**Africa and the Politics of Love and Rebellion**

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My main argument here is as follows:

Since its birth, capital has defined two spaces — a sacred zone occupied by the owners of capital and their allies, those they themselves consider to be ‘human’, and a sacrificial zone comprising everyone else who they consider to be less than human or less human than themselves and those not considered human at all. Who belongs in each zone changes over time depending on the nature of the struggles of the people of the sacrifice zones and the concessions made by the sacred zones. But those divisions have continued to be the fundamental nature of the rule of capital, of capitalist democracy, of colonialism, of social democracy, of independence, of neocolonialism. The sacred zone is maintained by the use of extreme violence against the occupiers of the sacrifice zones to ensure their continued existence as a dehumanised population. But the irony is that in seeking to render others less than human, the oligarchs of the sacred zone end up becoming profoundly dehumanised themselves. And because of the violence, exploitation and oppression experienced by those in the sacrifice zones, the people of this zone have the most profound understanding of what it means to be human, and in their organising for freedom and emancipation, they engage in inventing what it truly means to be human, a universalist humanity that is founded on the principles of love and freedom.

Secondly, I argue that the condition of being ‘African’ was a creation of Europe, a synonym for the non-human or lesser human being, that justified enslavement, slavery, colonialism and exploitation. The specific terminology evolved subsequently to consider the African as ‘uncivilised’ under colonialism, and then ‘underdeveloped’ in the post-independence period. The struggles against enslavement, slavery, exploitation and national liberation represented the reassertion by Africans of their humanity, and as human beings, as makers of history, as contributors to the history of human emancipation. When the term ‘African’ becomes devoid of, or disarticulated from, any connection with the struggle for emancipation and freedom, as it did in the aftermath of independence, it becomes indistinguishable from the taxonomy of race and of identity politics created by the European that identifies ‘Africa’, rather than its continued exploitation of its people and resources, as the ‘problem’. So long as the experiences arising from emancipatory struggles are perceived as merely ‘African’, it is not possible to understand their contribution to universal humanity. That is only possible if the politics of African experiences are transcended and considered as part of the human condition that ‘belong to the whole world’.

Before the15th century, Europe did not exist. It was merely a collection of feudal, mercantile, tribal towns, farms, villages, small states at war with each other. It had few natural resources and its social system meant that it was deeply impoverished. Europe was invented in the process of inventing Africa. Europe was invented by it push outwards not because of its wealth but by its poverty. Colonialism gave European states common interests in slavery, plantations, the world market, looting, rape, genocide, territorial grabbing, spices, precious metals. To invent itself as ‘Europe’ it had to render those populations on the African continent as being less than human to justify it destruction of people. It was Europe who invented the term ‘African’ — the peoples of the continent never defined themselves thus. And in inventing the African, it invented itself, just as by ‘racializing’ the Black allowed the invention of the racialized White.

Africa’ became shorthand for the non-human

Ideological justification was white superiority

* Required destruction of African city states, empires, and trade
* History rewritten to invent European superiority: erasure of memory of Iberian peninsula being part of African empire of Andalusia that lasted 700 years until 1492 destroyed giving rise to the ‘Spanish Inquisition’, expulsion of Africans and Jews, destruction of science, astrology, mathematics, culture etc
* 1492 — year Columbus began the genocidal move of Europe into the Americas and Caribbean
* White superiority leading to domination of all other peoples of the Americas and Asia as well
* Capture, enslavement, terror, genocide and mass killings, destruction of existing civilisations
* Too much emphasis placed by scholars in counting the bodies that were taken from the continent, who died in the middle passage and survived to be chattel slaves in the Americas. But that ignores the plunder and killings of resistance as well as export of captured people. Senghor et al put loss of life at 200 million — i.e. approximately one third of entire population of continent at the time of 600million souls.

Capture of slaves, destruction of societies, made possible not only by force of arms, but collusion of existing despotic rulers of class societies. The crucial aspect her is that the entire basis of colonization and rule has always involved the nurturing, feeding and arming of collaborators.

