical Pan-Africanism in a new historical phase. Nkrumah is an important transitional figure from the attempted synthesis of Classical Pan-Africanism and Classical Marxism to the emergence of Classical African Marxism. If Pan-Africanism, the legacy of its classical forms, still has any significance today, it is the attempt to forge a spiritual unification of all Black

people in the world.

Classical African Marxism thus emerged to combat the then rapidly developing forms of neo-colonialism on the African continent. Within the international context of Marxist culture, Classical African Marxism emerged at the time when Western Marxism was in the process of exhausting itself as a philosophical system. This intellectual tradition, which is a legacy of Lukács, Gramsci, Bloch and many others ran aground in the May Rebellion of 1968. In South America, Latin American Marxism, founded by the Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariategui, was transforming itself into Guevarism, whose aim was to liberate Latin America from neocolonial strangulation and possibly bring about the unity of Simon Bolivar's nations. In Asia, Maoism was gathering towards its crisis point in the Cultural Revolution, and the Vietnamese Revolution was in the process of defeating American imperialism. In the USSR, the conservatism of the Brezhnev regime was in the process of blanketing the Soviet republics in a cesspool of corruption and pessimism. In the United States itself, the civil rights movement and the student rebellion were joining forces to fight for new democratic positions. The formation of Classical African Marxism belongs to this historical conjuncture of political and cultural forces.

Classical African Marxism, which is articulated in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, is the product of both the Algerian Revolution and the Guinean Revolution within the context of the African Revolution. Taking Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* as the classical summary of the tradition of Western Marxism, if we compare Western Marxism I with Classical African Marxism we find the following historical contrasts: whereas the former was a product of defeat, the latter

was a product of victory; whereas the former largely occupied the domain of philosophy, the latter concerned itself with the dialectics of politics; whereas the former separated theory and praxis, the latter was the very expression of its profound consummation; and whereas the former theorized aesthetics, the latter theorized a new sphere of history. In many ways, Classical African Marxism, more than Western Marxism, is a continuation of the themes of Classical Marxism. But it is necessary here to look at the specific concepts and distinctive characteristics of Classical African Marxism.

It was Frantz Fanon who mapped the political landscape within which Classical African Marxism achieved a revolutionary transformation in our understanding of African history by widening the perspective of Classical Pan-Africanism into a political unity of both Arabs and Africans on the continent, against the primacy given by both Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism. The very nature of Fanon's theoretical and political praxis within the Algerian Revolution was the forging of

this North (Arab) - South (Black Africa) unity. For Fanon the Algerian Revolution was the first and primary dialectical process towards the unfolding of the African Revolution. According to him, or at least in accordance with the logic of his political position, Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism were to find their historical expression within the concept of the Third World. It was Fanon who articulated the concept of the Third World into a serious political category, giving it a fundamentally rich historical content. The Third World, which encompasses Africa, Asia and Latin America, was to be understood and analyzed in relation to the capitalist West, designated by Fanon as the First World, and in relation to the socialist East, which Fanon theorized as the Second World. At the moment of the formation of Classical African Marxism in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, this concept of the Third World was instrumental in forging a political consciousness among the dispossessed people of the world.

Although Fanon's advocacy and political practice of Arab-African unity were historically correct and salutary, he lacked the sociological categories and coordinates within which it could be achieved. In other words, Fanon never possessed a rich and original historical imagination: His articulation of historical categories was never solid. On the other hand, Fanon's critique of the intellectual mediocrity, economic bankruptcy and political immaturity of the African national bourgeoisies, which were then emerging, was profoundly deep and is still unsurpassed. It was the bankruptcy of this class and its alignment with imperialism that led Fanon to argue that socialism was the only way to the collective development of Third World peoples. But he was to add an important proviso, which with the passage of time has taken on greater significance, given the historical crisis of 'actually existing socialism': that Third World countries should not define their particular form of socialism in accordance with that defined by other peoples, in other continents, and in other historical circumstances. This was the context of Fanon's argument that the application of Classical Marxism within colonial contexts should always be stretched and made more elastic. This should not be taken to mean that Fanon advocated a form of African Socialism; for him there was only one form of socialism, Marx's socialism, which had to be specified in relation to the historical particularity of each Third World country. Unquestionably this is an issue of enormous complexity.

