

AFRO AMERICANS AND THE AFRICAN
REVOLUTION: SOME THEORETICAL NOTES

ABDUL ALKALIMAT

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Peoples College
P.O. Box 7696
Chicago, Illinois 60680
312-842-8242

The modern African Revolution is nearly a century old if we date it from the resistance to the colonial pattern of rule agreed upon at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. At the conference, the imperialist powers gathered to negotiate their spheres of colonial domination, including the USA as an observer to protect its neo-colonial interests in Liberia. Further, the involvement of Afro-Americans with Africans in developing the theory and practical plans for the African Revolution is virtually as old. This article is an attempt to develop some theoretical notes on this development, the relationship of support efforts by Afro-Americans for the development of the African Revolution.

Black people, as people of African descent, are found in every part of the world because of the Slave Trade and the impact of imperialism on Africa. Further, the experiences of these dispersed Black people have represented apparent similarities in the midst of a worldwide system of capitalist exploitation. This has repeatedly given rise to political relationships on the international scene. This has been true not only in the familiar circles of Black nationalists and Pan Africanists, but in the context of the international communist movement as well. In general, Black people have always been viewed as part of their own specific historical context, a country or even continent, but also in the broader context of world relations between different races of people. This has been one of the most misunderstood problems of international revolutionary movements.

This paper is going to focus on a very specific history, the historical development of revolutionary Marxist thought within the African revolution and its parallel with the development of independent revolutionary Marxist thought within the Black Liberation Movement in the U.S. One of the important reasons

for developing these notes is that there is a political parallel to the further integration of Blacks in the U.S. and Blacks in Africa into the world capitalist system, each within their own concrete historical context (country) while at the same time, interacting with worldwide forces in which they have, to some extent, a common identity.

Wallerstein, in his article "The Three Stages of African Involvement in World Economy,"¹ develops a three-stage periodization schema.

- (a) 1750-1900: "Phase I was the phase of 'informal empire'; that is, those areas of Africa, mainly on the coast, that came to be incorporated into the capitalist world economy as peripheral zones retain their local sovereign political institutions for the most part. The way was open now for a second integration of Africa into the capitalist world-economy, which would occur in the twentieth century, one that would not only be more extensive but more intensive, as it would begin to reorganize the class structure."
- (b) 1900-1975: "Thus, the essential objective of the second phase of African incorporation into the capitalist world economy was to create sufficient cash crops to meet world needs as defined at this stage and to sustain the political administrative cost that European powers had forced on each other."
- (c) 1975- : "The third phase now starting will complete Africa's integration into the world economy. In the coming 50 years, this incorporation will take one of two forms: dependent development or revolution transformation as part of a network

← add something on what class relations

of forces within the world-economy as a whole, which will further the transformation to a socialist world system."

While any schema is necessarily general, and demands clarification regarding any specific context or historical moment, it is important that the integration of Africa into the capitalist world economy, and the development of capitalist production relations and industrialized production forces, is the appropriate material basis on which to assess the development of the politics of the African revolution. What is being argued is that it is a ^{MODAL} context for and not a simplistic determinant of the African revolution.

On the other hand, it is possible to use the periodization scheme developed by Peoples College to sum up the extent to which Black people in the United States are integrated into the core of the capitalist economy of the U.S.

"The thesis is that Black people's history in the United States has developed in a dialectical (i.e. dynamic) fashion--moving from one period of relative social cohesion to another, separated by periods of transition and social disruption. The main periods of the Afro-American experience are the slave period, the (rural) agricultural period, and the (urban) industrial period. The periods of transition are the Reconstruction period between the slave and rural periods."

not the complete quote

This schema identifies the Black experience in the U.S. as being transformed within the context of the urban industrial space from World War I through World War II. There are schools of thought, especially split labor

market theorists and theorists of labor-market segmentation, who would define Blacks as remaining in the peripheral sector of the industrial economy. The main point, however, is the qualitative difference between living and working as a rural sharecropper in the South in the early part of the twentieth century, versus doing virtually any kind of job in the context of the industrial city from the 1960s on. In sum, these two parallel developments (in Africa and in the USA) whereby Blacks have been increasingly integrated into a capitalist process, with more direct involvement in the overall class struggle, sets the stage for understanding the dynamics of the African revolution and how Afro-Americans have related to it.

While theory must always be regarded as the summation of historical practice, conceptual ^{clarity} on an analytical level is necessary in order to illuminate the facts to reveal the essential content of the historical dynamic. There are at least four fundamental concepts to the historical development of revolutionary trend in twentieth century Pan Africanism. Each of these concepts is a theoretical terrain of battle, in which the European thesis of reaction is confronted by the African antithesis of self-defense leading to the negation of both by the revolutionary thrust of the class conscious working-class in Europe and the worker peasant revolutionary alliance in Africa. Of course, there are parallels here with the Afro-Americans as well. The first concept is the concept of race. This concept was used by Europeans as a way to establish a biological hierarchy placing African on the bottom and thereby justifying their domination. Africans indulged in the opposite rationale identifying the genetic character of white as cold and ruthless, and aggressive, while Africans were humane cooperative, and moral. The current scientific position essentially negates both of these views by

Theoretical Concepts of 20th Century Pan Africanism

RACE: Biological concept of physical characteristics, reflected in social and ideological practice as racism. Africans are generally defined as Black in color, with strong hair and full facial features, and universally subjected to negative mechanics of social control—Racism.

NATION: Historical form of social life, rooted in common experience with shared territory, language, culture and economy. African countries are creations of European colonialization, though many are large and diverse enough to be considered multi-national states with the revolutionary task of consolidating the many indigeneous ethnic groups into one political and economic system.