Resistance everywhere: Congo, from Khoi-Khoin herders, against Poturguese in Kilwe and Zanj, Mombasa, Mbanza, Ethiopia, Sao Tome, Zambezia, Pemba, Tete province, Madagascar, Angola, Cape region of South Africa, Sierra Leone, Ghana, destruction of Fort Jesus in East Africa etc etc often killing of collaborators

* Most important resistance was in San Domingue by African slaves recently brought — 1791-1804 Haitian Revolution, Defeat of British, French and Spanish. First successful slave revolution and universalist humanity declared defining people politically not racially

Atlantic slave ‘trade’, plantations, genocide of indigens, sugar, tobacco, looting, all led to massive capital accumulation and wealth transferred to Europe and provided the wealth and the leisure for the birth of the European Enlightenment: Enlightenment — celebration white skin, and the condemnation of dark Africa, inscrutible Asian, and of course forgotten genocide of indigens of Americas / Caribbean. The European Enlightenment cast a shadow of erasure over the histories and civilisations of Africa and darkened the continent by virtue of the violence and destruction cast on the people of the continent.

The Enlightenment is celebrated by Europeans as giving birth to Liberalism. But Liberalism was itself constructed by the existence and expansion of the sacred and sacrificial zones. It was liberalism that created the conditions for the establishment of modern democracy. But let us look at that carefully: In USA, birth of modern democracy enabled only white, male slave owners be allowed to vote. Even the womenfolk of the slave owners were not permitted to vote. Similarly in England, only landowners and propertied classes, especially those who colonized Ireland, allowed to vote. Everyone else considered to be part of the SACRIFICE zones because they were considered *less than human* or in the case of Africans, *not human at all*

Modern (capitalist) democracy has always been an exclusivist project. All political gains by those in the sacrifice zones have been a result of the organising and mobilisation of the people of that zone, forcing concessions from the occupiers of the sacred zones.

For the sacred zones to survive required the use of extreme violence against those in the sacrifice zones while recruiting collaborators, police and armed forces from amongst the people of the sacrifice zones. The methods of rule use in the colonial project were fundamentally fascist in nature. As Césaire (2000: 36) pointed out, why Europe’s humanistic bourgeoisie could not forgive Hitler wasn’t because of the crime he committed but

the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the ‘coolies’ of India, and the ‘niggers’ of America” and the so-called ‘natives of Africa.

This form of rule was characterized by Losurdo as a *Herrenvolk* democracy — *Herrenvolk* being the term used later by the Nazis in Germany to refer to the 'master race'.

The rise of Nazism was new for Europe, but something indistinguishable from it had long existed in many parts of Africa. The absolute totalitarian dictatorship of monopoly capital, fused with the state dictatorship of the combination of monopoly capital and the state that is an essential part of Nazism and fascism. This dictatorship shared another essential factor with the later European dictatorships: a mass social base in the middle class such as was found in Germany Italy and Spain. … In Africa this popular base was found internally among the colons and the settlers of all classes, farmers, traders and workers. But besides the settler aggregate of classes, such as was found in Southern Africa, Kenya and Algeria, colonial Nazism had another popular base, the alliance workers and capitalists in the dominant foreign countries. In a real sense it was the Berlin conference of the 1884-5 and not in the flames of the Reichstag half century later that Nazism was created I am not in the flames of the Reichstag half century later (Jaffe 1985: 73-4).

The industrial workers of the North wanted socialism at home but at the same time the continuity of colonialism that guaranteed its luxuries and privileges. That holds as much today as it did in the rise of European colonial ventures.

The creation and maintenance of these two zones was at the heart of the colonial project. The colonial powers created the sacrifice zones through widespread use of genocide, mass killings, imprisonment, sexual abuse, torture, forced labour, all forms of brutality, floggings and extrajudicial killings for the most trivial of acts. The judicial system was created to protect the interest of the colonial powers. Looting and land grabbing, and the handing over to colonizers land and privilege exclusively to their own kind. Corruption was at the heart of the colonial system. Leaders of protest movements were summarily executed.

The ideological framework for colonialism required the destruction of pre-existing cities and civilizations in Africa, to remove reference to the cultural, social, economic, scientific, artistic heritage. That was a prerequisite for the ideologues such as Hegel and other so-called philosophers and historians to claim that Africa has no history.

