African Awakenings: the courage to invent the future

Firoze Manji

We are living today in what is probably one of the most inspiring times in our recent history, reminiscent of the period of the rise of the anti-colonial revolutions that followed the Second World War. Our continent is pregnant with hope, but equally it carries hope's twin, despair. This duality, which has remained a characteristic of our post-colonial inheritance, was perhaps best illustrated in the events of 1994: on the one hand we witnessed the rise of the popular movement that brought about the downfall of the apartheid regime in South Africa; and on the other, we saw the massacre of nearly a million people in Rwanda in a period of a few months. Both hope and despair coexist in all our countries. But because of the depth of the current crisis of capitalism, that duality will become ever more polarised in the coming period.

African awakenings

We are all familiar with the extraordinary events that took place in Tunisia and Egypt leading to the downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, and followed by popular uprisings in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and elsewhere in what is known today as the Middle East. Corporate media has christened these the 'Arab Spring'. However, this in not an adequate descriptor as it ignores the widespread expressions of discontent across the continent. Throughout 2011 we have witnessed significant uprisings in a large number of African countries – and we should not forget that Tunisia and Egypt are *African* countries. Indeed, where does Africa begin and where does it end? Did the building of the Suez Canal amputate Africa from its intertwined history with the peoples to the east? Is Africa merely a geography? Or should it more correctly be seen as a history, a history that precedes the colonial conquest by millennia.

The uprisings of 2011 have not been confined to the Arab-speaking world. There have also been protests, strikes and other actions in Western Sahara, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Gabon, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Madagascar, Mozambique, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Djibouti, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, Botswana, Namibia, Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland, South Africa, and Uganda. Many of these uprisings have been brutally suppressed.

Some of the uprisings have perhaps not (yet) been on the scale that we have witnessed in North Africa, and each has its own aetiologies. But despite the specificities of each, together they can legitimately be considered as the cumulative response to a common experience shared over the last thirty years. Indeed, they have much in common with events we have witnessed this year in Wisconsin (USA), Spain, Greece and, indeed, in Italy (where 95% of the population delivered a resounding defeat of the government in a referendum that sought to privatise water, to extend impunity to politicians, and to attempt to expand the use of nuclear power).

The shifting political and social climate in Africa is not limited to the overt, large-scale uprisings. There is growing evidence in a number of countries of social movements re-emerging during the last 10 years, providing a framework through which the disenfranchised have begun to re-assert their dignity, proclaiming - even if only implicitly - their aspiration to determine their own destinies, their own right to self-determination. The emergence and activities of movements such as Bunge La Mwananchi, Bunge Sisters and the Unga Revolution in Kenya, Abahlali base Mjondolo, the Anti Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement in South Africa, the anti-water privatization movement, the growing militancy of the LBGTI movements, the formation of alliances of peasant and farmer organisations, the growing demands from organised labour –- all these are manifestations of an underlying mood of discontent and disenchantment with the social and political order. Even in South Africa, that so-called democratic success story, "South African police have conservatively measured an annual average [since 2005] of more than 8000 'Gatherings Act' incidents by an angry urban populace which remains unintimidated by the superficially populist government of Jacob Zuma" (Bond, 2010).

Today, the gathering momentum of these movements for change defines the social and political scene on the continent. We are witnessing not so much an 'Arab Spring' as an *African Awakening*.

What has given rise to the awakenings?

Conventional wisdom - or more accurately, perhaps, corporate media - would suggest that the uprisings are happening because the growing middle-class have rising expectations for individual freedom, mobility, money, private health and education, luxury commodities, cars, and so on. It is suggested that what is fuelling the discontent with autocratic regimes is middle-class aspiration for an unfettered market and frustration with the regimes that prevent them enjoying these benefits. To give credence to this perspective, the African Development Bank and the World Bank claim that Africa has a burgeoning middle class: apparently one-in-three Africans are today middle class, based on the ridiculous and laughable definition of that class as being those with an income of $2 - $20 a day "a group that includes a vast number of people considered extremely poor by any reasonable definition, given the higher prices of most consumer durables in African cities." Conveniently forgotten, of course, is that 61 per cent of Africans, who are below the $2 a day level, are mired in deep poverty (Bond 2011).

However, the mass uprisings and protests that erupted across the continent and in the Middle East, as well as those that we have witnessed in Wisconsin, Ohio, France, Spain, Italy, as well as the 'sub-clinical' discontent manifested in the emergence of protests by social movements share a similar impetus.

