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African Transatlantic Resistance and Movements

SEATTLE, PORTO ALEGRE, DURBAN and more recently Bombay are massive and conclusive expressions of the fight for a better future. From Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, to Europe and the United States, the planning and ordering of the global economic system gradually and dramatically imperils the life of millions of families. This phenomenon of increasing exclusion is mainly conditioned by a transnational economic logic, which establishes an eminently predatory consumption pattern that undermines the ecological, material and social basis of human life and dignity.

From a historical distance, the analysis of social movements makes it possible to prove that processes of change are constituted by "ruptures" expressed mainly by "resistance". Reciprocally, in order to generate ruptures, resistance must be massive, organized and sustainable. Therefore, the recent appropriation of the field of resistance by anti-globalization activists of industrialized countries has granted a new *input* to worldwide mobilizations: a mediatic *input* necessary for current protests.

Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have for centuries posed and designed "other" ways of resistance that, though less visible, have modified and altered international, regional and national balances. At present, the multiplication and diversification of worldwide resistance formats (political and economic) involves an increasing amount of affected people and implies recognizing the "fairness" of our fight. In addition, the possibility of counting on an observation and interpretation that includes contextual and temporal social movements makes it possible to understand their dimensions, potentialities and scope.

Africa, and especially the African transatlantic resistance, offers an experience that refers to the contemporary resistance's two mainstays: the first one, economic, on the formats and purposes of the production system; the second one, political, on racial discrimination and its social effects.

It is worth clarifying that even though there is a bibliographic gap about African experiences, based on specialized analyses, experts regret the "invisibility" of African contributions to the construction and evolution of modern resistance. This invisibility is understood as a "non existence", or as the "incapacity to become visible" in the framework of modern development. Afro-descendants in the Americas and the Caribbean are more than 150 million. In view of this evidence, I allow myself instead to question the systems and scientific approaches to the measurement of reality that cloud our social nuances.

African modern resistance's genealogy (XV-XX)

African transatlantic resistance arises and shares its origin with the development of triangular trade initiated in the XVI century among Africa, America and Europe. With a tri-continental geographic scenario connected by the Atlantic Ocean, triangular trade consisted of an exchange of products and services that set up the principles, structure and dynamics of Atlantic modern economic globalization.

For Latin America, the colonization and exploitation of raw materials required the importing of an African labor force. For Europe, the consolidation of nations-states, technological development, the food revolution and the pursuit of wealth consolidated American colonization and the opening of African commercial routes towards the Atlantic.

From the African continent, the implementation of territorial domains in the Americas and the resistance of Indian people offered options of diversification of commercial routes with the aim to expand their growth and development strategies. That is why, in the first stage of the

triangular trade, one can observe an organized and planned participation, from the XV century until the mid XVII. The experience of African labor force exports is not new in African economic history. Starting in the VI century, marine and land trade with Asia included an extensive range of products such as the African slave labor force. It is important to recall that trade in human beings was not an African exception but a reality in numerous regions of the world (Europe, Asia and America), based on a principle of economic exploitation.

From the XVII century onwards, the enlargement of colonial objectives in the Americas and the Caribbean generated the competitiveness of colonial and marine markets, and piracy and illegality gave shape to the industrialization of triangular trade. In this second stage, African participation and answers to the rising demand would show to be disordered and unplanned, leading to a new category of merchant: the "slave trader". This period will be denounced as that of the *slave trade* or *transatlantic trade.*

Additionally, since the XVI century, a model of social organization based on a cultural classification system and ranking according to racial castes[1] is established as from the American colonies. Colonial hegemony allowed the use of "terror" as a mediator of almost all the links between the white minority and the so-called "irrational", be them aboriginal population or black (Taussig, 1991: 5). The African "savage" represented the spiritual and rational level of Europeans when providence or reason freed them. Implicitly and explicitly, this interpretation permitted Europeans, in the name of Christ –through the system of the Inquisition–, or in the name of reason, to colonize, administer and, whenever possible, to enslave the savage.

For the people enslaved, the loss of freedom, labor exploitation and physical extermination hatched African transatlantic resistance and mobilizations. Between the XVI and the XIX century, the sabotage of agricultural and cattle production (Arocha, 1998: 343), open revolt and flight were common formats of resistance.

In the face of this double discrimination –*class* and *race*– Africans of the continent as well as of the Americas and the Caribbean designed strategies in order to restore the balances of survival and sustainability.