The faith in the superiority of the culture of the sacred space combined with Christianity’s missionary zeal laid the foundations for empire and the spread of Christendom. ‘After the slave trade, armed conquest and colonial wars’, wrote Cabral, ‘there came the complete destruction of the economic and social structure of African society. The next phase was European occupation and ever-increasing European immigration into these territories. The lands and possessions of the Africans were looted’. Colonial powers established control by imposing taxes, enforcing compulsory crops, introducing forced labour, excluding Africans from particular jobs, removing them from the most fertile regions, and establishing native authorities consisting of collaborators.

Cabral pointed out that whatever the material aspects of domination, ‘it can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned’. Of course, domination could only be completely guaranteed by the elimination of a significant part of the population as, for example, in the genocide of the Herero peoples in southern Africa or of many of the indigenous nations of North America, but in practice this was not always feasible or indeed seen as desirable from the point of view of empire. In Cabral’s words:

The ideal for foreign domination, whether imperialist or not, would be to choose: either to liquidate practically all the population of the dominated country, thereby eliminating the possibilities for cultural resistance; or to succeed in imposing itself without damage to the culture of the dominated people – that is, to harmonize economic and political domination of these people with their cultural personality.

The use of violence to dominate a people is, argued Cabral, ‘above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least neutralize and to paralyze their cultural life. For as long as part of that people have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be assured of its perpetuation’.

The reason for this is clear. Culture is not a mere artefact or expression of aesthetics, custom or tradition. It is a means by which people assert their opposition to domination, a means to proclaim and invent their humanity, a means to assert agency and the capacity to make history. In a word, culture is one of the fundamental tools of the struggle for emancipation. Culture is an expression both of love and of rebellion.

For Cabral, culture has a material base, ‘the product of this history just as a flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and reflects the organic nature of the society’.

Culture, insists Cabral, is intimately linked to the struggle for freedom. While culture comprises many aspects, it ‘... grows deeper through the people’s struggle, and not through songs, poems or folklore. ... One cannot expect African culture to advance unless one contributes realistically to the creation of the conditions necessary for this culture, i.e. the liberation of the continent’. In other words, culture is not static and unchangeable, but it advances only through engagement in the struggle for freedom.

National liberation, says Cabral, ‘is the phenomenon in which a socio-economic whole rejects the denial of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, it is their return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which they were subject’.

Or, as Fanon put it: ‘To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow. One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation’. … ‘National culture is no folklore ... [it] is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remain strong.’

The struggle of people in Africa has always focused on land. But it is important here for us to acknowledge that land is not the same as territory. The latter is premised on private ownership, whereas land has to be conceptualised as a place of memory, of history, of culture, of ancestry, of beliefs, of social relations, of love, languages, histories and capacities to produce, organize, tell stories, invent, love, make music, sing songs, make poetry, create art, philosophize, reflect– all things that make a people human. Attempts at removing people from their land is not merely their disarticulation from property but something more profound, spiritual as well as material.

But the people of the sacrifice zones are not passive. The resounding claim of every movement in opposition to enslavement, every slave revolt, every opposition to colonization, every challenge to the institutions of white supremacy, every resistance to racism, every resistance to oppression or to patriarchy, constituted an assertion of human identity. Where Europeans considered Africans to be sub-human, the response was to claim the identity of “African" is a positive, liberating definition of a people who are part of humanity, who, as Cabral put it, 'belong to the whole world’. As Paulo Freire was to proclaim:

But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.

If being cast as ‘African’ was originally defined as being less than human, the resounding claim of every movement in opposition to enslavement, every slave revolt, every opposition to colonization, every challenge to the institutions of white supremacy, every resistance to racism, every resistance to oppression or to patriarchy, constituted an assertion of human identity. Where Europeans considered Africans to be sub-human, the response was to claim the identity of ‘African’ as a positive, liberating definition of a people who are part of humanity, ‘who belong to the whole world’, as Cabral put it. As in the struggles of the oppressed throughout history, a transition occurs in which terms used by the oppressors to ‘other’ people are eventually appropriated by the oppressed and turned into terms of dignity and assertion of humanity.

It was thus that the concept of being ‘African’ became intimately associated with the concept of freedom and emancipation. The people ‘have kept their culture alive and vigorous despite the relentless and organized repression of their cultural life’, wrote Cabral. Cultural resistance was the basis for the assertion of people’s humanity and the struggle for freedom.

