

## HOW TO ACHIEVE THE FREEDOM PROMISED

What is the main ideological factor that has led to so much violence around the question of identity in post-colonial Africa? Can the concept of culture of peace contribute to the establishment of lasting peace in Africa? And, if so, how?

### The legacy of freedom

"Each generation must, with little help from the past, discover its mission, fulfill or betray it" said Frantz Fanon in his book "Wretched of the Earth," which was written in 1961 and which had a strong influence on the political consciousness of anti-colonial and Third World activists in his time. If we compare ourselves to the generations that have lived through slavery, colonization and apartheid, we can say with some caution, that the political reality of the African continent has generally improved today. The laws that legitimized the inequality and justified the occupation of territories of peoples of different cultures have been abolished. African leaders who are progressive have overcome the identity manipulations imposed by colonialism; they have unified the freedom fighters of their own country, organized pan-African solidarity, and promoted international solidarity with other peoples struggling for freedom. Despite the political and economic violence that many African peoples still experience, we should not forget the victories over oppression. Thanks to the peoples' struggles, significant economic and social rights have been achieved in much of the continent. Human rights and gender equality have emerged to a certain extent from the ruins of discriminatory laws. We must remember that no right is natural: each area of freedom we enjoy today is the result of the epic battles in the past by peoples for justice and human dignity. The promise of freedom is the fruit of resistance.

In addition to the culture of resistance, we are also heirs to values and techniques of peaceful conflict resolution. In the face of tragedies such as apartheid, the genocide in Rwanda and the war in Mozambique, the African people have tapped into their ancient culture to break the impasse and reconcile those who have been bitter enemies.

Thanks to the legacy of the freedom fighters of yesterday, we can look ahead today with optimism and say with certainty that a better Africa is possible. In fact the major challenge of our generation is not to begin the story, but to keep it going, not allowing it to be stopped at midpoint of the long road traveled by the generations who preceded us in the struggle for freedom. For as long as war and poverty continue in even the smallest part of the African continent, the freedom promised by the fathers of Pan-Africanism will require other heroes to ensure its fulfillment. As long as people lack freedom somewhere in the world, no one of us can feel completely free.

Therefore, the mission of our generation, post-colonial and post-apartheid is the struggle for a lasting peace in Africa. To do this, it is essential to first understand the belief system that continues to enable the poverty and violence linked to identity in our continent. In other words, we must identify the major obstacle to the emergence of an Africa that is free, democratic and inclusive for which previous generations have struggled. An Africa where peace is no longer a dream but a reality.

It is our point of view that most of the political and economic violence suffered by the African peoples today is rooted in a system of thought we call the Radical Identity Populism (abbreviated PIR). So what is PIR and how can the concept of culture of peace serve as an antithesis to the prejudices that serve as its backbone?

## Radical Identity Populism

To understand the roots of the economic and social crisis of a country at a specific moment in history, we must examine the state of the dominant culture of its political elite. The major factor of extreme violence faced by many African countries today is to be found in the dominant ideology of those elite that already hold the reins of power as well as those who aspire to obtain them. The phenomenon of ethnic and religious extremism as well as other forms of violence by states against their citizens mirrors the lack of a culture of peace in part of the political elite of the countries concerned. In Africa, just as elsewhere in the world, the different versions of fascism are always thought up by the intellectuals. In the same way, colonialism, apartheid and the various types of extremism facing Africa today were theorized by intellectuals.

In Africa, the decolonization in the legal sense has not been followed by an ideological break with the colonial model of governance by some of the political elite. Violence against the people has been perpetuated beyond independence. While the enemy for the colonialists was those who sought independence, now for the post-colonial elite who have not been mentally liberated from colonial prejudices, the new enemy has become the "other" who is perceived to be different. Discrimination against the colonized peoples has been replaced by discrimination against other ethnic groups, against other religions, against people from other regions, against foreigners ... The colonial practice of divide and rule is continued today as the favorite political weapon of extremist elites. The phenomenon of crimes against humanity such as genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, the ethnic massacres in Burundi in 1993, the fratricidal war in Southern Sudan, the mass crimes orchestrated by the army of the lord, the LRA in Uganda and the DRC, the war waged by the radical Islamist organizations al-Shabab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Qaeda and the Islamist state in Libya, North Africa and Mali are all rooted in theorized system of thought that legitimize extreme violence. This extreme violence is always the culmination of a long process of erosion of the values of peace and tolerance that structure any society. The xenophobic campaigns against foreigners in many African countries are all manifestations, more or less extreme, of an identity vision of politics by the post-colonial elite. As progressive women and men, we cannot afford to close our eyes and allow the Radical Identity Populism to return.

