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*How to Liberate Marx from His Eurocentrism: Notes on African/Black Marxism /
Wie man Marx von seinem Eurozentrismus befreit: Anmerkungen zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus*
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Poster for the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, organized by Présence Africain, 1956 / Plakat des Ersten Kongresses schwarzer Schriftsteller und Künstler, organisiert von Présence Africain, 1956
There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the “universal.”

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

Among these events was the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, where non-aligned and newly independent nations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East met and defiantly declared an independent course at the climax of the Cold War. Bandung remains an incomplete project, but as an event it certainly signaled the potential of ending Western hegemony, and the possibility of a more pluralistic world. Extending such potential to the domain of knowledge production allows us to think of modernity and modern thought as more than just a post-Enlightenment Western project. This made possible the critique of Western modernity and facilitated the move toward less Eurocentric modes of thinking in the humanities and social sciences within and outside the academy. Today, it is impossible to think about the mid-twentieth century and decolonization without remembering gatherings such as the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956 in Paris or the Second Congress in 1959 in Rome. Organized by the Paris-based quarterly Présence Africaine, these two meetings hosted discussions of issues ranging from decolonization to slavery and signaled the rise of new schools of thought and movements such as Négritude, Pan-Africanism, and African Socialism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 | Kevin B. Anderson, Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies (Chica­go: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
Mustafa Abusharaf) of Mahgoub’s political defense (a tradition in an abbreviated translation (made by myself and my colleague Rogaia representing Marxism in the context of Africa (Mahgoub) and of the innovative Marxist thinker, and Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), founder of the Sudanese Communist Party, who was a brilliant mind African/Black Marxism: Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub (1927–1971), the African-diaspora intellectuals to Marxism in general. Such indifference, as she points out, takes place “within the wider and longstanding exclusion of non-Western knowledge from a canon compiled by [Western] metropolitan scholars.” While crediting a few Western Marxist thinkers such as Göran Therborn with acknowledging that Marxism became “the main intellectual culture of two major movements of the dialectic of modernity: the labour movement and the colonial movement,” Barry also criticizes them—with the exception of recognizing Frantz Fanon and his contribution to the study of violence and trauma associated with modernity in the colonial context—for underestimating the creativity and innovations of Asian and Latin American Marxism and for rejecting Africa as a “player in the discourses of Marxism and Modernity.”

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

The first text, Mahgoub’s “By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor,” is an abbreviated translation (made by myself and my colleague Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf) of Mahgoub’s political defense (a tradition in Sudanese left politics) in front of a military tribunal in 1959. This text provides a glimpse into the thinking of the founders of one of the strongest leftist movements in African politics, the Sudanese Communist Party. It helps explain the enduring legacy and perseverance of this party to the present day, despite the violent repression it has faced from successive regimes in Sudan, which ended with the execution (surely the assassination) of Mahgoub, along with several other leading members of the party, after a farcical military trial in July 1971. Mahgoub dedicated his short life, as Abusharaf puts it, to “considering how socialism, which he described as the noblest cause that humanity had ever known, could be advanced within the struggle for national liberation and tailored to meet the needs of ordinary citizens.” As she further explains, “Turning a critical eye on both legacies of European colonialism and the repressive traditions within Sudanese culture, he posed the perennial question: How can Africans utilize Marxist thought to create a progressive culture that embodies a systematic critique of all that is reactionary within their societies?”

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

In the wake of the downfall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of official Soviet Marxism and the Soviet Union around the same time, Jacques Derrida reminded us in his seminal work Specters of Marx that the spirit of Karl Marx is more relevant today than ever before. For, he laments, it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the world and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the “end of ideologies” and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect . . . [this fact]: no degree

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

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

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

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13 | The notebook also includes a facsimile of the original letter to Maurice Thorez as obtained from the archives of the French Communist Party in Paris.
Afrika und anderen Teilen der Dritten Welt zusammenfielen und mit bahnbrechenden Begleitereignissen, die die Weltpolitik veränderten und eine neue internationale Ordnung schufen.