Economic strategies

Globalization is presented as a "free market", the result of a natural process of commercial expansion and a development generator. However, this presentation happens to be counteracted by a "reality" that questions its modalities and objectives.

This reality translates into the fact that 20% of the world's population holds 83% of the world GDP, controls 82% of international trade, uses up the 95% of the total of commercial loans granted in the planet, and generates 95% of all the research and development of the world. The last UNDP Human Development Report (PNUD, 2003)[2] pinpoints that 3,000 million people in the world survive on less than 2 dollars a day, while 1,200 million people survive on less than 1 dollar per day and lack drinking water. Finally, 2,400 million are in need of basic sanitation.

Systems, their modalities, and the tools (legal, scientific and technological) for the operation and development of the global market, are monopolized by the "West", marginalizing "peripheral societies" from the free market's benefits. This exclusion translates into the undervaluing of their products and into commercial logic.

In view of globalization's aim of being the engine of development, experts try to convince us that the display of negative results (high levels of poverty and effects on the environment, among others) is a consequence of local or national inability to take up a position within the global system. The subsequent imposition or importation of development models in the countries of the so-called Third World showed the limits of its applicability, causing effects contradictory to the ideal of development and precluding "exchange" in every way.

Due to the fact that it is in the African experience in the Americas and the Caribbean that this ambivalence is most crudely revealed, African transatlantic resistance movements have worked out interpretations and strategies in order to keep up and improve their population's quality of life. According to African transatlantic movements, the establishment of an organizational system based on racial stratification placed Afro-descendants at the bottom of the social scale. African populations in the Americas are affected by unemployment, a lack of basic services

such as health, education and housing, and an absence of communication networks that violate their private and civil rights.

From local initiatives for self-sufficiency (setting up cooperatives or creation of non-governmental organizations) to international negotiation processes, African transatlantic resistance strategies have made it possible to modify economic structures.

In 1975, Africa and the G77 with the proposal of a "New World Economic Order", which according to professor Samir Amin is a "project of rejuvenation of the controlled internationalization that would have allowed the continuation of general growth" (Amin, 1989), mobilized and combined several political, economic and social fronts to provide a way out for to the Third World's problems, and in particular for Afro-American transatlantic ones. More recently, from the African continent and its diasporas, the New Partnership for African Development –NEPAD– with South Africa, Nigeria and Algeria was designed, which aims to grant new competitive spaces to all Africans within and outside the continent.

The South-South Summit on debt, "Towards a new millennium free of debt", carried out in November 1999 in Johannesburg, and the International Meeting Dakar 2000 "From the Resistance to Alternatives", in December 2000, had as their aim to pressure for the annulment of the debt and the abandonment of the adjustment programs in the Third World. Among the most specific initiatives there exists, for instance, the African Business Roundtable, which gathers African and Afro-American businessmen who work for the strengthening of African transatlantic companies.

From the field of economy, a "labour of memory" is materialized, aimed at re-establishing, through compensation or reparation, ethic and economic balances for the reintegration and return to action of Africans as regards the productive processes. Therefore, for many spokespeople of this way of resistance, the "position consists in declaring that it is the duty of the states that have enriched themselves thanks to slavery, to grant a compensation to those that have been impoverished due to the latter [...] and that to the recognition of the crime should be added the debt cancellation of African, Latin American and Caribbean countries. In like manner, the restoration of the compensation must include the redistribution of the means of production and of exchange [...] We consider urgent also to suppress the social barriers that exist due to the persistence of the caste spirit"[3].

Even though these strategies have allowed an improvement in the conditions of economic negotiation, the results obtained continue to be negative for African communities. The low literacy rate and the lack of access to basic services reveal the inefficacy of an "equitable economic thought" *vis-à-vis* a perception of "irreversibility" of the conditions and processes of development in the framework of the national and global economic structure.

We know that globalization is an ideological "discourse" aimed at legitimizing capital's strategies (Amin, 1997). We know that this discourse is created by a mechanism that constructs it. There is therefore an urgent need to modify the perception and the instruments of participation of African transatlantic peoples in the world economy.

Political victories

From their beginnings, African transatlantic struggles and arguments rapidly produced positive results. Already in 1804, Haitian capabilities allowed total independence and the implementation of the first model of an African state in the Caribbean.