Whatever one might have to say about the shortcomings of the post independence

governments in Africa - whether of the first or second waves - whatever we might think about the shortcomings of some of the social and political policies, whatever we might say about the undemocratic nature of the regimes that were established, we have to acknowledge their extraordinary achievements over a relatively short period of time after independence. In the space of less than two decades, through the establishment of universal health care, education and social welfare, the expansion and development of transport and communications, and the establishment of grain marketing boards and cooperatives, there were dramatic improvements in life-expectancy at birth, infant and child mortality, material mortality, university education, and many other parameters of social progress. All these gains were the result of hard fought independence struggles through which many lives were lost and much blood shed. The regimes of independence had in effect struck a social contract with the mass movement that brought them to power, and to some measure, as part of a modernisation project, they sought to deliver on their promises, albeit in an uneven way (Manji 1998).

But over the last 30 years, countries in the global South, and in particular in Africa, have been faced with coping with the systematic reversal of the gains of independence. These reversals emerged in the context of a number of major world events: the spiraling worldwide recession of the 1970s; the defeat of the US in Vietnam; the de-linking of the dollar from the gold standard and floating of currencies; the emergence of OPEC which enabled oil-producing states to control the world price of oil, with the result of a glut of capital flooding the market seeking new avenues for profits; the rise of the debt-crisis of countries in the global South as their currencies became devalued; and the establishment of the hegemony of the New Right and its neoliberal policies under the tutelage of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA in the 1980s.

Almost without exception, the same set of social and economic policies were implemented under pressure from the IFIs (international financial institutions) across the African continent – the so-called structural adjustment programmes (later rebranded as Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes), all to ensure that African countries serviced the growing debt. But the agenda of the creditors was also to use the debt "crisis" to open avenues for capital expansion, through extreme privatization and liberalization of African economies.

The state was declared 'inefficient' (despite its considerable achievements in the short period since independence), and public services were first run down before being sold off to the oligopolies for a song. The state was prohibited from subsidising agricultural production and investing in social infrastructure, with prohibitions on capital investment in health, education, transport and telecommunications, until eventually public goods were taken over by the 'private' (read oligopoly) sector. Tariff barriers to goods from the advanced capitalist countries were removed; access to natural resources opened up for pillaging; tax regimes relaxed; and 'export processing zones' established to enable raw exploitation of labour without any regulations from the state or trade unions. Over

time, privatisation was extended to agriculture, land, and food production and distribution (Manji, Free and Mark, 2011).

Landlessness, unemployment, increases in child, infant and maternal mortality rates, decline in life expectancy rates, impoverishment on an unprecedented scale came to be the lot of the majority of citizens, while a minority accumulated and enriched themselves through their control of the state and alliance with international corporations (Manji, 1998). Countries that only two decades ago were characterised as having more than 80 per cent of their populations being rural, were transformed so that today the UN Habitat estimates that some 50 per cent live in the peri-urban slums with no rights of abode, tenure or any other form of security. Deregulation of all constraints on capital was the mantra of the day, justified as the precondition for encouraging foreign investment, which in turn would supposedly lead to "development". (Habitat 2010)

The net effect was to reduce the state to having a narrowly prescribed role in economic affairs, and precious little authority or resources to devote to the development of social infrastructure, its primary role being to ensure an 'enabling environment' for international capital and to police the endless servicing of debt to international finance institutions (Amin 2010).

But the most serious consequence of these policies was not the reversal of the many gains of independence, but the erosion of the ability of citizens to control their own destinies. Self-determination, originally such a powerful motor force for mobilisation in the anti-colonial movement, was gradually suffocated. Economic policies were no longer determined by citizens and their representatives in government, but by technocrats from the international finance institutions and the World Bank, with hefty support provided by the international aid agencies. As the state was forced to retreat from the provision of social services, the space was avidly occupied by the development NGOs (non-governmental organisations). What citizens once had a right to expect by virtue of the gains of independence was replaced by charitable acts of agencies that were dependent on the support of international aid institutions whose policies were increasingly aligned with those of the IFIs (Manji and O'Coill, 2002).