Fanon's stretching of Classical Marxism within the colonial context was to lead him to argue that the peasantry was the only revolutionary class, whereas the proletariat was privileged and conservative. In this way Fanonism can be compared to Maoism, even if within a limited historical space. Mao also emphasized the revolutionary role of the peasant class. But the real difference between the two is that, whereas Maoism argued for the primacy of the peasantry because of the small historical weight of the proletariat within the

evolving Chinese social structure, Fanonism foreclosed any possibility of the working class being revolutionary because of its corruptibility within the colonial context. And whereas Maoism offered an ingenious reading of a complicated historical terrain, Fanonism misread a convoluted political space. Cabral was to provide, within the historical space of Classical African Marxism, an epistemological and political corrective to Fanonian historical misperception. It is this dialectical reciprocity and exchange between Fanonism and Cabralism that constitutes the unity of Classical African Marxism.

Whatever the historical misperceptions of Fanonism within Classical African Marxism - for instance, its belief that the Algerian Revolution had emancipated Algerian women - its great merit is that it expressed the inseparability of theory and practice within the Algerian Revolution. It should be remembered that Fanonism was the ideology of the Algerian Revolution, however much today for reactionary reasons Fanonism is disowned by certain elements within Algeria. This particular version of Classical African Marxism was superior to Western Marxism because it insisted on the unity of theory and practice, one of the cardinal points of Classical Marxism, while the illusions of Classical African Marxism as practiced by Fanon were no more debilitating than those of the tradition of Adorno, Althusser and Gramsci. The other merit of Fanonism is that it brought into being a successful political revolution against French imperialism, especially against its classically colonial forms, however much the Algerian Revolution later proved incapable of extricating itself from its own contradictions. Is Leninism in any way negated by the serious limitations that have been apparent in the results of the October Revolution since its inception?

There can be little doubt that *The Wretched of the Earth* implanted a revolutionary ideology in Africa, especially where ideology had been absent. Among its various salient characteristics, the following are perhaps the most important: first, that it is historically correct and politically wise to counterpose the revolutionary violence of the oppressed and the dispossessed; against the counterrevolutionary violence of imperialism and colonialism;; second, that the historical moment of the national bourgeois classes in the Third World is always a culturally useless and economically unproductive phase, in which national interests are always subordinated to the wishes of imperialism and neocolonialism; third, that only the peasant class is a revolutionary class within a colonial context; fourth, that culture should be an instrument in the national liberation struggle; fifth, that culture and politics are inseparable; and last, that the Third World should constitute itself as a historical entity. The impact of Fanon's ideology on African historical and political consciousness has been extremely uneven, leaving whole stretches of the African cultural imagination untouched, while simultaneously informing Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in its struggle against South African white fascism

in the 1970s, and the struggle of Mulelism against the neocolonialist politics of Mobutu.

Although Fanonism has been an extremely fruitful source in the formation of Classical African Marxism, it has to be seen in light of its complimen- tariness to the other wing of African materialist philosophy, namely Cabral- ism. Amilcar Cabral is, without question, one of the great Marxist intellectuals produced by our deeply troubled century. His theoretical for- mulations constitute the fundamental base of Classical African Marxism - Classical, because African Marxism is a direct continuation of the Classical Marxism of Marx, Lenin and Engels. The many intellectual breakthroughs that are still to come in Africa during the next centuries can only be on the basis of Classical African Marxism, for this materialist theory of history is Africa 's living philosophy today. There can be no going beyond it until all the historical tasks it calls forth have been fulfilled by the African peoples.

