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Sub-Saharan Africa

After fifty years of “independence”

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At the start of the second decade of the 21st century, numerous states in sub-Saharan Africa which once belonged to the British and French colonial empires are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of their creation or the independence of the colonial territories. This article is a modest contribution to the appreciation of the African situation on the occasion of this anniversary.

This anniversary falls in a period marked by a crisis of the neoliberal economy, which has not affected the African economies to the same extent as those of the capitalist centre. Meanwhile, in what can be seen as a practical critique of the economic “cooperation” between the former colonies and the western powers of the first five neo-colonial decades, we see the development of partnerships between Africa and the so-called emergent economies in general, the Chinese in particular.

Adjustment to neoliberalism

A half century after the first wave of independence, sub-Saharan Africa remains fairly specialised in supplying the industries of the capitalist centre with agricultural, energetic and mining raw materials, often strategic and sometimes at the price of neo-colonial wars which are often presented as ethnic or confessional. This capital and bloody participation in the development of the capitalist economy is often hidden by the habitual evocation of Africa's 2% rate of participation of Africa in world trade, an undeniable expression of its marginality. The mission of the developers is then seen as inserting or integrating Africa in globalisation. A good intention which is unhappily based firstly on a falsification of the history of the world economy, and secondly on ignorance of the fact that Africa is the continent most connected to the world economy, with only 15% of exchanges being conducted between the different states of the continent. The most significant share is realised with the rest of the world (whereas intra-European exchanges of commodities represent more than 60%). The claimed African marginality is moreover, very particular with respect to what it contributes to the rest of the world – raw materials, which are one of the conditions, indeed the condition sine qua non for certain performances by the most powerful companies of Western capital. Thus the quantitative expression of African marginality, by its weakness, can also be interpreted as the expression of the persistence of unequal exchange on the world market which remains controlled by the economic powers of the Centre.

A situation of inequality and not of marginality, which has accentuated with the neoliberalisation of the so called African economies organised from the 1980s onwards by the international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank and so on), through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), considered as the appropriate response to the structural crisis of the neo-colonialism of the first two decades, manifested by the critical indebtedness of the African states “at the same time as those of Latin America and Asia. Thus, since the 1980s, this region of the world has been permanently readjusted or restructured for the consolidation of the neoliberal version of neo-colonial domination. An operation carried out with the active support of the states of developed capitalism, whose multinational companies appropriate formerly state owned African companies, in the sectors considered the most profitable [\[1\]](#).

The African continent is considered by the technocrats, those of UNCTAD for example, as that where foreign capital realises the best return on investment (an average of 24-30% since the 1990s, against 16-18% in the centres of capitalism). This is the consequence of the success, among other things, of the mission confided to the international financial institutions, including African ones like the African Development Bank (ADB, which includes non African public institutions among its shareholders) and of adaptation, by local governors, of national legislations to the

neoliberal demands of capitalist accumulation. Thus, the second half of the first fifty years (1980-2000) proved to be one of neoliberal “recolonisation”, through the reduction to the minimum of the margin of autonomy “already very relative” acquired with the declarations of independence and favoured by the climate of the “Cold War”. With the disappearance of the so called “Communist” bloc in Europe, the margin of negotiation of the petty bourgeois nationalist elites with imperialism was reduced. In other words we have seen the quasi disappearance of any progressive nationalist project, based on the development of a state economic sector and a less restricted redistribution of the national wealth. That is, the collapse of what some observers had hastily classed as socialist experiences in Africa (from Nasser’s Egypt to Thomas Sankara’s Burkina Faso, by way of the Congo of Marien Ngouabi and the Madagascar of Didier Ratsiraka), forgetting that they were effected always in a capitalist context, taking account of the structural mechanisms of the so-called neo-colonialism of cooperation with the former metropolises.