This was also a period of significant repression. Political opposition in most countries was discouraged or suppressed; opponents of government were locked up or disappeared. And where progressive developments occurred – as in Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara – assassinations, support for military coups and economic isolation were some of the weapons used to prevent citizens having the audacity to construct alternatives to the crass policies of neoliberalism. And with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Stalinist 'socialism' in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, the credibility of alternatives to capitalist ideologies collapsed too. Without a coherent alternative to the dominant ideologies of capitalism, Thatcher's famous claim of TINA (there is no alternative) became a reality.

Over time, one of the consequences of neoliberal economic policies was the gradual transformation of citizens into consumers. Those with the resources could exercise choice on where they bought their services, education, and health care. Power and influence over social policy were increasingly determined by wealth. But those who had no means to participate in consumer society – the pauperised, the landless, the jobless, the never-employed – those unable to consume, were left effectively disenfranchised. And those who were able to find employment were forced to accept poor working conditions and low wages. Attempts to organise or protest were discouraged by the knowledge that outside stood a reserve army of labour ever hungry to take jobs from those fortunate enough to have them.

The scale of looting that was opened up as a result of neoliberal policies is well documented. Third World payments of US$340 billion each year flow northwards to service a US$2.2 trillion debt, more than five times the G8's development aid budget.[1] At more than US$10 billion a year since the early 1970s, collectively the citizens of Nigeria, Ivory Coast, the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), Angola and Zambia have been especially vulnerable to the overseas drain of their national wealth. As Brussels-based debt campaigner Eric Toussaint concludes, “Since 1980, over 50 Marshall Plans worth over $4.6 trillion have been sent by the peoples of the Periphery to their creditors in the Centre.” (Bond, 2005)

Research by the Tax Justice Network (TJN) estimates that a staggering US$11.5 trillion has been siphoned 'offshore' by wealthy individuals, held in tax havens where they are shielded from contributing to government revenues. “Around 30% of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP is moved offshore”, writes John Christensen (2006) of TJN: “As several studies have suggested, this rate of capital flight means that Africa - a continent we are continually told is irrevocably indebted - may actually be a net creditor to the rest of the world.” (Christensen 2006) And finance capital and the corporations do all they can to hide their wealth in offshore tax havens. A UNDP report on illicit funds estimates that illicit flows from least developed countries (LDCs) have increased from US$7.9 billion in 1990 to US$20.2 billion in 2008. The top ten exporters of illicit capital account for 63 per cent of total outflows from the LDCs while the top 20 account for nearly 83 per cent. (UNDP 2011)

Corruption, far from being the cause of the crisis in Africa, is the result of the insistence of finance capital to ensure it has its way. Corruption is a fundamental structural feature of capitalism in the global South in the era of globalisation.

Many criticise SAPs / PRSPs as being the product of bad policy - neoliberal policies that are said to be dogmatic and an expression of 'market fundamentalism'. But, as Prabhat Patnaik has argued recently, the policies that are being insisted upon by the international finance institutions are the result of the structural needs of

financialised capitalism in the present era, something that began as early as the 1970s and today dominates all parts of the global economy (Patnaik 2011). There are today, according to Samir Amin, some 500-700 oligopolies that control almost every aspect of our lives, whether to do with the clothes we wear, transportation, communications, agriculture, industry, natural resource extraction etc. (Amin 2010b).

It is worth quoting Patnaik at length here for he captures succinctly the structural nature of the demands of financialised capital that give rise to demands for specific economic conditions to be fulfilled. In the current period, he argues,

> " … finance capital has become international, while the State remains a nation-State. The nation-State therefore willy-nilly must bow before the wishes of finance, for otherwise finance … will leave that particular country and move elsewhere, reducing it to illiquidity and disrupting its economy.
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> "The process of globalization of finance therefore has the effect of undermining the autonomy of the nation-State. The State cannot do what it wishes to do, or what its elected government has been elected to do, since it must do what finance wishes it to do.
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> "It is in the nature of finance capital to oppose any State intervention, other than that which promotes its own interest. It does not want an activist State when it comes to the promotion of employment, or the provision of welfare, or the protection of small and petty producers; but it wants the State to be active exclusively in its own interest. It brings about therefore a change in the nature of the State, from being an apparently supra-class entity standing above society, and intervening in a benevolent manner for "social good", to one that is concerned almost exclusively with the interests of finance capital. To justify this change, which occurs in the era of globalization under pressure from finance capital, the interests of finance are increasingly passed off as being synonymous with the interests of society. If the stock market is doing well then the economy is supposed to be doing well no matter what happens to the level of hunger, malnutrition and poverty. If a country is graded well by credit-rating agencies then that becomes a matter of national pride, no matter how miserable its people are.
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> "Since the nation-State pursuing trade liberalization has to cut customs duties, and therefore must restrict excise duties (so as not to discriminate between domestic and foreign capitalists), and since, in the interests of 'capital accumulation' it keeps taxes on corporate incomes… low, the limit on the fiscal deficit causes an expenditure deflation on its part. And this provides the setting for "privatizing" not only State-owned assets "for a song" but also welfare services and social overheads like education and health. All this is usually referred to as constituting a 'withdrawal of the State' and its rationale is debated in terms of 'the State' versus "the market". Nothing could be more