In a way beyond intellectual estimation and epistemological measure-ment, Cabral effected a revolution in redrawing the conceptual structure of African history and in formulating an ideology in accordance with Africa 's historical specificity. Further, he has posed fundamental ques- tions as to the intellectual structure of Classical Marxism. Cabral postu- lated Classical African Marxism as a response to the ideological deficiencies he encountered in Africa . It is perhaps necessary to make clear that when we talk of Classical African Marxism we are more con- cerned with its coordinates as an intellectual system and a political tra- dition. For Cabral, the whole historical period from World War II to the present, the era in which the African Revolution was unfolding in all its complex variations and mutations, is characterized by *national liberation struggles* on the three continents of the Third World, much more than by the *class struggles* in the late capitalist countries, and much more than by the struggle between *capitalism and socialism*. It is these national liberation struggles that he considered to be the prime motive force of our histori- cal moment. The importance he accords them is in dialectical relation to the fact that for Cabral, and also for Fanon, national liberation struggles were the central means by which the oppressed, the dispossessed and the wretched peoples of the Third World could re-enter their own na- tional histories, from which they had been expelled by imperialism, co- lonialism and capitalism. In short, armed revolutionary struggle is a fundamental method of re-entering and rewriting history.

In a great essay, 'The Weapon of Theory', which he delivered as a speech in Havana in 1966 at a celebration of the Cuban Revolution, Cabral argued for a new conception of Marxist history, especially in relation to the conti- nent of African history. Since what Cabral was theorizing in 'The Weapon of Theory' reflected the developing process of the Guinean Revolution, of which he was the

principal theorist, it can be said that it confirms the Marxist axiom that there can be no successful revolution without revolutionary theory. Cabral thus sought to theorize the nature of history in those African societies that were characterized by the absence of classes or class struggles. Since he did acknowledge that class struggle is the motive force of history, he went on to ask: Does it mean therefore that in those societies where this motive factor is absent those people live outside history? This is a crucial question, for when imperialism penetrated African societies it was on the pretext that these societies lived outside history and civilization. For Cabral, the intrusion of imperialism into Africa forced its peoples to leave African history and enter European imperial history. It is in this sense that armed struggle is a process of exit from colonial and imperial history, and a re-entry into African history (national histories) and peoples' history. For Cabral, both *before* and *after* class struggle, it is the mode of production that is the motive force of history. With this conceptualization of a new Marxist understanding of history, he sought to establish the patterns, lineages and forms of continuity within African history from antiquity to the present. Even during the era of colonial domination, we lived and experienced our African history in a particular way.

In arguing that, in particular circumstances, the mode of production rather than class struggle is a motive force of history, Cabral sought to articulate the process of the elimination of the concept of class and class struggle by socialism and communism. How would history be experienced and lived in truly communist societies, far beyond the contradictions of capitalism and imperialism? Cabral writes: 'Eternity is not of this world, but man will outlive classes and *will* continue to produce and make history, since he can never free himself from the burden of his needs, both of mind and of body, which are the basis of the development *of* the forces of production.'

Theorizing the progression of history; Cabral articulates three stages through which human history passes, that is, the progressive complication of the complex structure of the mode of production. The first stage is characterized by a low level of productive forces, in which there is no private appropriation and classes are absent. In the second stage there develops private appropriation of the means of production, and the subsequent appearance of social and economic contradictions that lead to the appearance of classes. In the third stage there is elimination of the private means of appropriation and the subsequent elimination of the concept of class and the class struggle. The formation of social structures corresponds to these stages, that is, from horizontality (absence of the state) through verticality (formation of the state) back to horizontality (abolition of the state). Cabral was here not merely articulating an abstract concept of social structures and history, but their actual imbrication in the complexity of social reality. In other words, Cabral was tracing the social determinants of history and

the historical relationship between the abstract and the real. Indirectly, in the sense that it was not his central object of concern, Cabral was polemicizing against the theorists of so-called African Socialism, who postulate the absence of class formation in African history prior to imperial intrusion.

