

Concerning Sanya Osha's Essay – 'Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba: Profile of a Guerrilla Intellectual'

I would like to thank the colleague Sanya Osha for having tried to reflect on my work and its circumstances. I realise that it is not easy to reflect on the activities of someone one does not really know well and his or her working conditions and circumstances. I also realise the author's limitations in terms of the accessibility of my work. I want, in the comments I am going to make, to share with him certain considerations that may help him to improve his very important pursuit.

1. I do not think of myself as being a guerrilla intellectual at all. I have reflected a lot on the activities of guerrilla intellectuals such as Che Guevara, Régis Debray and Leonard Mitudidi. I did not think that circumstances in the 1998 DR Congo were ripe for a repetition of those kinds of activities. I joined the rebellion with a specific mission: how to reorient the armed pressure on the Kinshasa regime—which had closed all the channels of communication—to force it into direct negotiations for the re-activation of the blocked democratisation process. This was given the fact that major political conflicts that have led, on and off, to armed conflicts could only be resolved politically. This position was supported by and in line with that of certain leaders of the region: Mwalimu Nyerere, President Mandela, President Mkapa, President Chiluba, etc. After I was elected, unanimously, President of the Congolese Rally for Democracy-RCD, I led the delegations for discussions with regional leaders from capital to capital: Dar-es-Salaam, Lusaka, Pretoria, Gaborone, Kigali, Kampala, Ougadougou and Tripoli, just from August to December 1998. I tried to orient the vision of the rebellion by insisting that ours be organised as a democratising rebellion—'la rébellion démocratisante'. Its ultimate aims were supposed to be not a military victory per se, but a political victory. Military victory makes the victors so haughty that they become opposed to a democratic opening up. This position, not shared by all parties in the rebellion, led to my demise. Those who had no confidence in the democratic process to get to power, wanted to get first military victory and then see later about democracy. At the end, of course, most of my ideas calling for Inter-

Ernest Wamba dia Wamba
Kinshasa
DR Congo

Congolese Dialogue won. Even if, having no army and controlling no territory at the time, I was put aside in the power sharing.

2. I always think that academics have also the obligation, as citizens, to be involved in the movement to save their country when it is clear that it is going down the drain. I find it insupportable to be in a sinking boat and still be happy pursuing my scientific work inside a cell in the boat. Running away and letting the boat sink does not really appeal to me. I could have made myself a citizen of another country, as others have done; this also does not appeal to me.

3. Most of my articles were published either in English or in French. A number of manuscripts submitted to publishers have yet to be. I have not made a decision to refrain from publishing my work at all. It is true, however, that I have not made publishing a first priority at all. I have many working notes and drafts of publishable work waiting to be organised and sent for publication. Curious publishers want to know if I would accept an offer of contract to write my experience in the rebellion. It is sad to see that most so-called progressive publishers or African leaders prefer receiving our analyses free but not help us materially to systematise them and publish them for future generations. I do not think there is a leader in Africa who has done what European leaders did to support people like Descartes or Leibniz.

4. Works referred to by Sanya, in the third paragraph of page 2, have been published. I see that Sanya did not have access to the sources. The first one referred to has been published by *Quest: Philosophical Discussions* (vol. V, no. 2, December 1991). The second one is in *Development Dialogue* (no. 2, 1995). The third one is a chapter of Ulf Himmelstrand et al., eds., *Development in African Perspective* (James Currey Ltd, London, 1994), and the last mentioned was published by ZNET (August 20, 2003).

5. The correct chronology of events leading to my involvement in the rebellion needs to be clarified. I have written, in French though, something clarifying this point (see *Leçons d'une Expérience de la Rébellion, 1998–2002: Un Témoignage*). I do not remember having met Sanya and I do not know how much he knows about me. Some of his speculations seem to be incriminating. Is it really possible to deduce from a reading of a few of my essays the thrust of my biography and make statements about the level of my 'ruthlessness and corruption' (p.3)? Even my enemies have never accused me of that. I hope he has read my late son Philippe Wamba's *Kinship* to get a first insight into my personality.

6. If the ideals we struggle for were already accepted by 'a wide array of social and political actors', would we still need to agitate and fight for them so hard? How can Sanya say: '... an academic must be prepared to engage in a mode of politics without values and a politics of violent domination where a Hobbesian disposition is normally the most attractive option'? Does to struggle against a system of negative values mean to join it, to be integrated in it, to be incorporated by it? From where should one struggle to transform such a system? Is this not a form of defeatism due to the powerlessness of the ivory tower intellectual? To start with, a committed intellectual does not struggle alone in the process of struggle for self-emancipation. Is there no other way out except a Hobbesian type of politics, requiring that everyone engaged in politics must be ruthless and corrupt? Can there be an emancipative politics? How can it be struggled for without involving oneself on the side of those who struggle for it? 'One must get one's feet wet', said Walter Rodney, 'before gaining the truth'. From a position of humility, would it not be better to ask me what I have learned in getting myself involved? Of course, when involved in struggle like ours, one must realise the real possibility of being defeated, but should one stay out because of that possibility? At the end the question is: who does one serve openly?