But with the neoliberalisation of the world economy, Africa is no longer considered as the exclusive province of the old colonial metropolises. Since December 1998 (Saint-Malo Accords), these metropolises, the France of Chirac-Jospin and the Britain of Tony Blair, have decided to dominate Africa in a concerted manner. Since the end of the last century, Africa is also one of the areas of the new restructuring of the imperial order and the US has reconsidered its African policy and strengthened its economic presence. Thus the main European neo-colonial mechanism, the European Union/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Agreement (EU-ACP, formerly EEC-ACP) and the traditional agreements of bilateral “cooperation” between European and African states, have been joined by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, 2000) introduced under the presidency of Bill Clinton. The main reason for the installation of this so called preferential market is the search by the United States for better access to the energy resources (long under-valued) of Africa, indeed with the intention of controlling them, at a time when the US supply coming from the Middle East became insufficient and indeed threatened. However, the strategic interest in oil (92.3% of US African imports in 2008) on the West African coast, from Nigeria to Angola, was accompanied by an interest in other African productions (minerals, metals, transport equipment, textiles) and the export of US products (18.6 billion dollars in 2008, against 86.1 billion in imports) from genetically modified seeds (Bt cotton and so on) to military equipment.

Military imperialism

The US oil supply relates to national security, and is accompanied by a direct military presence of the army, a change after a long period of indirect interference, during the Cold War, for example by providing logistic support, via South Africa and Mobutu’s Zaire, to the UNITA of Jonas Savimbi in its long war against the government in Luanda. France thus lost its monopoly in terms of a direct military presence on the continent, with its bases inherited from colonisation, whose maintenance as favoured by the Cold War and which served as a means of pressure, intimidation and worse, against certain political and economic orientations in its former colonies.

For a decade, the US army has been multiplying its joint military operations with African national armies, including those of the traditional French fiefdoms. Under George W. Bush’s presidency it was decided to give the African continent a US military command, like other continents “an exclusivity of the global hegemon” by instituting, in 2007, the United States Africa Command (Africom). Which makes the US an African military power, even if the US army has been present for decades off the coast of Africa, on the giant base at Diego Garcia “Mauritian territory which the United Kingdom kept among its last colonial possessions [2]. But, with the drunkenness of power, very manifest under the presidency of Bush junior, there was no question of the administration requesting the opinion of African “partners” concerning the continental accommodation of the said command. Thus, the latter could find no land of welcome on the continent, which is however well known for the hospitality of its governors with regard to everything opposed to the interests of the peoples. The African Union (AU) seems, for the moment, determined to dissuade any irresolute state “like the Liberia of Ellen Sirleaf Johnson (newly elected)” from going against its resolution to rid the continent and islands of foreign military bases. Even Morocco, which is outside the AU and

indecisive “ according to persistent rumours “ seems unable to escape the pressure of its peers. Thus the US military command in Africa remains based in Stuttgart (Germany). The only open and permanent US military presence on the continent is then, for the moment, that (subsequent to the creation of Africom) at Camp Lemonnier, one of the French camps in Djibouti. Declaring independence late, in 1977, Djibouti has remained the main French military base in Africa.

While awaiting a breach in the pan-African consensus which could give it the benefit of a site on the continent, Africom contents itself with regular missions of training, joint exercises and so-called humanitarian actions (health interventions and so on) in different African countries. Which is not negligible, for with these military manoeuvres and so-called humanitarian interventions, the US army consolidates, inside the local armies, indeed certain African élites, the tenacious myth of its effectiveness, which seems unaffected by its historic misadventures of the 20th and 21st centuries, from Vietnam to Afghanistan by way of Somalia (Restore Hope and Continue Hope, 1992-1993), characterised by ongoing human rights violations. Like the US army everywhere, Africom is integrated in private multinational military missions, with their mercenaries of sinister reputation. The industry of death is traditionally, it should be remembered, one of the most lucrative sectors of actually existing capitalism, that of the US above all.

This African activism of the US army has its economic dimension. The missions and other activities of Africom are also an opportunity for unabashed advertising campaigns for the national military-industrial complex. Indeed, in spite of the growth of military expenditure for a decade, the continent does not appear among the main clients of the US arms industry. Apart from Egypt (9th), the main African importer, the other African states appearing in the top 50 of importers “ Algeria (15th), South Africa (27th), Angola (36th), Sudan (43th) “ get less than 4% of their supply from the US. Algeria (the main importer in recent years) and Sudan prefer Russian arms (more than 65%), while South Africa supplies itself more from Europe, mainly Germany (more than 65%). As for the other African states, some minor clients remain still, in this area, very linked to the colonial metropolis. Post colonial military cooperation agreements, signed between France and its former colonies, limit again the diversification of training and military equipment of the latter. But in offering more training grants to African trainee officers destined for command positions in the near future, Africom can scarcely conceal a certain competition with its European partners, who, while being members of NATO, are developing a common European defence policy, the European Force (Eufor). It seems that it is Africa where Eufor is most deployed (Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Central Africa), under French leadership (by recognition of its colonial and neo-colonial experience on the ground), shared with Germany, with the regular participation of other European states, like Sweden, which is in the top 10 of European arms merchants [3]. However, US supremacy inside NATO plays in favour of Africom, as agency of the military-industrial complex.