It is against this phenomenon of Radical Identity Populism that the new generation of freedom fighters must struggle if someday Africa is to live in peace with herself.

**By populism**, we mean the political demagoguery expressed through the discourse of hate against others who are different. Those who are populists empty politics of its noble mission that should be the search for the common good; instead, they reduce politics to a means of access and maintenance of power. For the populist, power is an end in itself and the people

are simply conceived as an instrument by which one can climb to the ranks of the highest office. Political power, instead of being a way to build prosperity for all citizens, is seen by the populist as a means of access to the material wealth and the symbolic prestige that it confers. The populist promotes the insecurity of the scapegoat: he profits from the destabilization of society by identity conflicts. His cold approach denies the humanity of the other and reveals a lack of humanity in the sense of Ubuntu. According to the philosophy of Ubuntu, I am because you are. If I am indifferent to the suffering of the other, it reveals the loss of my own humanity. In the philosophy of Ubuntu, every human being is perfectible.

**By identity**, we mean the manipulation of real or perceived differences for the purpose of gaining or maintaining power. Instead of celebrating the wealth for the nation represented by the diversity of peoples and cultures, the populist develops an allergy to differences. He dreams of a world of one color and one dimension. If he could erase the colors of the rainbow and keep only one, he would. He replaces equality in diversity by hierarchy of races, ethnicities, gender, religion ... By his hate speech and stigmatization of the other, the populist transforms the best of his country, the cultural diversity of citizens, into a source of conflict. Even in countries such as Rwanda and Burundi, where Hutu and Tutsi share the same language, the same culture and live intermingled in the same territory, the populist finds a way to pit citizens against each other on the basis of superficial differences. When the populist instrumentalizes religion, he attacks not only the beliefs that are different from his, but also the moderate elements of his own denomination. We see the populists everywhere that Islamist organizations are rife. The populist elite imagine a one-dimensional world where all differences of thought, culture and religion have been abolished.

**By radical**, we mean the will to exterminate the other who is different. In Rwanda, those who carried out the genocide of Tutsis did not ask their political beliefs before murdering them. Neither the political or religious beliefs nor the age of the victims could save them. Their ethnic origin alone was enough to condemn them to death. In fact, religious or ethnic extremist movements make no distinction between state officials and ordinary citizens. The will to exterminate the other simply because he is different is radical. Genocide is the highest stage of radical identity populism. Before the extermination, the populist politicians have already banalised and instrumentalised the evil that is racism, sexism and xenophobia.

## **Towards an Africa in peace**

The Culture of Peace is not a closed concept. It is a concept that is integrated with the elements of the peoples' traditions for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the diffusion of the values of peace. From this point of view, the philosophy of Ubuntu, the tradition of the Ubushingantahe in Burundi, the traditional and participatory justice of the Agacaca in Rwanda are all components of the Culture of Peace. Let us now consider the key constituents of the Culture of Peace in relation to the African situation.

1- Respect for life, for the human person and for his rights.

"I am because you are" says an African proverb. The human being is foremost a social being. The philosophy of Ubuntu teaches us that the suffering of the other calls into question our

own humanity. I cannot be indifferent to the violence and poverty that affects the other, without eroding my own humanity. Respect for life, for the human person and for his rights is also the condition for the respect by the other of my human rights. We can not be free ourselves in an environment of violence and poverty. Being free is inseparable from the responsibility to the public interest. "To be free", says Mandela "is not just to get rid of my chains, but even more it is to live in a way that enhances the freedom of others." Respect for life and the human person means that under no circumstances can we justify the use of degrading practices against the other.

## **2-Access of all citizens to economic and social rights**

Any power that does not seek to guarantee fundamental economic and social rights to those who are vulnerable, imposes violence on part of the society, which in some cases can amount to war. Such a pessimistic view of the future is the cause of social exclusion and wars. The idea, among a certain elite, that African countries do not have the capacity to speed up the pace of development and to overcome poverty leads to exclusion. Those who feed the misconception that there is not enough wealth in the country for everyone, and so it should belong to only a few, will tend to use all tricks to exclude others from the race to power, which they consider to be the source of their own material enrichment. They will see in the other an enemy in competition for the riches that they consider to be scarce. To struggle for a lasting peace requires that we struggle against structural violence and all the latent prejudices in the society that lead to war. Especially, we should not forget that heroism is not measured in number of lives cut down but the number of lives saved. To guarantee human rights for all means to guarantee a life of dignity to millions of individuals who, in circumstances of hate, of hunger and war, will die every day of a preventable death.