> wrong than this. The State under neo- liberalism does not withdraw; it is involved as closely as before, or even more closely than before, in the economy, but its intervention is now of a different sort, viz. exclusively in the interests of finance capital." (Patnaik, 2011)

What we face across the continent is a process of massive dispossession: dispossession of land through land grabbing, dispossession of the value of our wages, dispossession of our ability to produce what we, rather than what international finance capital, wants. The extent of land-grabbing that is occurring across the continent illustrates the scale of what is going on: a recent set of reports from the Oakland Institute shows that "land grabs encompassing the size of France, displacing thousands of families, building miles of irrigation canals without concern for environmental impacts, allowing crops to be planted that do not improve food security for Africa--done with little or no consultation with those directly impacted, and have no accountability or transparency." (Oakland Institute, 2011)

But perhaps the most serious dispossession that we face is a political dispossession. Our governments are more accountable today to the international financial institutions, to the corporations that extract wealth without restriction, and to the international aid agencies that finance institutions such as the IMF, than to citizens. In this sense, our countries are increasingly becoming more akin to occupied territories than democracies.

It is this process of dispossession that was behind the eruption of citizens of Tunisia and Egypt. In both cases it was not only the repressive nature of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes, but the accumulated years of experience of 'pauperisation' or impoverishment of the majority, while a few enriched themselves. When Ben Ali and Mubarak were swept out of power by the popular uprisings, there was an immediate resonance across the continent. While the media sought to portray these as some form of contagious disease, the reality was that the dispossessed across the continent and beyond recognized in the anger and demands of the Tunisians and Egyptians their own demand to reclaim their own dignity, and the aspirations of their own desires. They recognized immediately the common experience of the decades of neoliberalism that had impoverished them. It was no surprise that as far away as Wisconsin, Barcelona, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen the call to establish 'Tahrir Squares' has been on the lips of activists.

Rolling back the gains

What then has been the response of empire to the uprisings?

The sweeping away of Ben Ali in Tunisia and of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt took the imperial governments, who had been ardently supporting those regimes financially, economically, politically and militarily, completely by surprise. The corporate media sought to present the uprisings as sudden and spontaneous, despite the evidence in both countries that the eventual pouring of people on to the streets was the

outcome of years of attempts to organize protests that had been brutally suppressed. Corporate media sought to present the mobilizations as being the product of Twitter and Facebook, obscuring the agency of people, and conveniently forgetting that in Egypt the largest mobilization occurred after both the Internet and mobile phone networks had been blocked.

Imperial response to the uprisings has been, in essence, to establish in Tunisia Ben Ali-ism without Ben Ali, and in Egypt, Mubarak-ism without Mubarak. It is instructive to note the profound hypocrisy of US and European governments: in Egypt, they had sought to present Mubarak as a bastion against Islamists in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood. As Samir Amin has pointed out (Amin 2011), Mubarakism was comprised of the Mubarak family, the military (who control major sectors of the economy) *and the Muslim Brotherhood* (who had, since the days of Anwar Sadat, been given a direct role in media and in education). With the fall of Mubarak, it is hardly surprising that the US has been eager to push for the formation of a government comprising the remaining components of Mubarakism – the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. But what is even more instructive are the economic policies now being pushed by the IMF and World Bank: privatization of the commons, opening up of the economy to the transnational corporations, reduction in social expenditures – in short, the very same worn out policies that led to the crisis in the first place.

While empire is seeking to contain the mass movements in both Tunisia and Egypt, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the transformations brought about by the uprisings will be successfully reversed. The military has certainly been active in seeking to intimidate, imprison and torture activists, while the US seeks to put all kinds of pressures to ensure that compliant regimes are established to protect the interests not only of the oligopolies, but also of course, of the Zionist state of Israel.