Nonetheless, this competition between the traditional imperial powers should not make us forget their permanent complicity, which is currently manifested particularly in the face of the ambitions of some emergent economy states (China, India, Brazil and so on) for access to African resources.

The Chinese ogre

The growth of Chinese economic power presents a serious threat to Western hegemony in Africa. A share of the resources it needs to feed the exceptional growth of its economy is drawn from Africa. Hence the development by China over the past decade of an economic partnership with the African states: 56 billion dollars of Chinese imports (71% in oil products) against 50.8 billion in exports in 2008 and an exponential growth in direct investment, which has gone from 10 billion dollars in 2000 to 106 billion in 2008, with more than 100 billion anticipated for 2010. Among Chinese exports there are the products of its workshops, considered more accessible to African mass purchasing power, affected as it is by two decades of structural adjustment.

This Sino-African partnership attracts the ire of a fraction of the organic intelligentsia of Western capital, not because

of its unbalanced character in China's favour – even if the main African capital, that of South Africa, has been able to invest 1 billion dollars in China (against 6 billion for China in South Africa) – or the environmental consequences of the intensive exploitation of minerals over the medium and long terms. Because in these areas, China has done nothing new in Africa and those who worry about it are being selectively critical in favour of the practices of Western firms and their states. Nor because of the risks of a new explosion of external public debt which will be generated by the loans granted by China to its African partners (on conditions preferable to those of the international market), as IMF director general Dominique Strauss-Kahn would have us believe, to justify the mobilisation of the neoliberal technocracy against a recent contract between China and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In exchange for the exploitation by Chinese enterprises (private and public) of a little more than a million tons of copper and more than a half million tons of cobalt, China was to grant the DRC 9 billion dollars (including 6 in construction of road, steel, health and educational infrastructures, and 3 as financing of Congolese participation in a Sino-Congolese mining enterprise). According to the Chinese ambassador to the DRC: “We from the beginning avoided any situation which could lead to an increase in the debt” [4], by making the guarantor the Chinese bank Eximbank, rather than the Congolese state. Thus, after several exchanges, in Kinshasa, with the IMF experts, “the Chinese party finds the recriminations of the IMF fantastic and unsustainable” [5]. The IMF's only remaining weapon was blackmail: revision of the Sino-Congolese contract (including the suppression of 3 billion dollars in construction of infrastructures) in exchange for relief on the Congolese debt by the Paris Club and the early qualification to the point of completion of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Sino-African cooperation cannot for now absolutely overcome the traditional neo-colonial mechanisms which can still deprive the DRC of infrastructural improvements for its people.

The construction of infrastructures (road, steel, hydro-electric, health, education and so on), which has been neglected in Africa through five decades of neo-colonial “cooperation” and “development aid” – is part of the charm offensive China is waging. Certainly, the visibility of the said infrastructures serves the electoralist interests of the African leaders, interested also by the Chinese rejection of conditionality with respect to human rights (demanded hypocritically and with variable geometry by the Western states) and the receipt of Chinese equipment for repression and war. But these new infrastructures also contribute to the development of a certain Sinophilia – more significant than Sinophobia [6]

– in the countries concerned, including in the élite considered as pro-Western, but which is rather pro-capitalist. In the style of the patented technocrats of neo-liberalism: the Beninese Abdoulaye Bio-Tchané (former Africa director of the IMF and current director of the West African Development Bank), who considers that “China is not a threat to our economies” [7], or the Zambian Dambisa Moyo (responsible for economic strategy at Goldman Sachs and an iconoclastic, but neoliberal critic of “development aid”) according to whom “it is time for Africa to look the situation in the face and move on – time for it to sit at another table with other players ready to give it better cards. China is today a player of this type.” [8].