With regard to the American continent, the conditions of domination allowed the obtention of political and legal victories such as the abolition of slavery in 1850[4]. At present, they are expressed through policies of "affirmative action" or of "positive discrimination". In relation to these two mobilization settings, America's and the Caribbean's Afro-Americans expressed themselves mainly in two different formats.

First, *governability*. The experience of political independence (Haiti), with administrative management capacity, economic control and cultural development, showed its limits in the practice of autonomy (e.g., the recent expulsion of elected president Aristide). With a revolutionary Constitution, the management of society was organized on stiff, authoritarian and centralized practices. Additionally, the Island's geo-strategical position (the Greater Caribbean) sometimes had a dramatic influence on its development.

The second scheme: *multiculturalism*. From the Americas, the freedom (from slavery) attained did not involve Afro-Americans' active participation in the decision-making process. Until the new constitutions implemented in the 80s, Afro-Americans were recognized as "citizens with no rights" through a "modern apartheid" model. The American system identifies and legitimizes "Afros" or "negritude", but makes them invisible in their domestic and international agendas. This format of inclusion is generated through the logic of the "ethnic minority", in which perception and treatment cause a process of systematic marginalization, displayed in a behavior of "conscious" discrimination.

In view of this political and social invisibility, in both scenarios, numerous Afro-American and Caribbean intellectuals have drawn up interpretations in order to organize the transatlantic resistance. The actors of the construction of the African memory and struggle are located, in the main, within the pan-African movement.

This movement is a sphere of theoretical interpretations, political initiatives and economic strategies formulated by and for Africans. Its struggle is concentrated on the recognition and promotion of Africans. Its field of action includes the Americas, Caribbean, Africa and the new African Diasporas (Europe, Central Europe, Canada and Asia, among others). Structured at the end of the 19th century and beginnings of the 20th, the pan-African movement was organized and consolidated through the following international meetings: London in 1900, Paris in 1919, Paris in 1921, London in 1923, New York in 1927 and Manchester in 1945.

From Africa and from the Americas and the Caribbean, pan-Africanist leaders such as Edward W. Blyden (1832-1929).), W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1963), George Padmore (1902-1959), Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), Leopold Sedar Senghor (1903-2001), Aimé Césaire (1913), Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), Jomo Kenyatta (1891-1978), Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), Emperador Hailé Selassié I (1892-1975), Martín Luther King (1928-1968), Malcolm X (1925-1965), C.L.R. James (1901-1989), Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and Archie Mafeje (1937), just to name a few, identified theoretical and methodological options for the promotion of the African peoples. For each one of them, the extent of their mobilizations was carried out in different times and conditions. At present, all the pan-Africanist interpretative proposals have again acquired vigor and feed the formulation and design of coordinated and sustainable manners of existence.

Recently, academic settings have also appropriated the issue, granting continuity, shape and depth to African social movements. In the Caribbean, the annual "All African Students' Conference" held at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, focuses, for instance, on themes such as "Pan-Africanism at the Beginning of the 21st Century: New Century, Same Challenges" and reporting on the theoretical advances of African legitimacy. With regard to the African continent, the conference "Intellectuals, Nationalism and the Pan-African Ideal" organized by the Council for Development and Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and held in Dakar, Senegal, in December 2003, is another evidence of the need to articulate and coordinate theoretical as well as practical efforts within contemporary African resistance.

In parallel with this process of internal formulation and definition, there also exist external mobilization strategies. The World Conference against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Similar Forms of Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, is an important opportunity for African social movements to debate and face the complex outlines of the "race" discourse that has excluded the "Afro"[5] from local, national and international public settings. International mobilizations have made it possible to establish alliances that create feedback, and enlarge and increase the options of legitimacy. Therefore, African transatlantic mobilizations organize on different levels.

In the first place, political and legal initiatives such as the Meeting of Afro-descendant Parliamentarians of the Americas and the Caribbean I and II, held in Brazil in October 2003 and in Colombia in May 2004 respectively. The conferences identified a great number of Afro-descendant parliamentarians and focused on the dissemination of local problems. Lastly, they reasserted the need to create strategic alliances for the promotion of policies on behalf of Afro-American and Caribbean populations and communities. In the second place, African mass participation (labor unions, intellectuals, academics, student and peasant movements) in the "Battle of Seattle" (1999) and the I World Social Forum of Porto Alegre (Brazil) to raise and discuss land rights, citizenship, liberty, equality and peace by means of the discourse regarding the redemption of the historic and social debt. Thirdly, one may identify mobilizations such as

the "Million Man March" (1995) in Washington DC, or the March against Racism, in favor of Equality and Life (2000) in Brazil, in which the dynamics consist in generating greater self-consciousness: "The only way we are going to stand up and be seen is if we do it together".