What we have witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt is but only Act 1 Scene 1 of a long struggle that may take many decades to reach a transformative conclusion. Revolutions don't happen overnight. They are the product of long struggles over decades that are characterized by upswings and downswings. It is not possible to predict the outcomes of these long struggles, and much will depend on the kind of political programmes that progressive forces within the mass movement are able to advance and how they succeed in organizing themselves.

Regime change and military intervention under the guise of humanitarianism

If the events in Tunisia and Egypt inspired hope, its twin, despair, is perhaps what is dominant in relation to Libya, Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia. What may have begun as popular protests in Libya that were inspired by the events in neighbouring Tunisia, very soon became captured by the splits within the Gaddafi regime. There appears to be evidence that the rebellion in Libya was nurtured, armed and orchestrated long before there were spontaneous demonstrations, with plans for regime change mapped out well in advance. Ismael Hossein-Zadeh (2011) has pointed out that

Gaddafi has much in common with nationalist populist leaders such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Salvador Allende of Chile, Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti.

> "Gaddafi is guilty of insubordination to the proverbial godfather of the world: US imperialism, and its allies. Like them, he has committed the cardinal sin of challenging the unbridled reign of global capital, of not following the economic 'guidelines' of the captains of global finance, that is, of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and World Trade Organisation; as well as of refusing to join US military alliances in the region. Also like other nationalist/populist leaders, he advocates social safety net (or welfare state) programs - not for giant corporations, as is the case in imperialist countries, but for the people in need." (Hossein-Zadeh 2011)

Under the now completely discredited excuse of 'humanitarian intervention' [2] the UN authorized invasion delegated to NATO has involved large-scale bombing, use of drones and killing of civilians. Far from protecting citizens, the intervention has created a civil war between the so-called 'rebel' forces and those supporting Gaddafi. All attempts to establish a basis for negotiation have been systematically undermined by NATO and its allies.

Similarly, the UN authorized intervention in Côte d'Ivoire was a thinly disguised regime-change initiative that has guaranteed corporations control the lucrative economic resources of the country, in which French and US concerns in particular have gained. What it has failed to resolve are the deep divisions within Côte d'Ivoire society.

And in Somalia, every attempt to reconstitute a semblance of peace has been systematically undermined with the aid of military intervention by the Meles government of Ethiopia, acting as a proxy of empire.

These events illustrate the growing willingness of empire to intervene militarily to ensure that regimes that serve its interests are guaranteed. They represent precisely the mirror image of hope that the uprisings demonstrate. They are also consistent with the increasing willingness of empire to engage openly in the barbarism that the world has witnessed in Afghanistan and Iraq, and increasingly in Pakistan.

A period of wars and revolutions

Samir Amin (2010b) has pointed out that the current crisis of capitalism, which he locates as beginning in the 1970s with the delinking of the dollar from the gold standard, has parallels with the first major crisis of industrial capitalism almost 100 years previously in the 1870s. The consequence of that crisis was the colonization of

[2] Interestingly 'humanitarian intervention' was also the excuse used to justify King Leopold's brutal colonisation of the Congo (see Adam Hochschild 2011)

the world and the division of Africa into colonial territories, the wide scale grabbing of land and resources, brutal mass killings and genocide, and the growing concentration and centralization of capital. The period following that saw the massacre of millions in the inter-imperial war of 1914-18, the depression that led to the rise of fascism in Europe, and the outbreak of the second world war that killed millions. But the same period also saw the first successful anti-capitalist revolution in Russia, the successful peasant led revolutions in China, the rise of the anticolonial revolutions, the defeat of first the French and then the US in Vietnam, and the revolution in Cuba. But the current crisis of capitalism is different from the earlier one in that the scale of concentration and centralization of capital is unprecedented, and accompanied by a financialisation of capital also on an unprecedented scale.

We have entered a new period of wars and revolution, a period of barbarism or social transformation. In Africa we have seen the devastation of Somalia, the destruction of the natural environment in places such as the Niger Delta, the military interventions in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire, to say nothing of the arming of regimes that ensure the illegal occupation of territory of Western Sahara. At the same time we see the emergence of social movements reasserting the dignity of our people through the protests and uprisings that have developed across the continent. The outcome of all these events cannot be foreseen. But there are grounds for optimism.

What way forward?