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

Der erste Text, Mahgoubs »By Virtue of Marxism, Your Honor«, ist eine gekürzte Übersetzung (von mir und meinem Kollegen Rogaa Mustafa Abusharaf) von Mahgoubs politischer Verteidigungsrede (einer ‚Introduction in der Politik der sudanesischen Liniken‘) vor einem Militärtribunal 1959.2 Der Text vermittelt einen Einblick in das Denken der Gründer einer der stärksten linken Bewegungen in der afrikanischen Politik, der Sudanesischen Kommunistischen Partei. Er hält das bleibende Vermächtnis und das Durchhaltevermögen dieser Partei bis zum heutigen Tag zu erklären, trotz der brutalen Unter drückung, die sie sich seitens aufeinanderfolgender Regime im Sudan ausgesetzt sah und die im Juli 1971 nach einem farcenhaften Drängung) Mahgoubs und mehrerer anderer führenden Mitglieder der Militärgerichtsverfahren mit der Hinrichtung (zweifellos der Ermord ung) Mahgoubs) endete. Mahgoub widmete sein kurzes Leben, wie Abusharaf den Text gedeutet, der sich zu dem entwickelte, was heute als Discourse on Colonialism (1955) bekannt ist, und in dem er seine Kritik an Kolonialismus und Rasse ausarbeitete.3 Am bedeutendsten ist die Tatsache, dass Césaires Brief, wie Cilas Kemedjio betont, ein ‚strauriger Kommentar zur kontroversen und prekären Beziehung Zwischen der marxistischen internationalen Linken und den antikolonialen Aktivisten der Dritten Welt‘ ist. Der Brief, argumentiert Mahgoub weiter, ‚führte die Frage von Rasse und Colonialismus eindringlich wieder mitten ins Herz von Kämpfen, die hauptsächlich entlang ideologischer Linien geführt wurden‘.4


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

1 | Hier ist erwähnenswert, daß sich die Forschung zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus leitet. 2 | Belang sei. Denn, klagt er, 3 | Hier sind erwähnenswert, daß sich die Forschung zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus leitet. 4 | Hier sind erwähnenswert, daß sich die Forschung zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus leitet. 5 | Hier sind erwähnenswert, daß sich die Forschung zum afrikanischen/schwarzen Marxismus leitet.
With the massacre of Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub, a page of beauty and
tolerance was turned in Sudanese politics.

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

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

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

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

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² Al-Ashiqaa Party is now the Democratic Unionist Party, which called for reunification with Egypt (Unity of the Nile Valley) at the time of independence in 1955 from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, as British colonial rule in Sudan was known.
As someone whose life’s circumstances did not place him as either a farmer or a lord but as an educated person, it behooved me to seek ways to augment my culture and expand the horizons of my thought. I was not targeting the problem of culture for culture’s sake—rather, insofar as it provides a settled body of knowledge for analyzing social and natural phenomena. Many who read Western culture think of it as lacking in consistency, unsettled, shaken. But Marxism is a distinguished epistemology both in its coherence and consistency and in its unsurpassed capacity for the holistic analysis of multiple dimensions of culture and society, universal values, politics and aesthetics, literature, philosophy, and economy. As someone who thrives on the constant pursuit of answers and new pathways to explore, I found Marxism to be both the purest idea and the best culture in and of itself. My experience had proved that my acceptance of a Marxist culture was not a religious conversion but a mirror for my yearnings for liberatory politics that challenges the arguments behind power structures and foreign influences. I longed for independence and for ridding our people of the oppression that had weighed them down since 1898. I longed for their welfare and happiness and for all that would render life in the Sudan worth living. I longed for a culture that calls for blasphemy. Once more, where in this objective can you find “fighting Islamic religion” as one of the planned agenda? Indeed, Marxism requires the utilization of the mind to meet the needs of humanity in scientific advancement, in medicine and literature. It therefore ends the indissoluble fear of the future that permeates the lives of a people in distress. Obliterating grinding poverty and its accompanying trepidation and panic that push people to lie and steal is not an objective that calls for blasphemy. Once more, where in this objective can you locate invitations for combating religion? What is left for me to say on the subject to those who produced these deceitful rumors is that an honest man combats an idea with another idea. He objects to opposing opinion by argument and logic. The falsification of your opponents’ views or of those whom you have invented as enemies is petty, shameful, inexcusable conduct. It is a sign of the trivial-mindedness of those who perpetuated these damaging misrepresentations and lies regardless of the size of their body or height.