7. I know the country from different points of views and angles: from a stay in an

underground jail (1981–1982) from where many did not come back; from an academic study and research point of view; from a participation in something that was close to a national palaver – the Sovereign National Conference – from inside the rebellion where I was face to face with death four or so times; from the so-called Inter-Congolese Dialogue, as a transitional senator, etc. I have seen situations that would move anyone with a minimum sense of compassion or feeling for humanity – seeing for example people, including children, cut into pieces just because of what they were and not what they had done. I still felt that running away was not morally acceptable to me. Short of the feelings of real love for people really suffering, it is difficult to understand my commitment. No analysis, whatever its quality, is enough to be persuaded to face death. That is why we find it unbearable that those who should know us, like Nzongola, have accused us of being puppet of Rwanda, those very leaders who actually organised to kill us in Kisangani, for example. I believe that there is no material force that can defeat a spiritual force.

8. Each day in our political involvement, the analysis of our country, in all its situations, deepens. This is what provokes in us an insatiable thirst for new ideas, of how other colleagues understand the world situation. Almost every other week, I write a kind of summing-up of how I view the situation. I do not always have time to translate it into English, for example, so that English-speaking colleagues could read what I write. It is unfortunate. My friend Jacques Depelchin, a multi-language-speaker, used to help me translate as fast as possible some notes – he is too busy. I think it is important that there be a serious intellectual exchange, back and forth, between those involved inside political battles and those who are outside. I try to correspond with those willing intellectuals – including great philosophers such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Camatte and François Bochet. Some who find our approach doomed to failure ask us only to leave and go outside to write a good book! A friend has committed to our struggle, every month, one hundred dollars of his salary: it is an impressive commitment.

9. The issue of Marxist ideology has always been ill understood. I have been accused of all kinds of contradictory things; either that I became an anti-Marxist or that I criticise non-Marxists while I do not criticise Marxists. I am concerned with how to

achieve emancipative politics; the contribution of all Marxists that is helpful is welcome. What I have written on that matter is still valid. I am currently studying the works of Alain Badiou, Roy Bhaskar and John Holloway. This is just to say that the issue of the unity of theory and practice, complex as it is, concerns us very much. To really understand the situation of our country, we need a clear position on globalisation. I published an introduction to my position on the question.

10. It is inaccurate to say that I propose the Mbongi as a new mode of politics. The Mbongi and the palaver (Ntungasani), in the experiences I had in my culture, have been the agencies where participation, by all, in the treatment of collective affairs has been the closest. I raise the issue whether or not lessons drawn from such experiences could help us to re-conceptualise the people's rooted agencies of struggles for emancipation. We have created here a group we call Mbongi a Nsi (literally: country's Mbongi). It is a site through which we organise discussions. There I presented a paper: 'Le Mbongi, la Palabre: hier, aujourd'hui et demain' in which I raised the issue: why have cultural agencies that were capable of resolving conflicts among the people become incapable of doing so? People who participated there felt compelled to think; they wait impatiently for another paper. Despite the situation of globalisation requiring that we think and act globally, we still need a certain 'local theoretical sovereignty' to be able to deal with behaviour imposed by consumerism, for example. The modern state, in our countries, is a grafted or an implant state. The majority of people who live in the rural areas exercise no impact on the very functioning of that state. A minority of people, that derive their very power from it, perpetuate this state's historical illegitimacy. A re-conceptualisation of both politics and the state is needed to see what possibilities of a new mode of politics there may be. Note that a new mode is not a creation of a single individual; it is of the order of an invention in a specific situation.

11. My assessment of Cheikh Anta Diop is somewhat different from what Sanya thinks. I would not say that my 'entire intellectual project has been based on' Diop's premise. Diop proposed many challenging positions: his reading of history in general (*Civilisation ou Barbarie*), his conception of dialectics, his conception of the fundamental differences of cultural cradles, his preconditions for the possibility of a unity

of African history, his vision of the healing of humanity, etc. Those are but some of the issues I am still grappling with. What I said in my article was a first reaction to that work. I am now reading what his disciples have been writing – what I can read. Some of the questions need spiritual profundity. The question of the responsibility of Africans in the whole struggle for reparations for the slave trade, for example. I have been associated in Kinshasa with a ceremony of apology for the sale of slaves and the buying back of the descendents of slaves. Diop speaks of the impact of the starting position over the whole process up to the end. The slave trade, the inaugural capitalist crime against humanity, needs to be dealt with correctly, to help us grasp why other genocides or holocausts were bound to happen, etc. The central position of Haiti's history is not often well understood. For me the work of Diop is not just an occasion to assume a certain nationalist afro-centric posture. It is a search for a vision in a situation of globalisation built on the dehumanisation of Black peoples. Those who live on that dehumanisation are also alienated. How do we recreate egalitarian humanity, so to speak?

12. Death has haunted me all along. I have lost three children, very promising ones too. I have always struggled with the idea that one must have a cause to struggle with when one is alive. I do not live with the fear of dying; each of us will die, sooner or later. We must do what we can to contribute to the betterment of this world so that the next generations won't need to struggle as hard. My sons confronted me one day and said: 'Dad, your generation has failed completely at all levels: revolution, liberation, development, etc. Should you not leave it to our generations to try?' My answer was: 'I do not feel like I have failed. The fact that you are able to ask me that question means that I have done something in educating you'. That my son, Philippe, died before me, one who could have re-evaluated all my work and pursue it, was my first most important philosophical thinking about death. I have resolved it to say to myself that I must pursue his work on top of mine until death finds me. We are trying to get his book translated into French. One person's life must always be viewed in the community of people; otherwise, it will always be seen to be incomplete.

13. Those are few comments I can make as I read Sanya's essay. I should one day come back to it and write a more theoretical response. Right now, I am still bogged down with other supposedly urgent matters.