In this essay Cabral also sought to understand the process of bypassing the stages of development in historical progression - whether African societies could move directly from the feudal stage to socialism, bypassing capitalism. This question was related to the role of imperialism in African history. These theoretical questions were imposed on Cabral by the nature of the national liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau, and by the political and armed practice of the African peoples in Guinea. Here we see a profound unity between theory and practice in the central process of Classical African Marxism, a unity whose absence profoundly debilitated Western Marxism after the 1920s, after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the defeat of the Turin workers' councils under the leadership of Antonio Gramsci, and the failure of the German Revolution led by Rosa Luxemburg. For Cabral, European imperialism in African history succeeded in its historical mission: in increasing the differentiation between classes, in accelerating the development of the productive forces, and in enriching the cultural text of the African peoples. One of the failures of imperialism was in not allowing the accumulation of capital on the part of the then incipient African bourgeois class.

To fight against the imperialist distortion of African history, national liberation struggle is the necessary political instrument. As Amilcar Cabral writes: 'In the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected: In this sense, national liberation struggle is for Cabral not only a struggle against neocolonialism and the resurrection of the process of the development of the productive forces, it is also a revolution. The entrance of African peoples into history has the effect of potentially eliminating tribalism and of overcoming their social and cultural backwardness. Cabral agreed with Fanon on the necessity of employing revolutionary violence: of counterposing the liberating violence of nationalist forces against the criminal violence of the agents of imperialism. Through the process of armed struggle, the African peoples develop and attain revolutionary consciousness; and the attainment of revolutionary consciousness varies from class to class.

The nature of this revolutionary consciousness corresponds to the position of the various classes in the social structure. It was this awareness on the part of Cabral which led him to analyze the social structure of Guinea. In an essay, 'Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea', which was presented in a seminar at the Frantz Fanon Center in Milan in 1964 and established the credentials of

Classical African Marxism, Amilcar Cabral analyzed the processes of structuration of an African social formation. The object of critique was also neocolonialism, the very historical process that necessitated the emergence of African materialist philosophy. There can be no doubt that this essay is one of the great documents of African intellectual and political history in the twentieth century. Here the problematics of Marxist analysis, which Perry Anderson in *Arguments Within English Marxism* saw as informing the polemic between Louis Althusser and E.P. Thompson, are employed in a profound way: the concept of mode of production as a category through which the dialectical movement of history can be periodized; the presence and existence of a plurality of modes of production within a particular social formation; the differential historical temporality of the various interconnected and hierarchical levels within society; and the dialectic between agency (social classes) and determination (structural process).

Though this essay takes as its empirical object the social structure of Guinea, the abstract theoretical structure of this object has universal applicability, particularly in Africa. One can only schematically indicate the complexity of the historical and social relationships analyzed in this text. What this analysis empirically proves is that long before the intrusion of imperialism in the domain of African history, African societies were already in a state of class stratification. Cabral distinguishes and interrelates to each other segmentation within a particular social formation: the patterns of property ownership and the private means of appropriation in semi-feudal and feudal societies, where the dominant ideology is animistic or Islamic, in which marriage practices are monogamous and/or polygamous, and the positioning of women within them is profoundly problematical.

The whole analysis covers practically the entire ethnically differentiated social geography of Guinea. He combines the historical differentiations that ensue from such a structure into a complex whole. Cabral calibrates the class position of the following social groups: nobles, religious figures, artisans, peasants, workers and chiefs. This enumeration makes clear the historical differentials between the concept of 'class' in an African 'feudal mode of production' and in a capitalist mode of production. Cabral attempts to trace the transitional passageways from the one to the other. Within the embryonic structure of the capitalist mode of production, he situates the concept of the *déclassé*, which naturally is a problematical category in the feudal order. Cabral unveils the complex social structure of a colonial capitalist order: the formation of the petty bourgeoisie, the metamorphosis of officials (higher officials, middle officials, petty officials), the nature of *déclassé* people (beggars, prostitutes, lumpen-proletarians). It is within such a complex order that imperialism intervenes to bring about other complications: the evolution and emergence of a national bourgeoisie. This

patterning of relationships proves beyond doubt the existence of African history, an existence that imperial history sought to contest and destroy.