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

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

I belong to a generation of young persons whose minds were opened and their ears trained to hearing the voice of nationalism. Since we were pupils, our thinking of this quandary leaped over the walls of classrooms and the frontiers of schoolyards. We thought about the nation as a whole. We grasped fully that the suffocating atmosphere and the cultural deprivation we lived in were attributable to the eschewed education and the glorification of the past that saturated it. These predicaments were an embodiment of prevalent shortcomings that colonists had exploited to oppress our nation. When pupils come to appreciate the deep meanings of such seemingly simple reality, then there is no doubt they would not be passive victims vis-à-vis the barriers and shackles that encircled them. We, therefore, spread our wings as we formed groups and debated nationalism. I offered my modest efforts to build a student movement and organized a rally in 1946 as a start. This was the first opportunity to express ourselves since the massive blow that the British dealt to the 1924 anticolonial uprising. It was this event that shaped our commitment to the struggle well into independence. Nationalist activism of these student groups, especially the one I referred to in 1946, was a chance to formulate ideas about practical matters affecting the Sudan. Hundreds had watched attentively the honest attempts that were made to unify parties and create a sense of tanadi,4 consensus around nationalism, and sovereignty that topped the Cairo negotiations that were held at the time. Sorrow overwhelmed our hearts when
we learned about how some parties have sold the cause short because of personal jealousy and competition. They opted to stand by British interests, a position they made crystal clear. These people were very compliant even though they were turned into tools of exploitation to wage war against their own citizens and block the path of real national liberation. It is not surprising in this context that threats were directed at students and other nationalists who diverged from this self-serving strategy. Why the insistence on this position? Many questions have roamed in my mind, questions that dissipated our imagined promises and settled deep down within our consciousness. It was made obvious that not everyone within Sudanese national borders was necessarily a nationalist supporter of Sudan’s independence. As one of hundreds of students, I started to examine these questions and of course could not reach a satisfactory explanatory frame emanating from logic or truth. Our concepts of nationalism were regarded as nothing but a fierce war between freedom fighters and rapists. At this critical juncture, I paused to think. I started to read everything I could get my hands on relevant to histories of nationalism in India, Egypt, and Europe. I located what I was looking for. How elated was I when I completed Stalin’s *The Problem of the Colonies*? Here, I began to explore conditions of possibility and to read in depth about empire, colonial desire, dominance, violence, and governmentality. I also understood the mechanics of colonialism and the ability for the colonial project to absorb national classes to extirpate them from their roots. These progressive ideas and writings opened a window of opportunity from which we observed the world. These writings, which were passed on from hand to hand, were Marxist-Leninist. We understood their depth as we espoused Marxism as an organizing principle in our own lives. We searched for ways to adapt them to our needs and to our material circumstances. My own personal history will prove that I did not knock on the door of Marxism for fleeting or transient gains, for these are ephemeral and are bound to come to an end. Instead I was faithful to the cause of emancipation through building a sovereign, dignified Sudanese republic, in which its sons and daughters will enjoy its abundance and plenty. When I look back, I cannot help but feel an enormous sense of pride in a thought that I have wholeheartedly embraced and one that had sculpted my convictions and activism. I am comforted by the mere thinking of a question I ask myself: had I not become a Marxist, what would I have become? Here I must note that I did not reach Marxism through political struggle alone, though it suffices. Instead, I reached it after the longest quest for a culture that coordinates the mind with the psyche and a philosophy that distances one from the contradictions and fluctuations that lie beneath and that afflict many Sudanese intellectuals.

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

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

We continued our methodical analysis to pinpoint ways in which individuality and collectivity may be bridged. We tried to circumvent the kinds of ideas that get stored in people’s minds, without any possibilities for empirical applicability, in lived realities and in contexts where attainment of democratic rights is an absolute must. We defied colonialism’s culture by posing questions as to what horrible maladies may have troubled the British to make them wander around in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. A ghastly condition must have afflicted them to the marrow. There is no doubt that their notions of freedom
should not have unfolded in the ugliness perpetuated in the colonies. These were the issues that invited us to think deeply about colonialism both as culture and as politics, when we found Marxism, through which the ostensibly mysterious paradoxes were decoded in the most powerful of expositions once and for all. Like many comrades, I approached questions of justice and equality from a modernist, humanist view. I was convinced that these values cannot be reclaimed from an irretrievable past. Seeking social justice is a value that matters to people in this temporal world, and neither nostalgia nor romanticism about past glories is going to fulfill it. As for the British, it is critical to think about empire and the ways it had undermined the dreams and aspirations of the majority of the populations it had subjugated. We found in Marxism an oasis, a healing formula for suffering, an enabling epistemology that brings personal integrity, intellectual stimulation, and positive emotions into a single field of thought and praxis. Hence, it brought significant satisfaction in circumstances that illustrate the responsibilities of Sudanese intellectuals. These responsibilities are as heavy as crushing mountains, and those who fail to come to grips with them and confine themselves in cages of personal gain are paralyzed members of our society. They are biting the hand that feeds them. Had it not been for the support of the Sudanese people, these intellectuals would not have been able to rise to prominence.