In the light of the current period, as our governments genuflect to the corporations and international financial institutions and ignore the wishes of their citizens, the solution on offer is the fetishisation of the ballot box where citizens are presented with merely different versions of the same comprador elite elements. What this approach ignores is that while citizens may have a chance to vote once every four to five years, finance capital votes every day on the stock markets, voting that has a direct consequence on every aspect of production, and on the price of every day goods, fuel, land prices, and so on.

If we are to regain control over our own destinies and dignity, we need to consider not so much how to use the ballot box but much more the question of how we democratize our societies. What kind of processes do we need to allow us to democratise of every aspect of our lives. For example, who determines what is produced, how is it produced, by whom is it produced, how much is produced, for whom is it produced, what is done with the product? And how do citizens decide on how the surplus is used? The same goes for all sectors: health, education, social welfare, telecommunications, agriculture, natural resource extraction, and so on.

Of course, such decision-making would be anathema to finance capital, to the corporations, and to those compliant governments who have neither the courage nor the will to stand up to them. Unless citizens themselves have direct control and say over these critical issues, democracy simply does not exist. Instead we are faced

with decision-making that is in essence based on the same old structures that ensured colonial domination and control.

We need to be creative. We don't need to go shopping for answers at the supermarkets of the corporations, banks and finance houses for what they have to offer 'off the peg'. It is time we had the courage to invent the future. Either we do that, or others will determine our future for us.

There are a number of important features of the present situation that are favourable for beginning to build the kind of world that we want to live in.

First, there is little doubt that because of the extent of the financialisation of capital and its dominance in the current era, the ruling classes face a dilemma: financialised capital demands that neoliberal policies be implemented relentlessly – from the perspective of capital, *there is no alternative*. Yet these are precisely the policies that have created the current crisis. Einstein's famous statement captures this dead end: "You can't solve a problem by using the same kind of thinking that created the problem". There is, in effect, a bankruptcy of ideas. This presents us with an opportunity. In Latin America, ALBA countries (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) are seeking to develop social, political, and economic integration between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean based on a vision of social welfare, bartering and mutual economic aid, rather than trade liberalization as with free trade agreements. They are even planning to establish their own currencies. A similar debate needs to be opened up in Africa.

Secondly, one of the striking features of the current period is the degree to which there is growing recognition across the global South of the commonalities in experience of the dispossessed. Indeed, there is even recognition of those commonalities emerging in the North – as in the recent uprisings in Wisconsin, Spain and Greece. For the first time in many years, we see the potential to create solidarity links with people in struggle based not on charity or pity, but on recognition of the common cause of our dispossession.

Thirdly, whereas for many years social struggles have focused on single issues – for instance, water, energy, environment or health – today the material basis for cooperation between different sectors is greater than has been the case for years. Initiatives such as the World Social Forum, for all its shortcomings, provide an exceptional opportunity for forging both cross-sectoral and inter-regional solidarity.

Fourthly, accompanying the growing crisis of the credibility of neoliberal ideas has been, since the collapse of Stalinism and the Soviet Union, a crisis of credibility in the dogmas that have so long imprisoned progressive and creative thinking about the kind of world we want to live in. This means that there is greater room for creativity as well as learning from the mistakes that have been made by the left internationally.

Finally, while recognizing that there are many struggles against those who seek to exploit Africa, there are opportunities also to create today the alternatives to profit-driven motives of corporations. For example, African farmers' organizations are confronting the onslaught of powerful actors such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, backed by oligopolies like Monsanto, that are "pushing agro-chemical crops using multi-genome patents. The objective of the corporations – or at least the end result – is plain to see: the control over Africa's plant biomass to generate super-profits for mega-chemical and seed corporations." (Tandon 2011). Yet at the same time, farmers and peasant organizations, especially those led by women, have been organizing to counter this by launching their own campaign, 'We are the solution: celebrating African family farming systems', in which indigenous knowledge and farming methods that are sustainable can be promoted.

What these movements understand is that now is the time for us to chart a new path towards freedom and justice, ensuring that emancipation is not some distant dream but rather something that we make happen today. The outcome of our struggles for emancipation is not in the hands of the gods, but in our own ideas, struggles, and solidarity. We have the capacity to influence, if not determine, the way things will turn. But to do so, we have to have the courage to invent the future. Let me leave the last words to Thomas Sankara:

> "You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. It took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen." (Sankara 1985)

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