With the growing discontent with the domination of the colonial regimes, especially following the second world war, many political parties were formed, many of which sought to negotiate concessions from the colonial powers. Colonialism had been reluctant to grant any form of pluralism to black organizations, but as popular protests grew, so there was a grudging opening of political space, often involving favours to those who were less threatening to colonial rule.

But such associations with freedom were, tragically, not to last for long beyond independence.

We saw the rise of popular discontent across the continent in the aftermath of the Second World War. Not a country on the continent was immune to the spirit of dissent, organising, vociferous opposition to, and acts of rebellion against the colonial project. The response was in many cases vicious, brutal, and bloody, with widespread use of torture, imprisonment, mass killings and widespread displacement, as seen, for example, in Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau.

With independence, the opportunity arose for changing the form rule, to dispense with the exclusivity of colonial democracy— to establish a real popular democracy. But what happened? In most cases, once in power, the nationalist leadership (composed usually of representatives of the newly emerging oligarchs and their intelligentsia) saw its task as one of preventing centripetal forces from competing for political power or seeking greater autonomy from the newly formed ‘nation’. Having grasped political self-determination from colonial authority, it was reluctant to accord the same rights to its own citizens.

The crucial failure of the nationalists was their embrace of the illusion that the colonial state could be occupied and made to serve the people. But the colonial state had been explicitly designed to protect the 'sacred' zone, and to police and control the populations of the sacrifice zones. The police, the armed forces, the judiciary, and civil service, had been established to protect the interests of the occupiers of the sacred spaces. The colonial state was premised on the notion that its function was to perpetuate the dehumanization of the colonized. But failing to dismantle the colonial state as urged by Cabral, led to the continuation of the rules by which the people of the sacrifice zones were controlled. Cabral urged that there has to be the creation of popular forms of democratic decision making, an alternative forms of a state that is controlled by and serves the interests of the masses.

In almost every case where there had been armed opposition to colonialism, freedom fighters of the liberation movements were, if not entirely marginalized in the post-independence period, incorporated, integrated, and placed under the command of the existing colonial military structures. At independence, the only real change to the operations of the state was to deracialize the state while dressing up the police and armed forces in the colours of the national flag. Except during liberation wars in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau, there were few attempts to form alternative state forms, and even then, these did not survive the occupation of the colonial state machinery.

For a period lasting to the beginning of the 1980s (and in South Africa perhaps a couple of decades later), it is true that there was some kind of social democratic contract between the elites and the masses during which education, social service, support for the agricultural production, exercise of human rights, etc. were possible. But these concessions placed considerable constraints on the emerging neo-colonial oligarchs capacity to accumulate. The resentment against leaders such as Nyerere in Tanzania were palpable throughout his period as president.

Then came the opportunity. The 1980s witnessed the restructuring of the world economy and the rise of neo-liberalism. The oligarchs that ruled our countries saw this as an opportunity to remove all constraints on their capacity to accumulate through privatization of the public domain, grabbing of land and theft of resources from the sacrifice zones, grace and favour for those in the sacred zones (the norm of colonialism today called 'corruption'), and the formation of alliances with international financial institutions and transnational corporations that enable considerable access to a piece of the pie. The removal of exchange control allowed the oligarchs to promptly export their new gained wealth to the banks and offshore facilities of the global North. And it was in the crucible of the establishment of neoliberalism as the dominant form for the world economy that South Africa achieved its new dispensation in 1994 — perhaps explaining the speed with which it manifested all the characteristics of neocolonial rule.

It is important to emphasize here the accuracy of the term *neoliberalism*: I insist that this was the *re-establishment of liberalism* with its sacred and sacrifice zones under new conditions of the continent. It was a return to the colonial forms of rule under new, or neo-colonial conditions. Liberalism is to colonialism, what neoliberalism is to neocolonialism.

It is a complete misunderstanding of the nature of neoliberalism to think the policies required were 'imposed' on each of our countries. For the most part, the local oligarchs were enthusiastic about implementation of policies that ensured that they would get rich. In a few cases where these oligarchs were not immediately convinced of the opportunities for accumulation, the World Bank and IMF were ready to apply pressure through conditionalities. But the political advantage for the oligarchs and their apologists in the 'development' arena was that they could publicly denounce the Bank and IMF while privately scoffing at the trough.