Marxism has compelled us to take our debt to society very seriously by embracing it as philosophy and conduct. Our motive in following it was deeply rooted in how we felt about the welfare of our nation. It was by virtue of Marxism, Your Honor, and by virtue of dialectical materialism, its beating heart, that we succeeded in narrating our story. This story was about emancipation and thus should not in any shape or form be tainted and twisted by the sick imagination and exaggeration that the security personnel had resorted to in desperation. This is the story of a Marxist generation that delivered independence to its people. The inflammatory propaganda waged against it is useless and irrelevant, save maybe for horror films and cowboy movies.

* By way of preparing myself to serve my country I accepted the role that the pen demanded of me as an educated Sudanese. I departed for Egypt in 1946, searching for a more progressive environment from which to learn. My Sudanese friends and I are indebted to the Egyptian people, from whose activism we drew the most momentous of lessons in revolutionary struggles. In Egypt we continued to agitate for our self-determination, and our years there witnessed the earnest efforts undertaken to challenge the multiple forces of reaction. We organized our exemplary student union, which mirrored the honesty and courage of its youthful members. We were harassed, and our freedoms and rights were mercilessly violated by Egyptian police. Our friend Salah Bushra’s murder in prison was a proof of what I am speaking about. His death was an unforgettable tragedy. We continued unfazed to defend what was sacrosanct to us amid waves of violence. We endured till our demands were integrated in the Egyptian policy in the Sudan.