IMPERIALISM: Historical stage of world capitalist hegemony, dominated by transnational corporations. Imperialism reflects the division of the world into dominating industrialized and wealthy regions, versus the dominated regions with natural resources, to extract cheap unskilled labor, to exploit a large consumer market. All of Africa has been dominated by imperialism.

CLASS STRUGGLE: Historical forms of conflict within a society that intensify to the extent of the level of internal capitalist development. African societies face increasing levels of class struggle although in most cases the working class has yet to fully develop.

by placing the ultimate test of determining factors in the realm of history as oppose to the realm of biology, though it is obvious that further research into biological differences within humanity therefore, what has been a historical force is racism the way in which physical characteristics have been used to rationalize a particular view of history and social relations. Racism is a factor in defining the relationships between Blacks and whites throughout the world.

The central historical concepts of twentieth century Pan Africanism are: nation, imperialism, and class struggle. The nation as a historical evolved concept is a concept that must be understood not in relationship to the internal consolidation of a market and class relation to relation to protect this market such as was the case in Europe, but rather must be understood as a function of European colonization in Africa. African social development was arrested with the invasion of European powers and countries was organized with respect to the needs and privileges of these European powers and not the internal logic of indigeous development. Therefore, African countries are European hybrids. It is in this context that we find the nation consisting of an interplay of three levels of reality. (1) The indigeous ethnic reality, (2) the European colonial culture, especially language, and political economy world network, and (3) the reality being the colonial nation in which the many different ethnic groups confront the colonial power in the formation of a twentieth century African country.

Imperialism is that worldwide stage development of capitalism, whereby the economic relations reflect the imperative of the capitalist system searching for greater profits through the export of capital and not simply the export of consumer goods. The development of imperialism is another way to

to discuss the increased integration of Africa into the world economy, in fact, one might even say that this historical stage to some degree coincides with Wallerstein's stage 2 mentioned above.

The last concept, class struggle, must be clarified because here it precisely means the internal development of production relations and production forces within African countries resulting in the development of capitalistic classes, workers and capitalists in varying type of middle strata whose struggle over the economic and political resources and the future of their country. There is another way to see the class struggle, its international manifestations, but the important point here is that the international level in the fight for national liberation, there was the necessity and practice of all class unity within each African country, whereas in this new stage of class struggle in Africa, this class unity breaks down into class antagonism. This is the essential defining feature of Africa today.

In general, the modern African revolution can be usefully understood as having gone through four stages. Each of these stages has to do with the politics of the revolution, reflecting changes in the strategy in tactics. The chart indicates in a schematic form these four stages. It is important to recognize that each of the stages does not fit the date listed there, but rather must be understood as overlapping, as inner penetrating and as co-existing in different region and different countries at the same time. However, what is true, that at any given point, one of these four stages has been dominant, and it is for this reason that its possible to understand the relationship between the African revolution and Afro-American struggle in light of these stages. The dominance of each of these has been reflected in the media, the rhetoric of African leadership, and the number of people who have traveled throughout the world and Africa spreading information and sharing the political line.

The first stage of the African revolution occurs after the Berlin Conference and reflects the peculiar role that descendants of Africa in the West played in the overall conceptual orientation, theoretical orientation of the African revolution. It is in the West that Africans become de-tribalized and homogenized into a Black African (viv-viv, the white European). And it is in this context in the West that Africa is regarded as a single entity. In Africa, Africans were by and large either confronting each other from the particularity of African ethnicity, or beginning to deal with the inner penetration of race and nationality in the confrontation with the white European in Africa, at which time it was possible to make a distinction between one white person another.

So it follows that the first stage of the African revolution has its ideological and political expression mainly, outside of the continent. It must be said, however, within the context of Africa at no time were Africans totally acquiescent, there was always revolt. This revolt has been discussed by the post-colonial Africanist historiography, including such struggles as the Matumbi people of Tanzania in their revolt against the Germans or the Maji Maji rebellion that followed in 1905. These were indigenous revolts using culture and religion to oppose and resist European colonialism. What we have in mind is the more modern struggle which does not reflect the confrontation of traditional society with European colonial rule, but rather reflects the struggles of African people within the colonial structures transforming them and liberating traditional society in their way.

The concept "Pan Africanism" was formulated at a conference in 1900 called by a West Indian lawyer, Sylvester Williams. This conference attended by Blacks from the US and the West Indies had its main purpose the ideological clarification of Pan Africanism on a world scale the first major event of considerable political importance was the first Pan African Congress initiated by W.E.B. DuBois in 1919. It was held in Paris simultaneously with the Versailles Peace Conference in order to make a direct appeal on behalf of the African masses. Given the backward and barbaric racism that dominated the world at that time, they were not concerned with demanding African independence at that point. However, what they did state was this:

the natives of Africa must have the right to participate
in the government as fast as their development permits,
in conformity with the principle that the government
exist for the natives, and not the natives for the government.

They shall at once be allowed to participate in local and tribal government, according to ancient usage, and this participation shall gradually extend, as education and experience proceed, to the higher office of the state; to the end that, in time, Africa shall ruled by the consent of the Africans."

The main demand was for international protection of the former colonial territories from a defeated Germany. The peace conference led to the League of Nations and demand was taken up there. Their additional demands were essentially democratic in character: abolishment of slavery and forced labor, rights literacy and vocational education, the right to participate in government, regulation of land use to preserve the national resources, the restriction of capital investment in the interest of the native peoples.