The impact of “Sino-African realist cooperation” [9] is such that it has fairly rapidly aroused some realism among the traditional actors of the development of Africa: the World Bank and the British government's Department For International Development have opted for partnership with China for the development of Africa. In 2007, China contributed to Africa 9 billion dollars of investment against 2.5 of co-financing of projects in Africa by the World Bank. During the World Economic Forum on Africa in June 2009 in South Africa the Director General of the World Bank and former Nigerian Finance Minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, renewed the support given by the Bank to Chinese investment in Africa. Such a partnership expresses well China's status as an African power which moreover, seems to no longer to contain its annoyance concerning the cries of alarm from the analysts subtly concerned with the fate of Africa. During a press conference in March 2010, Chinese foreign minister, Yang Jiechi pointed out that “Chinese oil imports from Africa represent only 13% of African oil exports, whereas US and European imports each represent more than 30%. Chinese investment in African oil fields is only one sixteenth of total oil investment in the continent while US and European investment represents a much higher proportion”. Thus China does not consider itself as having supplanted the traditional imperial powers in Africa, whose paternalism it denounces: “I would like to specify that Africa belongs to the African people, that the African people is the master of the African continent and that the

other peoples are only its guests. The guests should respect the points of view of their hosts, namely the African peoples, as well as their freedom to choose their partners of cooperation and their friends.” [10].

However, Chinese diplomacy has omitted to point out the significance of the economic exchanges between China and the West, which can be considered as vital or complicit concerning the reproduction of the international capitalist system: China is the banker to the US which in return provides its main market. And European enterprises have escaped the crisis thanks to their exchanges with China. Thus, although China’s sustained growth “one could say the same of Malaysia” is a practical invalidation of the precepts of the Washington Consensus, Sino-African cooperation participates fully in the dynamic of perpetuation of the capitalist system, indeed its neoliberal form.

If the Sino-African partnership is so well appreciated by Abdoulaye Bio-Tchané, Dambisa Moyo and company, it is because these sectors of the African bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie conceive this partnership as a factor in the development of African capitalism, above all at a time when the Western economies prove more fragile than China before the effects of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. The same is true of the apologetic attitudes on the partnership of the African economies with respect to the other so called emergent capitalisms of the South, whether India, Brazil, Malaysia, or indeed Iran or elsewhere. It is the concretisation of another type of relationship between capitalist states of the South, which has a certain attraction for African rulers and economic élites and allows them to think that “another capitalist world is possible”, stimulating thus the economic dimension of their project of “African Renaissance”, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad).

Nepad or the neoliberalism of the African neo-bourgeoisie

Since the beginning of the new millennium the states organised in the African Union (AU) “born from the ashes of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)” have had the common economic framework of Nepad, drawn up according to the principles of the Washington Consensus, yet already disqualified concretely by the Asian crisis. Thus, the motor role of the said development of Africa is there attributed to private investment, mainly that of the Western multinational firms. The latter were invited to Dakar for the presentation of Nepad. African rulers thus recognised officially their subordination to imperialist capital and their adhesion to the new economic carve up of the continent. But, with respect to the capital accumulated during the first four postcolonial decades, it is with the hope this time of a more effective participation as private minority partners to the multinational firms in the formerly public strategic enterprises, privatised in the context of structural adjustment. With the liberalisation of the markets, the African capitalists have in principle the possibility of entering locally into competition with the Western multinational firms. Certainly, the principle is not often concretised. In addition, these Africans had the possibility of appropriating the formerly public enterprises or controlling the economic sectors which did not particularly interest the so called strategic investors. This African bourgeoisie being composed in great part by those responsible for the waste of resources, those jointly responsible for the overbilling of public contracts of states and other criminal practices which have contributed, at the end of the first neo-colonial period, for critical public indebtedness, a factor in structural adjustment. Classical primitive accumulation or reproduction of capital at the expense of the public economy, which is not an African exclusivity.

Thus, for some years, in addition to direct foreign investment, there is a certain African private economic activism, of local investment, in intra-African investment (services: 36%, manufacture: 30%, agriculture: 19%). As one of the partisans of this neoliberal pan-Africanism puts it, it is “More than a third of the investment in Africa is African.” [11]. Some of these investors are as much African as Total is French, because they are institutions which also have non-African shareholders.

Indeed one notes “without any claim to being exhaustive” Mauritian capital in Madagascar and Mozambique,

Kenyan in Uganda, Egyptian in Algeria, Nigeria, Tunisia, or Zimbabwe, Libyan in the Ivory Coast, Niger, Uganda, and Rwanda. The Moroccan banks Attijarifawa Bank and the Banque marocaine du commerce extérieur are expanding into west and central Africa. A product of the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and Industry, in the 1980s, which declared itself pan-African, Ecobank Transnational Incorporated (based in Lomé) is currently present in 27 countries across Africa.