The structural adjustment policies that they implemented were dependent on perpetuating the existence of the sacred zones, now occupied by the new oligarchs and their allies in the middle classes. At the same time, there has been an expansion of the sacrifice zones Today, vast tracks of the country have been appropriated so that landlessness, unemployment / never-employment, homelessness, the explosive growth of informal settlements, the growth of criminality as the only means of survival, the privatization of healthcare, education, water, anything and everything that can make a profit. In effect, there is a vast disenfranchisement of large sectors of the population — whose votes can now be bought at election time - but who have no say in the form of democracy that exists in the neocolonies. Yesterday we had rights to healthcare and education. Today, we have to beg to receive third-class care and forms of education that hardly differ from what existed under colonial rule.

If you live in the sacred zones, you have access to human rights: if the police want to search your house, for example, they are obliged to apply or a warrant. But for the majority who live either in the growing informal settlements around the cities, or in the marginal lands of the rural districts, such formalities are never required, police simply smash down the doors. If you are less than human, then you don't have access to human rights. In essence, everyone has ‘human rights’ or the rights embodies in the local constitution. But only those in the sacred zones have the right to those rights. Everyone else does not have the right to those rights.

Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to see the police and armed forces carrying out massacres in our time so reminiscent of colonial practices, such as we witnessed in the killing of mineworkers in Marikana, South Africa.

Unlike under colonialism the masses have access to rights IN THEORY.  This has a number of consequences: For example, Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shack dwellers movement, can be represented by lawyers from the sacred zone but that requires political organisation. The decisions made in court are strongly influenced by popular organising beyond the courts. The exercise of rights is dependent on other circumstances and can be seen largely as secondary and dependent on their organised power, in other words as individuals they are not full citizens.  Many poor people can only survive by becoming clients of party leaders  through patronage relations. In other words the state needs quite a few people to support its parties/policies etc and to turn up at elections to legitimise them. But thereafter, it can't ONLY rule through violence. It follows that the African neo-colonial state can pretend to be 'democratic' (it holds elections, it has a constitution, it has a civil society and grants rights) which legitimses it in the eyes of the West AND in the eyes of its growing middle class/petty-bourgeoisie (who own property and have the right to rights in civil society).  The latter thereby give support to the oligarchy and do not react except with crocodile tears when Marikana happens.  This middle-class in civil society is organised more and more in NGOs (foreign and domestic) especially in churches...  It is these NGOs which are pointed to as evidence of the existence of civil society and democracy.

The masses outside civil society sometimes organise in genuinely DEMOCRATIC ways (e.g. Abahlali).  Not only popular rebellions which are constantly occurring, but the possible existence of new and genuine democratic forms of organisation in mass movements.  Without these there can be no genuine democratic way forward.  These are created by the people themselves and not by petty bourgeois exhortations to stand up.

The current COVID-19 pandemic further illustrates the different norms applied to the two zones: for the middle classes and the oligarchs, access to vaccines appears not to be a great problem. When I speak to middle class people in Kenya, they all admit to have obtained vaccinations privately. But not so those who live in the ghettos, the so called informal settlements. Instead, what we see in the COVID era is that in the sacred zone, your skin is pieced with a needle. For those in the sacrifice zones, it is bullets and clubs that pierce your skin. In many countries in Africa, the immediate reaction of the state in the face of COVID is to use violence, militarization of the streets, and repression — and no evidence of making vaccines available to the masses.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus while the international media talks about 'vaccine apartheid' on an international scale, it is important to recognize the reality is also that in our neocolonies, vaccine apartheid is maintained internally within our countries.

Previously, colonial rule was maintained through violence, killings and displacement of the 'native'. Under neocolonialism, we see the use of violence, killings and displacement of the people of the sacrifice zones. Some might argue that the situation is perhaps worse than under colonialism. But in reality, neocolonialism is an extension of the same mode of rule and exercise of power over the majority.