In making this detailed analysis of Guinea's ethnic geography, Cabral's aim was to locate the patterns of contradictions within which the national liberation struggle could unfold. After all, the historical logic behind the great theoretical project of Amilcar Cabral was to bring about the defeat of imperial hegemony within African history and the expulsion of imperialism and neocolonialism from the African political landscape. Consequently, within the structure of Classical African Marxism, behind theory stands praxis, and before theory stands praxis. It is in this context that a detailed morphological structure of class forms was necessary. And it was on the basis of a combination of theoretical formulation and empirical evidence that Cabral was able to correct Fanon's postulate that in the colonial context only the peasantry is a revolutionary class, and that the proletariat is privileged and reactionary. Cabral makes clear that the role of the peasantry in a national liberation struggle is that of a physical force, which must be distinguished from that of a historical force. According to him, it is only as a physical force against colonialism that the peasant class is revolutionary and not as a historical force. The working class is the revolutionary historical force that can bring about a transition from capitalism to socialism.

Since I have so far emphasized the historical role of Classical African Marxism in restructuring the social geography and conceptual form of African history in dialectical relation with the revolutionary praxis seeking to vanquish imperial domination, it may be thought that this African materialist philosophy was concerned only with these matters. In fact, it was deeply concerned with a range of other projects; from theorizing the nature of revolutionary democracy (socialist democracy) within an African context to the role of a revolutionary party in relation to the masses. I will shortly look at these issues as they concern the future of socialism in Africa. But for the moment let me emphasize that Classical African Marxism theorized the dialectical problematics of culture: here I will focus on Cabral's contributions, since I have elsewhere examined Fanon's ideas about politics and culture.

In a series of remarkable texts given as lectures at American universities, Cabral presented his thoughts on culture and tradition. In one of them, 'National Culture and Liberation, given at Syracuse University in 1970 as a memorial lecture in honor of the father of the Mozambican Revolution, Eduardo Mondlane, Cabral examines the revolutionary potential of African cultures. The other essay, 'Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle', given on the occasion of his receiving in 1972 an honorary doctorate from Lincoln University, articulates the dynamic between culture and tradition. In 'National Culture and Liberation, Cabral argues that as much as imperialist intrusion

constituted an act of suppressing the different African national histories, likewise on the cultural plane, this intrusion was a form of negating African national cultures, in the sense that European cultures established hegemony over them. This cultural domination reveals an intimate and dialectical relation between economic exploitation and cultural domination. Culture, according to Cabral, is an expression of people's history, revealing the dialectical unity between humanity and nature. Imperialism sought to obliterate the cultural memory of a people's history. In response forms of cultural resistance emerged. Historically, a national liberation struggle is usually preceded by an increase in the cultural expression of a dominated people. As Cabral writes, 'The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated.' Cabral's radical formulation leads him to argue that culture is not only an expression of history, it is actually history itself; it is an expression of the movement of productive forces. In counteracting foreign or imperial cultural domination, a national liberation struggle becomes an act of creating and enlarging the space of culture itself.

For Cabral, though culture has by its very nature a mass character, its distribution on the horizontal and vertical planes of a social formation is very complex and uneven, even among individuals within the same social group. It is in this sense that culture can be seen as not only a historical content, but also *as* an ideological process. In societies characterized by horizontality, culture is more or less uniformly distributed, whereas in those in which verticality is predominant, culture is complexly and unevenly distributed. These historical differences must be taken into account when national liberation struggles are initiated, and not only when a national cultural history is written. Where there is an imbrication of class, race and ethnicity, the complexity in the distribution of culture is even more profound.