In this African capitalist dynamic, South African capital, heir to the accumulation realised under the apartheid regime and exploiting the arrival in power of governments identified with the black majority, since the presidency of Nelson Mandela, is in a position of continental leadership. This is what the enlightened fraction of the white bourgeoisie which became hostile in the 1980s to the apartheid regime hoped for. Immediately following the election of Nelson Mandela up until 2005, South African capital outweighed all the traditional investors on the continent (14 billion dollars, against around 10 billion for the United States, 6 billion for France, 4.5 billion for the United Kingdom). From Mauritius to Morocco, it is present in different sectors, like that of mines, its favoured sector (where South Africa is nearly as well provided as the DRC) or others, like agriculture, brewing, port management, telecommunications, petrochemicals and so on. To such a point that a debate has opened on the continental status of post-apartheid South Africa: imperialism? Or sub-imperialism? However South Africa does not only export capital, it also receives “” in addition to the labour (qualified and unqualified) the countries of the region affected by structural adjustment “” as the main regional financial market for capital coming from certain economies, less developed certainly, like Nigeria, Kenya, principally in the banking sector.

Africa's mode of insertion in the world economy (mainly as purveyor of raw materials to the economies of the centre) seems to have sheltered it relatively from some of the direct impact of the economic crisis, manifested from the financial sector in which it is, in truth, weakly inserted. Nonetheless, like other regions of the world, Africa has not been spared from it. The continent's role as purveyor of raw materials has suffered from a fall of production in the centres of capitalism, in the form of the fall in demand for some raw materials (copper, cobalt, coltan, diamonds, tin, oil and so on) and prices are down -25% to - 50 %, indeed more in the case of oil which has gone from 140 dollars per barrel in summer 2008 to 55 dollars in spring 2009. Other sectors have also been affected, like that of tourism (Mauritius for example). One of the consequences of this crisis has been the significant reduction of exchange reserves of some national currencies. Thus Africa, which has known a sustained average growth for a dozen years, has experienced a fairly pronounced fall in 2009: 2.5% against 5.1% in 2008 and 6% in 2007, according to the least pessimistic estimates which take into account the increase in Chinese investment (+81%) noted over one year (1st half 2008-1st half 2009). Africa “”say the technocrats of African capitalism “” is at the end of the day better defended against the crisis and has emerged from it better than the continents of developed capitalism, with regard also to the predictions for growth in 2010.

However, behind the appreciable growth rates, from the capitalist viewpoint, there are the structural development of inequalities to the benefit of foreign investors (attracted by the high return on investment of the continent) and the leading layers (economic and political entrepreneurs, including oppositionists, mixed together). Because, in spite of the divergences internal to the hierarchical structure of world capitalism which are currently disturbing the so-called emergent economies of the South and local factional divergences, this African neoliberal capitalism cannot be considered as representing the interests of workers and the African popular layers nor as a factor of real social progress. As everywhere, this African capitalist accumulation adapts to the high rate of poverty that the international institutions fix on average at 50% of the sub-Saharan African population.

Growth has not improved the fate of wage earners (small and medium), the small peasantry (mostly women), or youth whether in school or unemployed, those dismissed by private enterprises, or the popular classes in general. If there is, undeniably, an "Africa which is winning" “” that of the African capitalists in objective alliance with others “” it is firstly in opposition to the wage earning work force, as the International Labour Office noted in 2008, before the crisis: “Around 55% of all the workers of sub-Saharan Africa still do not earn enough to live, with their family, above the poverty level of 1 dollar per day, around 80% live on less than 2 dollars per day...” [12].

In addition, the collapse in the prices of cotton, rubber, textiles, and so on has led to layoffs and factory closures in factories from Benin to Tanzania via Morocco. In Egypt there have been 100,000 laid off, from October 2008 to March 2009; 10,000 in Kenya, in the first quarter of 2009 alone; 13,000 in Morocco in the textiles sector, 60% of them women. In South Africa the unemployment rate has gone from 21.9% in the last quarter of 2008 to 23.5% in the first quarter of 2009, or 3.87 million unemployed to 4.18 million [13]. Thus the other growth is that of unemployment across the continent (including the islands), which went from 30.8 million unemployed in 2007 to 35 million in 2009.