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

These are glimpses from my life, one that has been inextricably linked to Marxist thought, the roots of which are original, pure, and celebratory of honesty and sacrifice. Expressions of concern over my experiences since 1948 and up to independence have been voiced by this court’s prosecutor. During the past years, I have been—especially during the reign of Abdalla Khalil and until this regime—subjected to hassle and harassment. The investigator posed the question as to what I have been doing for a living and how I have survived all this time.
were not only dealing with intellectuals but with those affiliated with lives formed strong labor unions. With this development, the colonists considerably. Those who followed it as an organizing principle of their virtue of Marxism, the sphere of national liberation had expanded plans upside down. It was the stepping-stone for independence. By colonial Legislative Assembly had no doubt led to turning the British trade Qurashi al-Tayeb was massacred. Our victory in shaking up the flame that ignited the fires of nationalism. In that bold event, our com­front. I am not exaggerating when I say that they were the first to lead the great demonstration in Omdurman in 1948 that represented the flame that ignited the fires of nationalism. In that bold event, our com­rade Qurashi al-Tayeb was massacred. Our victory in shaking up the colonial Legislative Assembly had no doubt led to turning the British plans upside down. It was the stepping-stone for independence. By virtue of Marxism, the sphere of national liberation had expanded considerably. Those who followed it as an organizing principle of their lives formed strong labor unions. With this development, the colonists were not only dealing with intellectuals but with those affiliated with large sectors of the economy and industry. The years witnessed general strikes that had no doubt shaken the very foundations of colonial rule, but in the process high prices were paid with decades of incar­ceration. To those Marxists working on all fields of social, political, and economic life, we say you played an instrumental role in the mo­bilization of the masses under the banner of self-determination. This is the picture that I wish to convey about communist theory’s con­tribution to our homeland. I am proud of the record and of my own role in illuminating this humanist theory—this is the record that is being presented to this court under laws that have been instituted by the colonists and are redolent with vengeance, hatred, hurriedness, and ignorance of the true meanings of our concerns. My comrades and I formed the Anti-Colonial Front, which I had the tremendous honor to head. The birth of this party was a corollary of a vast movement of our people who supported the right to organize and the freedom of opinion and expression. This party had triumphantly shaken colo­nialism to its core. In 1953, we organized a party with clear objectives and a clear vision, which we expounded in reference to the country’s political economy, despite the fear being spread by the British among the masses vis-à-vis our party. We insisted on the existence of an inter­national committee for elections to grant our right to exist. Since its declaration, the party expressed its partiality to the causes of our suf­fering masses. I do not wish to repeat myself, but I must express my gratitude to this party, which effected deep political transformations; it supported the majority of the Unionist Party, which announced independence. Had it not been for this collaboration, independence would never have been achieved. After independence we called for a structure that would accommodate all those who had fought gal­lantly to help in the great leap that our country had taken toward the future. History will pass harsh judgment on those who forfeited their opportunity to unify our people. The Anti-Colonial Front was the first nationalist party to defend democracy and liberty. When the country was approaching self-determination in 1953, the British in haste passed a law, calling it the Destructive Activity Law. It laid the foundation of the police state that robs our society of the meaning and spirit of liberation. Our party is credited with the historical fact that it halted the passing of this cruel law. We insisted that the word of the legislative branch should supersede that of the executive. The results of this democratic practice appeared during the months that preceded the advent of the military. The political history of our country is the best witness to how we resisted alliances with colonialist and militarist bodies. This was the gist of how independence was gained, and no single ruler can discard this reality. We were the only party that pos­sessed a positive program for post-independence Sudan, consisting
of our political evolution, economic rehabilitation, social and cultural change. We were not a party that dwelled on the past or one that played with emotions, religion, or superstition. We were a party that shouldered heavy responsibilities for our people. Up to this point we explicated the dangers of American aid. We were convinced that these charities would turn the Sudanese republic into a dog that chases its master to feed him every time it suffers hunger. In brief, we raised the consciousness of our citizens about the danger that encircles the country's autonomy and dignity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two ways with no third are before us. For every citizen concerned for the future and in order to preserve tradition, we either choose capitalism, which seems inescapable, or the bright path of socialism. Our Sudanese people have well-established, respected traditions such as in the system of consultation, which lies at the heart of democratic principles. The kings of Kush elected their leaders, so did the Funj and the Abdallab. Tribes were extremely autonomous before the advent of Turkish and British occupation, respectively. They rejected impositions and dictatorship but unfortunately in vain. Those who are stabbing democracy in the back are the very people who are undermining the good traditions about which they pretend to weep. Some mistook democracy and saw it as a Western model. True, parliamentary democracy originated in the West with the rise of capitalism. Notwithstanding, the very essence of democracy was contained within preexistent consultative traditions. The right of the people to elect their leadership is increasingly becoming an inalienable right. Paternalism and the violation of this right are unpardonable. This is the requirement of the age we live in, and the right of the Sudanese to modernism is no exception. I believe strongly in democratic rights and reject dictatorship in any society, let alone ours, which is markedly pluralistic and heterogeneous. Problems like that in Southern Sudan require consensus tanadi under the shadow of a united Sudan in which all Sudanese enjoy rights and entitlements on equal footing. The parliamentary system in the Sudan, in spite of corruption, had succeeded somewhat, but that does not mean the system is not corrupt. Bribery and corruption were clear, as evidenced in several press essays about parties thrown by colonists to entertain Sudanese political personalities to influence decision making. Decadence and corruption are also explicable as class issues that turn nationalists into mere follower, yes-man types. The activities of colonizers and their technical local affiliates continue. Parliaments are but mirrors that reflect the ugly and the beautiful in any democracy. The mind dictates the following: if you do not like what you see in the mirror, try to remove it, but don't be like a child and break the mirror, lest you turn into a sore loser.

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

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

—Translated from the Arabic and edited by Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf and Salah M. Hassan
To: Maurice Thorez
General Secretary of the French Communist Party

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

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

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

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

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

The facts are there, in all their immensity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have often asked myself whether, in societies like ours (rural and peasant societies that they are, in which the working class is tiny and, conversely, the middle classes have a political importance out of proportion with their numerical importance), political and social con-
of unity, the weapon of the anticolonial rallying of all who are will­ing one weapon, one sole efficient and undamaged weapon: the weapon acquired experience, has taught us that we have at our disposal but here and there, the torn fabric is being restitched! Experience, harshly that is the bulwark of our strength and the guarantee of our hope in to sacrifice everything (that is, everything secondary) in order to re­spectively transplanted into our local politics), how could we not be ready brought from outside (piped in as it is by European divisions abu­and reduced to impotence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, that is exactly what we do not want. What we no longer want. Yes, we want our societies to rise to a higher degree of develop­ment, but on their own, by means of internal growth, interior neces­sity, and organic progress, without anything exterior coming to warp, alter, or compromise this growth.