Social strategies

Due to the fact that the social is the sole area in which all the actors negotiate their identity, it is within this field that African pressures have individual or collectively attained startling results. African transatlantic social strategies carry out and combine different fields of negotiation, with the aim of generating the changes necessary for their existence. As a main result of this process, in the Americas and the Caribbean more than 150 million Afro-Americans are to be found.

Even though census systems continue to be unreliable due to the fact they are "inflexible", the Afro-descended population reaches 95% in Haiti, 90.4% in Jamaica, more than 90% in Trinidad and Tobago, 62% in Cuba, 47% in Brazil, 26% in Colombia, 18% in the United States, 10% in Ecuador, 4% in Uruguay, 3% in Peru and 2% in Chile. This is without cataloguing regions such as Central America (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, Panama, Honduras, and Guatemala) and Caribbean territories such as the Dominican Republic, Bahamas, Guyana, and the French Antilles due to their condition of colonies[6]. Their quantitative spread and territorial distribution prove their development and capacity of transformation. These capabilities develop through several social strategies.

First, *crossbreeding*. The establishment of racial stratification as an economic, cultural and social development model posed for the majority of Afro-descendants the need for "whitening" as a logic of integration. The *half-caste* is an option to break down the limits of labor and cultural discrimination. This conscious movement of acculturation designed new ways of African identity and made more flexible and ample the formats of African identity. Secondly, for many Afro-descendants the maintenance of an African identity has to do with autonomy and self-determination. Historically, freedom was associated with independence.

Therefore, the appropriation of land, as in the constitution of the Republic of Palmares in Brazil, or the Palenque of San Basilio in Colombia, are symbols of African mobilization. Additionally, as from the XVII century, the number of slaves who bought from their bosses letters of freedom and migrated from the mines of the gold-bearing areas to havens free of slavers increased (Arocha, 1998: 341-348; Friedmann and Arocha, 1995: 58-62). Nowadays, these efforts of libertarian separatism are displayed in legal mobilizations that have managed to speed up processes of *collective titling* of land. According to Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle (1988a), this need "integrates and incorporates them into the constitutional state [...] and transforms them [...] into citizens with a heritage to defend and into active participants in socioeconomic development".

Thirdly, struggles aimed at the strengthening and preservation of African culture hatched other juridical processes that established policies of ethno education in the Americas. To this end, the promotion of intercultural education that will contribute to the recognition, knowledge and appraisal of cultural and ethnic differences is sought; to promote processes of education of African communities in the Americas; and, lastly, to contribute to the improvement in quality and expansion of Afro-descendants' pre-school, basic, primary and advanced education.

In the fourth place, affirmative action policies concerning economic development called ethno-development. Within national development plans, ethnic development proposals that recovered traditional abilities and customs are incorporated. In Colombia, Brazil and Belize, projects tending towards the rescue, preservation and strengthening of cultural values are carried out, together with the training of members in small self-management enterprises, with the aim to fight unemployment, the worsening of the standard of living, mass emigration and the abandonment of the community heritage.

Fifth, in view of the labor market's limits, Afro-descendants have delved since the eighties into new forms of economic organization, such as the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These are considered new modalities of economic production that not only foster the creation of companies but also constitute an independent political position which, in the case of Afro-descendants, refer to "Afro" identity.

Sixth and last, the creation of networks. Local efforts have had to confront to such amount of necessities that mobilizations required alliances. In Colombia, for instance, the *Process of Black Communities* has established contacts and agreements with other regional agents, such as the Andean network of black communities that includes Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru.

Thus, African responses reply to the challenges of legitimacy and sustainability. Afro-Americans have turned the New World into a democratic social and organizational model. For those who criticize Afro-descendants due to the way they build their identity in the process of construction of the nation, it is important to stress out that in every process of negotiation Africans have understood that coexistence depends –to a large extent– on the flexibility and adaptability of the actors.

The Colombian case

Unlike the majority of the countries that make up the Andean region, Colombia, due to its access to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, has been, through its port of Cartagena, one the main entry territories of enslaved Africans. Afro-Colombians (included the localized population of San Andres and Providencia) constitute 26.83%, that is to say, 11,745,403 people. The vast majority of Afro-Colombians live on the Pacific Coast, in the departments of Choco, Valle, Cauca and Nariño, but also in the big cities on the Atlantic Coast such as Barranquilla and Cartagena, and in the capital city, Bogota, where they are estimated in more than a million[7].