This Africa, which is not winning, has moreover paid the cost of the price rises for some foodstuffs, which preceded and accompanied the crisis; a consequence of the dependency organised since colonisation which has developed continually in the postcolonial period. By demanding, for example, priority for exports for the repayment of the external public debt, at the expense of food crops, neoliberal structural adjustment policies have favoured the aggravation of the absence of food sovereignty. With as further consequence soil exhaustion, by certain monocultures in certain countries. This is the case for the Ivory Coast and neighbouring Ghana where the importance in world production of cocoa is rewarded by soil exhaustion since the colonial period. Which is a factor in conflicts over land, as is already the case in Ghana, or Kenya. In Darfur (Sudan), soil exhaustion caused by neoliberal intensive agriculture is one of the factors of crisis which have led to war [See Jean Nanga (2004), “Darfour : les enjeux d'un conflit meurtrier”].

The absence of food sovereignty and the situation of the small peasantry will get still worse. Partly because of the offensive waged by the multinational companies producing genetically modified seeds and intent on patenting or privately appropriating the agricultural genetic patrimony. And partly by the private appropriation of African fertile and common lands by international agrarian capitalism, by the multinationals whose thirst to appropriate the world is comparable to that of the companies of four or five centuries ago. There is already a question of the grip of the cocoa multinationals on the fertile lands of the Ivory Coast. In the context of neoliberal structural adjustment, it was necessary already to adapt national land legislation, which had conserved the principle of commonly owned property, to the principle of commodification of everything possible.

This neo-colonialism of land, which brings to mind the enclosures of the first centuries of English capitalism [14], undoubtedly will transform small independent farmers into servile and low paid labour, favouring the growth of unemployment in rural areas and the exodus towards the cities to swell the shanty towns and the lumpenproletariat, a very cheap reserve army of labour. Among the specific victims of this humanly absurd capitalist logic are the peoples living traditionally in the forest, like the so-called “Pygmies”, hunter gatherers spread across eight countries in central Africa and the Great Lakes, from Cameroon to Uganda, and including the two Congos. Thus the problem is not that of the presence of white South African farmers in the Congo, or that of the supply to the Gulf Emirates of agricultural products, for example, but that of the property relations thereby installed “although there is no risk of reproduction of the history of the Boers and Huguenots who contributed to the formation of the current South Africa” and the consequences for the native populations. White South African, Chinese or other farmers, having immigrated, who do not set up a colony turned in on itself, exploit or overexploit local labour, who produce for the satisfaction of the food needs of the area, together with small local producers, who understand the soil ecologically, do not in themselves present any problem. This is not the case with Daewoo’s project in Madagascar, or others which orient African agriculture towards the production of agro-fuels. An orientation in which Brazil, through, for example, the Brazilian Agency for Promotion of Exports and Investment (Apex-Brasil) plays a motor role, under the pretext of South-South exchanges of experience. As if Brazil was not a bad example in the area of agro-fuels and genetically modified seeds of which it also promotes the sale, in Africa, after the US. As if the problem of lack of oil should be resolved by creating another ecological problem, that of the consequences of agro-business “already practiced by the African oligarchs, from the Ivory Coast to Zimbabwe” which are more criminal with respect to this important part of the world population which already suffers from a food deficit. Whereas the problem is not posed, currently or in the near future, in terms of penury of food products, but of division of the available food production and a reorganisation of world agriculture, which would also avoid the current waste and preserve fertile lands for future generations.

After fifty years of neo-colonialism, the neoliberalised capitalist organisation of the continent seems to reserve it a destiny as the continuation of the accumulation of its most noxious effects. Thus, in terms of global warming, Africa which is not one of the main polluters of the planet will suffer the consequences of the growth and productivism of capitalism, imitated for around fifty years by the regimes of the Stalinist bloc, According to the IPCC: “New studies confirm that Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents because of the diversity of the anticipated effects, the multiple stresses and its weak capacity of adaptation”. That does not stop the African partisans of neoliberal capitalism promoting an “African strategy for the war of “green business”” [15].