Under these conditions, it will be understood that we cannot del­egate anyone else to think for us, or to make our discoveries for us; that, henceforth, we cannot allow anyone else, even if they are the best of our friends, to vouch for us. If the goal of all progressive politics is to
one day restore freedom to colonized peoples, it is at least necessary that the everyday actions of progressive parties not be in contradiction with this desired end by continually destroying the very foundations, organizational as well as psychological, of this future freedom, foundations which can be reduced to a single postulate: the right to initiative.

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

This is no doubt the essence of the issue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our time has come.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I shall anticipate an objection.

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

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

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

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

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

Paris, October 24, 1956

Aimé Césaire

—Translated by Chike Jeffers
Il est vrai que le fait même du vote du parti communiste français en l’Algérie, par lequel la majorité des socialistes ont renoncé à un soulagement postérieur à l’issue défavorable des élections, a donné lieu à de graves protestations du gouvernement, mais qui sont devenues moins à la hauteur des espérances et des espoirs qu’ils ont pu susciter. 

Les socialistes, en effet, se sont trompés en croyant que leur vote aurait pu entraîner une quelconque amélioration de la situation économique ou sociale. Ils ont négligé de prendre en compte le poids des intérêts économiques et financiers qui pesent sur la politique étrangère. 

Le parti communiste français, pour sa part, a choisi de soutenir les algériens dans leur lutte pour l’indépendance, malgré les obstacles et les difficultés qu’ils ont dû affronter. Il a montré ainsi son engagement à la cause de la liberté et de la justice, en dépit des pressions et des menaces auxquelles il était confronté.

Cependant, il est regrettable de voir que les socialistes n’ont pas su comprendre l’importance de ce vote et de ses implications pour l’avenir de l’Algérie. Ils auraient pu contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de la situation et à une meilleure prise en compte des besoins et des aspirations des algériens. 

Il est donc essentiel que les socialistes prennent conscience de la gravité de la situation et qu’ils agissent de manière plus cohérente et plus éclairée dans l’intérêt de l’Algérie et des algériens. Il est temps qu’ils cessent de se laisser conditionner par les intérêts et les stratégies politiques, et qu’ils se concentrent sur les besoins et les aspirations des algériens, pour leur permettre de construire un avenir meilleur et plus équilibré.
En tout cas, il est constant que notre lutte, la lutte des peuples coloniaux contre le colonialisme, la lutte des peuples de couleur, contre le racisme est beaucoup plus complexe - que dis-je d'une tout autre nature que la lutte de l'ouvrier français contre le capitalisme français et ne mourait en aucune manière, être considérée comme une partie, un fragment de cette lutte.

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

L'imposée où nous sommes aujourd'hui aux Antilles, malgré nos succès électoraux ne parait brancher la question ; j'entends pour le plus grand contre le plus étruit ; pour le mouvement qui nous met au coude à coude avec les autres et contre celui qui nous laisse entre nous ; pour celui qui rassemble les énergies contre celui qui les divise en chaînées, en scènes, en églises, pour celui qui libère l'énergie créatrice des masses contre celui qui la camoufle et finalement l'attire.

En Europe, l'unité des forces de gauche est à l'ordre du jour, les morceaux disjoints du mouvement progressiste tendent à se recoller, et nous devons que ce mouvement d'unité devrait être irréversible si du côté des partis communistes socialistes, on se décidait à jeter par des blocs forts tout l'impédiment des préjudices, des habitudes, des héritages, des doutes et des hésitations de BAINE. Voilà donc que dans ce cas, toute raison, mieux, tout prétexte de bouter l'unité serait enlevé à ceux qui dans les autres parties de gauche ne veulent pas de l'unité et que de ce fait les adversaires de l'unité se trouveraient isolés et réduits à l'impuissance.