Beyond the invigoration of African national cultures through national liberation struggles, the lineage of African culture shows itself to be a historical storehouse of immense richness. The lineage of cultural achievement from Carthage , Giza , Zimbabwe and Meroe to Benin , Ife , Timbuktu and Kilwa indicates the continuity of African culture. In the spheres of dance, music, oral and written literatures, cosmological and religious systems, as well as philosophy, the universality of African culture should be apparent to all. Given the impact of Africa 's expressiveness on the world, ranging from Picasso's adaptations from the African mask to Stravinsky's borrowings from Scott Joplin's music, it is necessary to quote this salutary warning from Amilcar Cabral:

But in the face of the vital need for progress, the following attitudes or behavior

will be no less harmful to Africa: indiscriminate compliments; systematic exultation of virtues without condemning faults; blind acceptance of the values of the culture, without considering what presently or potentially regressive elements it contains; confusion between what is the expression of an objective and material historical reality and what appears to be a creation of the mind or the product of a peculiar temperament; absurd linking of artistic creations, whether good or not, with supposed racial characteristics; and finally, the non-scientific or a scientific critical appreciation of the cultural phenomenon.

The task facing Africa today, as Cabral saw, is not so much celebration as much as a series of developments on a cultural front: the development of a popular culture, the development of a national culture, the development of a scientific culture, the development of political and moral awareness and the development of universal culture. It is the combination of these developments that constitutes a new cultural front for the present national liberation struggles.

In the essay 'Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle', Cabral sets forth a series of historical arguments concerning the form of African culture. Here Cabral develops the controversial but correct thesis that imperialism was not only negative, but also made its positive contributions to African cultures and societies. The accumulation of capital at the center, appropriated from the periphery through the historical system of imperialism, made possible the development of modern science and technology, and also facilitated the emergence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Cabral's argument here follows the famous classical thesis developed by Marx that capitalism had its positive and negative instances, a dialectic of progression and regression. In forcing the countries that were later to be designated as being in the Third World into modern civilization and *in* progressively lessening humanity's dependency on nature, capitalism was indeed a great historical achievement. On the other hand, because it destroyed great civilizations like the Aztec and many others, and because it made possible the exploitation of many by the few, capitalism deserves to be destroyed by the forces committed to socialism, forces like Classical African Marxism. It is necessary to recall here Benjamin's maxim, mentioned earlier: that culture is a product of both civilization and barbarism. The logic of this principle reappears in the analysis of the brilliant American Marxist literary scholar Fredric Jameson of the recent emergence of a new bourgeois cultural formation, postmodernism. This new cultural formation is the dialectical embodiment of the negative and the positive. Nevertheless, it should be opposed by the forces of socialism, as Terry Eagleton has made dear. Within the African context, although recognizing the great achievements of capitalism and imperialism, Classical African Marxism has taken up the instruments of warfare in order to defeat them. Only anti-dialecticians can see a contradiction in this.

On the one hand, imperialism has facilitated the expansion of human knowledge in the field of sociology, history, ethnology, ethnography and culture, by studying the dominated countries in order to exploit them better - one has only to think of the great scholarship at the center of Orientalism, however reactionary many of its forms were. The national liberation struggles, for their part, have had to acquire a greater knowledge of their own societies in order to dislodge and defeat imperialism and neo-colonialism. It is this dialectical process that accounts for the extraordinary brilliance of Classical African Marxism. There is nothing in the whole domain of European knowledge and scholarship to compare with the writings of Cabral, Fanon and Nkrumah on matters concerning the Third World, let alone those relevant to Africa. Here it is evident that Classical African Marxism is a direct product of the imperialism that it is historically destined to vanquish: it is similar to the Hegelian relation between master and slave. This is the very essence of materialist dialectics.