African resistance to neoliberal capitalism

The first social consequences of neoliberalism in Africa produced in the 1980s and 1990s a dynamic of popular mobilisation, and social struggles “with trade union organisations providing the backbone” which contributed to the “democratisation” of the postcolonial monolithic regimes. But this was in an international context of loss of legitimacy of the socialist emancipator project, identified with a collapsed Stalinism, with European social democracy proving a good manager of capitalism by constructing the Europe of neoliberal capital. In other words the transcendence of capitalism was no longer on the agenda. Thus this new democratic opening was everywhere realised in favour of political currents favouring the management of neo-colonialism, which, in some cases, then became jointly responsible for neo-liberal wars.

The popular organisations of the African left which had survived the monolithism of the three or four postcolonial decades were almost everywhere swept up by the discredit thrown on the socialist emancipatory project and in some cases, by the wars of neoliberal restructuring of neo-colonialism. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the more popular of the surviving organisations were progressively integrated into the management of the neo-colonial order, from the South African Communist Party (SACP) linked to its ally the African National Congress (ANC) to And-Jef/Parti africain pour la démocratie et le socialisme (AJ/PADS) in Senegal. The union leaderships which were linked to these parties were caught up in this drift, practicing so called responsible trades unionism or becoming “social partners” of the employers and rulers [16].

However, the activists or former activists of the radical African left, the “class struggle” trades unionists, have been among the main leaders of the so-called global justice dynamic in Africa. Anti-capitalism has become relatively audible again on the basis of a critique of neoliberalism in the context of the dramatic social effects of structural adjustment policies.

However, in gaining a certain media visibility “while often remaining very weak numerically among the popular layers” the African global justice movement has not escaped the hegemony of organisations/associations and individuals of “civil society” which were/are hostile to any critique going beyond the framework of neoliberalism, taking as its target the system of exploitation, oppression and pollution that is capitalism. Thus, there is no identification with any radical and global emancipatory project as an alternative to capitalism. Which is not an African peculiarity. It is also the expression of a grip exerted on the current by the big organisations of the West, mobilised for a “capitalism with a human face” and reproducing in this context the classic type of relations between the centre of capitalism and its periphery. The financial aid contributed to the African global justice movement is conditional on their opposition to the orientation of the radical current in the movement. The corruption of the African rulers can be denounced, but on a moralist basis, without being placed in the historic context of the capitalist system.

A state of affairs which is also favoured by the precarious status of the African middle layers, to which the leaders of “civil society” often belong. To be an activist or an organisation representing the “civil society” of the global justice movement means being open to dialogue, indeed partnership, with Western embassies, private multinationals, Western foundations and international institutions like the World Bank, and this openness provides a means of

escaping this precarious status. A subtle mechanism of corruption.

Thus after a decade of the global justice movement, of local and regional social forums, demonstrations against the cost of living, student mobilisations, trade union and peasant struggles, mobilisations of the unemployed and so on, the African organisations still identified with the radical left can claim no obvious successes in the area of contribution to the self-organisation of the workers and small peasantry in a perspective of articulation of their struggles with an overall project of a break with capitalism. The frequent, indeed permanent, mobilisations for access to drinking water, electricity, health care, decent jobs, land, good study conditions, against violence against women and so on remain fragmented and without convergence. A permanent fragmentation which can also be interpreted as an expression of the sectarianism of the organisations of the radical left, which certainly have the merit of having survived the steamroller of neoliberal ideology but which, unhappily, spend more time on the narcissism of small differences than the organisation of convergences and the local construction of permanent unitary and democratic dynamics.

Bringing Africa out of its tragic situation

The five postcolonial decades have been decades of neo-colonialism. A neo-colonialism with tragic consequences: the development of social inequalities in every country, neoliberal wars in some of them, exploitation of wage earners by a variety of actors. This is unhappily accompanied by a decline of organised radical anti neo-colonial /anti-capitalist consciousness, linked to a worldwide phenomenon but more serious. Moralism has been imposed as the only possible horizon of criticism. That is why it is more than ever necessary to avoid the apolitical conception of a betrayal of Africa by the ruling bourgeoisies. Because, if they are African, they are also guided and motivated by their class and individual interests. They are not in this respect fundamentally different from the French bourgeoisie, for example, which overwhelmingly made the choice to collaborate under occupation with the Nazified German economy.

To bring Africa out of its tragic situation, there is objectively no other road than that of anti-capitalism, beyond anti-neoliberalism. Today neither China, nor India nor Brazil or anywhere else can present any illusion, because the social and ecological costs of growth in these economies cannot be neglected. These countries cannot be examples of societies based on equality and social justice, the satisfaction of the basic needs of each individual and of peoples.