Et alors, comment dans nos pays, où le plus souvent, la division est artificielle, venue du dehors, branchée qu'elle est sur les divisions européennes abusivement transplantées dans nos politique locales... /...
Dans le cas de la classe et de son actuateur, ce n’est peut-être que le paternalisme qu’il s’agit. Mais c’est à coup sûr de quelque chose qui lui ressemble à l’être suprême. Imaginez l’acte : c’est du paternalisme. Sur lui, il est bien et bien d’un frère, d’un grand frère qui, même de sa supériorité et sûre de son expérience, vous prend par le cœur (d’une main hésité !) pour vous diriger sur la route qu’il sait et qui compte. Or c’est très exactement ce dont nous nous vouons peu. Ce dont nous nous voulons plus.

J’ose vous dire que nos sociétés s’élèvent à un degré supérieur de développement, mais l’almainn, par ordonnance interne, par nécessité intérieure, par orgueil organique, aussi que rien d’extérieur vienne à nous coûter croissance, ou à l’alterer ou le compromettre. Dans ces conditions on comprend que nous ne puissions donner à personne délégation pour penser pour nous, délégation pour chercher pour nous, que nous ne puissions déterminer accepter que qui se soit, fût-il le meilleur de nos maîtres, de porter pour nous. Si le but de toute politique progressive est de rendre un jour leurs libertés aux peuples colonisées, ce moins fait-il que l’éloignement des partis progressistes n’est pas en contradiction avec la fin recherchée et ne détruit pas tous les jours, les bases mêmes, les bases organisationnelles comme les bases psychologiques de cette future liberté, qui se ramène à un seul postulant : le droit à l’initiative.

Je crois en avoir assez dit pour faire comprendre que ce n’est ni le marxisme ni le communisme que le régime, que ce n’est pas une colonie qui fait le marxisme et le communisme. Que la doctrine et le mouvement soient faits pour les hommes, non les hommes pour le doctrine ou le mouvement. Et bien entendu cela n’est pas valable pour les peuples colonisés. Si je vous ai dit, je vous ai dit, je vous ai dit que le communisme est une doctrine de vengeance, que le communisme est une doctrine de vengeance contre ceux qui nous ont défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, défiguré, de
Pour revenir à notre propos, l'époque que nous vivions est sous le signe d'un double échec : l'un évident depuis longtemps : celui du capitalisme. Mais aussi cet autre, celui, effrayant, de ce que pendant trop longtemps nous avons pris pour du socialisme qui n'était que du stalinisme.

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

C'est assez dire que pour notre part, nous ne voulons plus nous contenter d'assister à la politique des autres. Au pire, l'Union des d'Afrique. Aux variantes des d'Afrique. Aux revendications de conscience à la causticité des autres.

L'heure de nous-mêmes a sonné.

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

Oui tout peut encore être sauvé, tout, même le socialisme installé et là en Europe par STALINE. A condition que l'initiative soit renewable aux peuples qui jusqu'à ici n'ont fait que le subir ; à condition que le pouvoir des et se renforce dans le peuple, et que nous n'abandonnons pas la lutte qui se produit à l'heure actuelle, en Bolivie, par exemple, au repos de la bout d'espérance.

C'est que l'on nous permet de penser plus particulièrement à mon malheureux pays : la Martinique.

J'y pense pour constater que le parti communiste français est dans l'impuissance absolue de lui faire un quelconque pari, qu'il soit autre chose qu'attaque, que le parti communiste français ne s'est jamais souci de lui en avoir, que nous avons pensé à nous qu'en fonction d'une stratégie mondiale au dominer des Européens.

J'y pense pour constater que le communisme a été de lui sauveté du feu le néoréalisme de l'assimilation ; que le communisme a été de l'isoler dans le bassin catalan ; qu'il a été de le négrier dans une manière de pêche insulaire ; qu'il a sauveté de la corruption des autres pays antillais dont l'expansion pourrait lui être à la fois instructive et fruitueuse (car il ont les mêmes problèmes que nous et leur évolution démocratique est imposée, que le communisme enfin, a été de le pêcher de l'Afrique noire dont l'évolution est dénuée de sens contre-sens du soleil. En pourtant cette Afrique noire, la mère de notre culture et de notre civilisation antillaise, c'est d'elle qu'attends la prospérité des Antilles ; pas de l'Europe qui ne peut que refaire l'antillaise, mais de l'Afrique qui seule peut réveiller et revaloriser les Antilles.

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

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