While imperialism did have a deleterious effect on the capacity of Africa's national bourgeoisies and elites to forge their own cultural identity, it never did manage to penetrate into the cultural texture of the masses of the people. For Cabral, this cultural resistance on the part of the people has been one of our great victories as Africans. The cultural influence of imperialism and neocolonialism has been confined to a small segment of the population, though tragically enough this elite rules in practically all of the neocolonialist countries with the support of imperialism and its agents. The cultural crisis in Africa today is a crisis of a bourgeois elite and not of the masses of the people, however economically and culturally dominated they are by this bankrupt elite. One of the central tasks of Classical African Marxism is to bring about the hegemony of a peoples' culture, replacing the elite culture of slavery and imitation and servility. The phenomenon of 'return to the source' is only confined to the elites. Cabral writes polemically and controversially:

It comes as no surprise that the theories of 'movements' such as *Ian-Africanism* or *Negritude* (two pertinent expressions arising mainly from the assumption that all black Africans have a cultural identity) were propounded outside black Africa. More recently, the black Americans' claim to an African identity is another proof, possibly rather a desperate one, of the need for a 'return to the source' although dearly it is influenced by a new situation: the fact that the great majority of African people are now independent.

Perhaps what Cabral seeks to convey here is that Classical African Marxism is the first modern philosophical and political system to emerge out of Africa, for it is a product of the contestation over African history. The other great philosophical system, Julius Nyerere's African Socialism, is the other candidate

for an intellectual process emerging from within Africa rather than being transported from the diaspora. According to Cabral, the bourgeois concept of 'return to the source' cannot be an *act of struggle*, for it expresses the momentary, secondary contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Simultaneously with forging a cultural resistance to imperialist cultural penetration, the masses of the people construct an individual and collective identity. During the period of national liberation struggle this individual and collective identity is historically realized through material practice. Cabral makes a salutary distinction between an *original identity*, which is largely determined by a biological element, and an *actual identity*, whose main determinant is sociological. In both forms of identity the dialectic of race and class is important. It is in the former that the element of race predominates, and in the latter it is the concept of class that is the over-determining factor. The historical mission of the national liberation movements in their struggle is to consolidate the actual identity of the masses of the people. The forging or restoration of a peoples' actual identity, especially in its cultural forms, is in dialectical relation to the restoration of a non-exploitative social structure, for it is on the basis of a dialectically harmonious social structure that this identity can fully emerge. The aim of the actual identity of the majority of the people is to attain supreme dignity.

In order to expel imperialist and colonialist intrusion and penetration into African history, which the spontaneity of masses cannot fully achieve, Classical African Marxism was compelled to invent an instrumentalization process which would be the embodiment of a peoples' will. It was in this circumstance that this materialist philosophy of history theorized the concept of the party within an African context. In addition, the Classical African Marxism of Cabral and Fanon has had to formulate and bring into practice forms of revolutionary democracy. All the different forms of the African Revolution, stretching from Algeria passing through Angola and Guinea-Bissau to Mozambique, have not been led by a party in the Leninist sense, but rather by national fronts, which subsequently transformed themselves into parties, more or less in the Leninist sense. Even the Ethiopian Revolution, probably the only classical revolution of the twentieth century in Africa, in the sense of being compelled largely by internal class contradictions rather than directly by foreign domination, found it necessary to invent a party after the victory of the revolution. The concept of the party emerged while these instruments of history were still national fronts, in the same way that the African National Congress is a national front. In his Havana lecture, 'The Weapon of Theory', Cabral makes clear that the concept of *party* or a *single party* is something unique to Africa's historical conditions, and should not be confused with the European concept of the party.