I think it is important to emphasize that our oligarchs are themselves members of an international oligarchy - their interests are in essence indistinguishable from the interests of the oligopolies. There exists no 'national bourgeoisie' that has an interest in the development of the productive forces, only a parasitic class that manifests all that Fanon predicted of them. "They have come to power in the name of a narrow nationalism and representing a race; they will prove themselves incapable of triumphantly putting into practice a programme with even a minimum humanist content, in spite of fine-sounding declarations which are devoid of meaning since the speakers bandy about in irresponsible fashion phrases that come straight out of European treatises on morals and political philosophy."[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is too easy to blame everything on the Global North. Yes, in alliance with our own oligarchs, they are part of the problem. But as Cabral pointed out: ‘True, imperialism is cruel and unscrupulous, but we must not lay all the blame on its broad back. For, as the African people say: “Rice only cooks inside the pot”’

The task of building democracy in Africa remains a vital task, the beginnings of which we are witnessing in the sacrifice zones, amongst the landless, homeless, the destitute and impoverished, and in the mass uprisings that we have witnessed from time to time in Egypt, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Sudan, and many other places. But we also have to recognize that the struggle for democratic rights is only part of a process of emancipation and freedom. Democratic rights should not be seen as an end in itself.

Cabral’s (1979: 80) statement that ‘We must put the interests of our people higher, in the context of the interests of mankind in general, and then we can put them in the context of the interests of Africa in general’ reminds us that the struggles to reinvent ourselves as humans is relevant not just for those in the location in which such processes take place. They are of universal importance and have value for the struggles to claim and express humanity everywhere. His statement is also a challenge to the Eurocentrism of the many who assume that only the western experience and its associated revolutions in France and America are of universal significance. The silence about the importance of the San Domingue revolution in much of left literature is shameful. It is a failure to recognise that the experiences and struggles of African people to assert and invent their humanity belong to the whole of humankind.

Those who have, for centuries, experienced dehumanisation inevitably and constantly struggle to reclaim their humanity, to assert that they are human beings. The process of reclamation is not, however, a harking back to some supposed glorious past when everyone was human, but rather a present and continuing process of constant invention, constant re-invention, and redefini- tion of what it means to be human.

For example, those who have suffered over millennia from the dehuman-isation processes that are associated with patriarchy have an experience that helps define what being human really means: the gains of the women’s and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movements over recent years have provided glimpses into the potential being that humans could become, countering the narrow-minded, tradition-focused and often violent constructs that patriarchy portrays. In the perpetuation of patriarchy, men have themselves become dehumanised, unable to map out what being human is about, and it is only through the emancipatory struggles of those oppressed and exploited by patriarchy that insights into the possibility and potentials of what it means to be human can be found.

Similarly, those who have experienced and struggled against the horrors of enslavement, chattel slavery, colonisation and imperial domination have insights that emerge from their struggles into what it means to be human and what the potentials and possibilities are that can be released in becoming human. One can see in the struggles against oppression and exploitation the release of invention, creativity, different ways of organising and of making decisions, in each struggle that takes place, as in the revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. The anti-colonial struggles that Cabral led in Guinea- Bissau, for example, released a torrent of creativity in the way in which society could be organised, how education could be transformed, how health services could be provided, and how people could exercise democratic control. In every revolution or uprising that is informed by desires for emancipation, there are examples of such creativity and drive to invent what humans, as social beings, are and can become.

One final point has important implications for those in Africa seeking their own emancipation. The process of dehumanising others has an effect not only on the victims but also on the perpetrators. As Chinua Achebe (2010) puts it: ‘We cannot trample upon the humanity of others without devaluing our own. The Igbo, always practical, put it concretely in their proverb *Onye ji onye n’ani ji onwe ya*: “He who will hold another down in the mud must stay in the mud to keep him down”.’

White people who occupy the sacred zones always consider that only their experiences are of universal relevance.

But, so long as the experiences arising from emancipatory struggles on the continent are perceived as merely ‘African’, it is not possible to understand their contribution to universal humanity. That is only possible if the politics of African experiences are transcended and considered as part of the human condition that ‘belong to the whole world’.

1. Reflections on, and learnings from, Organising in the time of Covid-19: Rene Loewenson interviews Firoze Manji. https://bit.ly/3bTdEkt (Accessed 31 May 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Frantz Fanon, 1961: Chapter 3: The Pitfalls of National Consciousness. In *The Wretched of the Earth* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)