## **3- Peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation**

In much of Africa, people from different ethnic groups continue to live in harmony. They have developed or inherited traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and a vision of the world and the other that keep them safe from identity wars. We must keep in mind that reconciliation is the affair of visionaries, those who are strong and certainly not those who are weak. For it is indeed necessary to have courage and lucidity if one is not to reduce the history of a people to one's personal suffering. It takes courage to think that even the executioners are human beings who, perhaps, can free themselves from their deadly blindness. We should reflect on how countries such as post-apartheid South Africa, post-conflict Mozambique or post-genocide Rwanda have found a way out of the impasse of extreme violence. The development of a specific conflict resolution process can not ignore the experience of others. In their essence, the different reconciliation processes are all part of a philosophy of life, a strategic way of thinking that is both modern and traditional, and that concerns the construction of peace for present and future generations. Thanks to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa has managed a peaceful transition. Through the Participatory Justice of Agacaca, Rwanda has been able to escape from the deadlock of genocide and successfully rebuild a nation at peace. One of the factors of instability in Burundi is the marginalization of the Bashingantahas, the traditional sages who were devoted to truth and justice. For

any reconciliation there is a precondition - the truth. Without the recognition of grievances, there can be no forgiveness or reconciliation.

#### **4. Equality between men and women and the inclusion of diversity**

Equality between men and women should result in parity. The under-representation of women in power is an act of injustice and a symbolic violence against a part of humanity. The invisibility or under-representation of women in leadership means that their identity is considered inferior to that of men. Beyond the gender issue, it must be said that there can be no lasting peace in a country where some citizens are excluded from power because of their identity. The stability of multi-ethnic and multicultural countries therefore also depends on a policy that is inclusive of women and all national diversities. For the exclusion of the other who is different creates an identity of exclusion that in the long run can become a source of violent conflict. To be effective, the policy of inclusion should not be limited solely to sharing power at the top; it must involve all levels of a state and society. It must be part of an overall policy that extends from top to bottom. The issue of inclusion of diversity is also closely linked to the fight against social exclusion. Learning to think of diversity as an asset, like the colors of the rainbow, this is the role of education for peace.

#### **5- Democracy and freedom of expression**

Without the right to elect one's leaders, one is the object of history and not its subject. Free and democratic elections humanize and empower when they create the conditions for reflection and when the citizens elect their representatives in good conscience: citizens thus become the masters of their own destiny. But we cannot ignore the fact that many electoral speeches exploit the fear and hatred of the other; instead of searching for the common good, the electoral process is transformed into an opportunity to destabilize society. Where institutional constraints fail to protect society against the hatred of the other, the electoral debate is not seen as a crime but as an acceptable view. In such a context, media can become amplifiers of factors of hatred in the society. The symbolic violence of identity discourse by politicians and media in Rwanda resulted in the genocide of 1994. Similarly, the concepts of "ivorian" and "congolité" were popularized by the media. We cannot imagine a democracy without freedom of expression, but how then can we ensure that freedom of speech is an instrument of peace and not of war?

Educating for democracy therefore requires the transmission of humanistic values of responsibility to the human community. It also involves the training of journalists to treat information not only as an expression of misfortune, but also as the illustration of human resistance and the victory of life over the forces of hatred and exclusion. Democracy must be both an instrument and a framework of tolerance, inclusion, development and elevation of thought. The degree of the vitality of a democracy is measured at the same time by the level of involvement of its citizens in public debates, by the human quality of their proposals and by their ability to control the politics of the officials that they have elected. A democracy that has not been misguided and emptied of its contents will not allow its government to be taken over by exclusive ethnic, religious or xenophobic and corrupt power. Because democracy is more than just access to power; its test is in the mode of its management.

## **6. Respect for the environment**

Environmental pollution leads to "natural" disasters, desertification of soils and famines that generate conflict. We can no longer afford to think of the environment as a handy object at our beck and call. If we neglect it, it will affect us. We cannot afford to think that we the only beings worthy of respect. Respect for the environment is therefore a matter of security and collective responsibility, in addition to being a philosophy of life. We are in a relationship of interdependence with trees, forests, oceans, air and animals. All of the matter that makes up our body is also contained in our environment. Taking care of ourselves also means taking care of the environment. Planting trees, reversing desertification, reducing pollution, these also permit millions of human beings to live in conditions that are decent.

## **Conclusion**

The Culture of Peace should be considered and taught as an ideal that ties together and strengthens that which has been torn apart. It is the antithesis of Radical Identity Populism, a theory of inclusion and reconciliation with which we can achieve the freedom promised, an Africa at peace with herself and with the world. It considers the differences within a nation to be a precious resource. It reminds us that there is no national identity except the diversity, both cultural and human, of all its citizens. The Culture of Peace demands all the human rights for all the people, because, as always, it is poverty and ignorance that continue to provide the fertile soil for the growth of identity demagoguery.