One of the best ways of honouring those who have fought against neo-colonialism/capitalism in Africa “rather than the neo-colonial “fathers of independence”” is to make genuine balance sheets of the struggles waged locally and continentally. To draw the lessons from them for the construction of new anti-neo-colonial /anti-capitalist organisations contributing to the self-organisation and struggles of employees, small peasants, women, youth and all the other oppressed social categories. Organisations which fight against economic exploitation, different oppressions and against avoidable harmful effects on the environment. In other words for the construction of socialist societies, that is to say societies which are socially just and egalitarian, feminist, anti-homophobic and ecological. The construction of this socialism demands a pan-African perspective. This is favoured moreover by the presence of the same exploitative enterprises in several countries, whether African or non-African, and the regional groupings of economic integration.

It is then urgent that organisations which still identify as socialist and pan-Africanist initiate a genuine dynamic of exchanges, solidarity, learning and common action, locally and regionally, in a democratic manner. The affiliation with different political traditions which characterised the socialist movement in the 20th century should not be an obstacle. It is in the construction of this dynamic of consultation and revolutionary socialist pan-Africanist action that each organisation will best contribute to the construction of an Africa genuinely and fully decolonised, emancipated from capitalism. For, as indeed is the case elsewhere, the alternative in Africa is either the struggle for and construction of a democratic socialism or the worsening of the capitalist social disaster.

- [1] According to “African Economic Outlook/Perspectives économiques en Afrique, 2010”, the rate of profitability in Africa was 12.1%, higher than that of other continents
- [2] Spain, France, Portugal and Britain still occupy African territories: the Azores, Ceuta and Melilla, the Canary Islands, Chagos Islands, Madiera, Saint Helena, Mayotte, Réunion
- [3] The sum of the seven biggest arms exporters of the European Union (Germany, France, Britain, Holland, Italy, Sweden, Spain) exceeded that of US exports in 2006 and 2007, according to figures from SIPRI (Sweden)
- [4] Quoted in “Affaire contrats chinois : Kinshasa donne raison À Pékin par la bouche du porte-parole du gouvernement”, “Le Palmarès” (a Kinshasa newspaper), June 4, 2009: <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/58575>
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] According to Pew Global Attitudes Project: “Across Africa, favourable views of China outnumber critical judgements by two-to-one or more in every country except South Africa, where opinion is divided”, Washington, Pew Research Center, June 2007, p. 41: www.pewglobal.org.
- [7] Abdoulaye Bio-Tchané, “La Chine n’est pas une menace pour nos economies”, interview published by the Abidjan newspaper, Nord-Sud, May 30, 2007
- [8] Dambisa Moyo in “L’aide fatale. Les ravages d’une aide inutile et de nouvelles solutions pour l’Afrique”, foreword by Niall Ferguson, Paris, JC Lattès, 2009, p. 189
- [9] In the formula of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jia Bao, “Report on government activity to the National People’s Assembly”, March 5, 2010, <http://french-news-en/documents/2010-03>
- [10] 12. “La Chine défend ses investissements en Afrique”, March 8, 2010, <http://www.focac.org/fra/zfgx/jmhz/t662292.htm>
- [11] Lionel Zinsou, “Plus du tiers des investissements en Afrique sont africains”, “Les Afriques”, number 96, November 5-11, 2009
- [12] “Report of Director General”, International Labour Office, Eleventh African Regional Meeting (Addis-Ababa, April 2007): “L’Agenda du travail décent en Afrique”: 2007-2015, Geneva 2007
- [13] These rates and figures are those for declared unemployed, not for all South African unemployed
- [14] See Karl Marx, “Capital”, Volume 1, Chapter XXVII: “Expropriation of the Agricultural Population From the Land”
- [15] The African financial journal, “Les Afriques” published a dossier favourable to “green business” over several numbers, during the last quarter of 2009, in synch with the Copenhagen Summit
- [16] Most recently the Zimbabwean Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) entered the government of ZANU-PF, led by Robert Mugabe, in January 2009, in the name of national reconciliation, with its leader Morvan Tsvangirai named as Prime Minister. Before the creation of the MDC, Mr. Tsvangirai, a former miner but also a Harvard graduate, led the Zimbabwean Trade Union Congress. Recently the MDC ministers have endorsed a pay freeze for Zimbabwean public employees