Since its constitution as a Republic, Colombia has undergone political and military violence, revealed in the systematic violation of the population's fundamental rights. This has worsened the situation of precariousness and economic and social penury, as well as of racial and ethnic discrimination in its population. The mass presence of Afro-Colombian populations in the regions of main economic and strategic significance is associated, likewise, with the zones of conflict, a fact that makes them doubly vulnerable[8].

It is within this context of extreme tension that Afro-Colombian social movements' constant demands have been satisfied by the dispositions of the Constitution of 1991. The Colombian nation's ratification of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity establishes principles and rights concerning autonomy, ethnic-cultural diversity and their own language, bilingual instruction, territoriality and own education for black communities.

Among Afro-Colombian victories, the Law 70 of 1993 and the General Education Law 115 of 1994 recognize the right to receive education for Indian, black and localized communities. Officially identified as ethno-education, it recognizes Colombia's black communities as an ethnic group and recognizes collective rights in the matter of territory, the use of natural resources, participation and socioeconomic development, in tune with their particular conditions. For the development of the Law, decree 1745 of 1945 was issued, regulating the procedure for collective title deeds. Nowadays, Afro-Colombian communities own 4.6 million hectares on the Colombian Pacific. Likewise, they have priority for the exploitation of existing natural resources there, and must be consulted in the processes aimed at granting permissions or authorizations for their exploitation.

This set of recognitions has allowed the African identity to be visible in Colombia. Since 1991, more than 1,080 Afro-Colombian organizations have been distributed all across the territory together with others related to particular sectors: homes for orphaned children, associations of female household heads, organizations for the displaced (AFRODES), cultural organizations (Black Colombia Foundation), political and educational associations, leadership schools (Maroon movements), musical groupings and associations for Afro youth. All of them act as pressure and mobilization groups for the promotion of Afro-American communities in Colombia.

Not to conclude

The African social movements' trajectory, pioneering in anti-capitalist mobilization, has demonstrated that within unequal structures, rebalancing formats are possible. In view of the double discrimination of *class* and *race*, the resistance has drawn up strategies that have managed in the Americas and the Caribbean to create more ample coexistence systems and, hence, more sustainable ones. The African transatlantic movement has provided a distinct

analysis that turns Africans into active participants in their history and fully shares the theoretical, economic, political and social basis of the new forms of mobilization.

The African experience –the most extensive, diverse and sustainable one– provides mechanisms that are rationally inserted within the new dynamics of world social movements. On the one hand, from a universal standpoint, African theoretical interpretations, by re-appropriating their Humanity, offer a progressive and equitable view and comprehension of the global system. On the other hand, strategies are worked on from the multisectorial angle, by recognizing and allowing each actor's objectives, modalities and aims that have been articulated and mobilized in order to create fairer organization and coexistence systems.

Even though these combined efforts have produced fundamental results in the evolution of worldwide human relations, it is important to recognize the limits of their scopes. African transatlantic movements have to face new technological, health, education and socioeconomic leveling challenges, among many other modern ones.

At present time, in view of the acceleration of the processes of marginalization, resistance movements are at a crucial stage of their credibility and sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to deepen and extend the forms of mobilization, applying the feedback of particular experiences. To account for the meaning of these manifestations today, to integrate the diversity of contexts, actors and social demands as they are defined today, gives feasibility to the worldwide social movements.

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Notes

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1 Black codes used to regroup legislation on permitted behaviors for each class.

2 Available in <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/espanol/>.

3 Kuya, Dorothy 2000 "L'action du mouvement africain pour les réparations au Royaume-Uni" en Chalons, Serge et al. (dirs.) *De l'esclavage aux réparations* (Paris: Karthala) p. 182.

4 It is worthy of mention that, even though the African communities of the Americas participated massively in American independence, they would have to wait 40 years in order to ratify the abolition of slavery.

5 "Afro" refers to continental Africans and to the African Diaspora.

6 See *Infoplease*: <http://Infoplease.com/ipa/AO855617.html>.

7 United Nations' preliminary report, evaluating the situation of Afrodescendents in Colombia, 2001.

8 In 2003, among the 890,000 and 3 million excluded people in Colombia, 17% were Afro-Colombians.