In a series of nine lectures, widely known as 'Party Principles and Political Practice', which were given to PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) cadres in 1965, Cabral formulated certain Marxist principles of a party within an African context. First, the party should embody unity and struggle. By unity Cabral meant unifying a diversity of positions towards achieving a specific aim or goal. In this sense, unity is a dynamic process of movement. By struggle he meant the practice of opposing imposed hegemony; the process of acquiring knowledge in order to intervene in social reality. In the colonial context, this principle means the unity and struggle of the different classes in opposition to imperial domination; in the neocolonial context, it means a class struggle. In other words, unity and struggle together form a process of overcoming social and historical contradictions. Second, for unity and struggle to be possible, the party must know the fundamental nature of the social reality in which its praxis intervenes. This historical reality is the unity of cultural reality, social reality, economic reality and political reality. Third, the party should be led by people committed to the interests of the masses; a political leadership that is comparable to revolutionary intellectuals. Fourth, that within the party there should be independence of thought and action. Fifth, the party itself should be faithful in the implementation of these principles. This means that the members of the party should reject all forms of opportunism. Last but most crucial, the party must establish revolutionary democracy. Cabral writes:

As I have said, we must constantly go forward to put power into the hands of our people, to make a profound change in the life of our people, even to put all the means for defense into the hands of our people, so that it is our people who defend our revolution. This is what revolutionary democracy will be in fact tomorrow in our land. Anyone who rules his people but fears the people is in a bad way. We must never fear the people.

In short, it could be said with justice that the one singular historical aim of Classical African Marxism has been to bring about the realization of revolutionary democracy.

In conclusion, then, it can be seen that Classical African Marxism is not only a product of the African Revolution, but is also an expression of the unity of theory and praxis in theorizing that historical moment. Fundamentally also, this materialist philosophy has reconstituted the continent of African history. Unrelentingly, its principal aim has been to defeat the neocolonialism that so dominates Africa today. Classical African Marxism can only claim total victory upon expelling a new form of imperialism, neocolonialism, from Africa, as much as Classical Pan-Africanism claimed total victory upon the expulsion of classical colonialism. Upon achieving this historical aim, Classical Pan-Africanism lost its historical significance, hence its replacement on the stage of

history by Classical African Marxism. Today Classical Pan-Africanism, which seeks to unify Black people across different historical moments, cultural patterns and social formations, is a historical impossibility. It succeeded magnificently in its one historic mission, which was in defeating classical colonialism. And after defeating neocolonialism, Classical African Marxism will in turn lose its historical legitimacy. This is equally true of Marxism as well: upon its victory in placing the working class in political and economic power all over the world, it will disappear from history. It may then remain as an ideology, much as Christianity remains today as an ideology, but not as a *living philosophy*.

The historical tasks of Classical African Marxism are still unfinished: it has still to theorize the chain of revolutions that broke out on the African continent in the 1970s. What was the projection of their socialist orientation? What should be the forms of socialist democracy in Africa today? Is the political and economic unification of the continent possible, given the intractable problems of nationalism? Can this philosophy of African history grasp and carry through the upcoming revolutionary storm in South Africa? Because of the nature these issues, Classical African Marxism is still in its infancy and must be extended and deepened by committed African Marxist intellectuals.

Note

This essay was originally presented in German in a forum on contemporary Marxism organized by Peoples' University on 1 May 1988. The Peoples' University is a three-day event held annually in celebration of May Day at the Technical University of Berlin. The force behind this fascinating intellectual forum is the great German Marxist philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug and his journal *Das Argument*. I would like to thank Wolfgang Fritz Haug for having invited me to make this presentation. The argument this essay sought to put forth was that Western Marxism had exhausted itself, and in order to replenish itself, it should seek inspiration in African Marxism, whose existence it had never acknowledged. Since 1989 much has changed: for all practical purposes European Marxism has collapsed and socialism has disappeared from the continent of Europe. English Marxism, the latest metamorphosis of European Marxism, has gravitated to Southern California. I have not found it necessary to alter the argument in this essay since then because Classical African Marxism is still the dominant intellectual force in contemporary African cultural history, finding continuation in the incomparable voice of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.