

THE DIALECTICS OF TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA

Elias Kifon Bongmba

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This book is dedicated to the loving memory of

Monica Munkeng Bongmba

Abel Yuven Bongmba

Alice Ntala Bongmba

And also to Odelia Y. Bongmba for her constant support

CONCLUSION

BEYOND PESSIMISM TO OPTIMISM: IN LOVE WITH AFRICA

The true development of human beings involves much more than mere economic growth. At its heart there must be a sense of empowerment and inner fulfillment. This alone will ensure that human and cultural values remain paramount in a world where political leadership is often synonymous with tyranny and the rule of a narrow elite. The people's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power, and liberation above control.

Aung San Suu Kyi¹

Africans seeking transformation that would move beyond pessimism to optimism ought to live in love with Africa. I have argued that the African crisis has resulted from political practices that have eliminated political participation, created a closed society, encouraged a culture of despoliation and violence, and resulted in economic stagnation. Independence offered to African leaders a fresh start and an opportunity to articulate a new political vision and participatory politics, but the leaders maintained a two-tier society that favored some and marginalized others.

I have discussed recovery projects such as structural adjustment, democracy, civil society, and the African Renaissance and have proposed the recovery of intersubjective relations as a way of reconfiguring social and political relations. I have offered a theological critique of power, arguing that from a religious and theological perspective, power is derivative and should be used to empower members of the political community to promote human dignity. In order for Africans to undo the destruction of the patrimonial state and rebuild the postcolony, they have to strive to implement

ubuntu (which means “humanity,” or “humanness”) values and love for one another in their political praxis.

African community values are expressed in different ways. *Ubuntu* offers one way of articulating community values that must be recovered to build a viable society.² The concept *ubuntu* prioritizes human and social relationships without jettisoning the individual dimensions of human life. Descriptions of this concept vary among African scholars. The Zulu expression “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,” which means, “a person is a person through persons,” has been articulated in a number of expressions in different parts of the continent. Other popular sayings include “I am because we are” and “It takes a village to raise a child.”

Bénézet Bujo describes another understanding of this concept when he states:

The human being does not become human by *cogito* (thinking) but by *relatio* (relationship) and *cognatio* (kinship). The fundamental principle in this ethics is not *cogito ergo sum* (I think, so I am), but rather, *cognatus sum ergo sum* (I am related, so I am). Somebody living far from any *cognatio* will never reach the *cogito*. Without communal relationship one can neither find his or her identity nor learn how to think. Self-awareness presupposes somebody opposite to you in human form.³

While this reflects aspects of *ubuntu*, Bujo places the weight of his argument on the communitarian dimension of identity and runs the risk of eclipsing the thinking dimension in African thought. Far from prescribing mainly a communitarian thesis (as it is generally perceived to do and which it does very well), *ubuntu* is a loaded concept that invites active participation in the promotion of the well-being of all members of the community at all levels through intersubjective engagements. It is important to see *ubuntu* as a concept and as an articulation of a broad personal and social vision grounded on the person and the community.

As an ethical idea, *ubuntu* underscores the anthropological focus on moral life in any person who is part of a community with distinct values. This position prioritizes the human person and the human community because human beings are more important than conceptual phenomena such as religion, philosophy, and other sciences. If *ubuntu* prioritizes the person, and I believe it does, then it places value on human experience and life. To claim that human life is important is to accept that humans have a basic desire and right to thrive and not merely to struggle to survive, as many do in Africa. Moral values ought to enable all members of the community to experience well-being. As they are intersubjective, moral values ought to start with simple practices, such as showing mutual respect. Beyond respect, acts of

caring, compassion, and the delegation of responsibility could enable individuals and the community to experience well-being.⁴

One cannot show concern for others and then abandon one’s own family. I agree with Bujo that the appropriation of modernity in the African context has led some people to selfishly use their wealth to acquire consumer goods, neglecting members of their own community in the process.⁵ Today, many Africans are in this position, because some members of the extended family expect more and more from the successful members of the family. Many African elites have resorted to corruption to meet the needs of the large extended family that depends on them.

The idea of *ubuntu* includes an anthropological vision that transcends family, village, ethnic, or regional trappings and is antithesis of the selfishness. Embedded in the idea of *ubuntu* is the preferential prioritization of another person, regardless of family of origin, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, or political views. Such a prioritization of a human other, which may be inherent in an ethnic community or a particular group of people, rises above the particular without destroying that particularity. The values that spell respect for another human being regardless of ethnic origin (as is implied by *ubuntu*), offer Africans an opportunity to construct a national identity and renew the structures of their society. The recovery of *ubuntu* values is crucial for political reconstruction. John W. de Gruchy has argued:

[*ubuntu*] does not imply the denial of individuals or individual political rights. On the contrary, a respect for each person as an individual is fundamental. But it is very different from possessive individualism. The emphasis is on human sociality, on inter-personal relations, on the need which each person has for others in order to be herself or himself. This is the root of African humanism, and it relates well to biblical anthropology, Trinitarian theology and the idea of Christian community.⁶

In recovering *ubuntu* values, African communities have to present a bold national agenda. However, they ought to be careful that such an agenda does not destroy pluralism; instead, it should enable individuals and communities to strive toward the kind of society that would promote respect, care, and responsibility for one another.

Ubuntu values imply that the members of the political community are the ones who ought to determine who has authority as well as the limits of that authority. Dictators who have installed themselves for life violate the *ubuntu* spirit because in doing so, they destroy the self-determination of the people. Augustine Shutte has argued: “[self-determination] makes us persons, and this is the capacity that must develop and flourish if we are to grow as persons. An authority imposed on us from outside or above would

contradict and prevent this."⁷ Recovery of the sociopolitical dimension of life in Africa will go well if people are given the opportunity to determine who has earned the right to exercise legitimate authority over them.

In addition to *ubuntu*, love needs to become a basis for a new political praxis. It is crucial that love, which is a rational activity, be deployed to serve the goals of the political community. In the *Symposium*, the physician Eryximachus states that love empowers every scientific or creative endeavor. Agathon, echoing Eryximachus, makes our point when he says that love is the genius behind poetic and creative arts. Love is the source of valor, archery, healing, divination, and governance. It terminates estrangement and restores friendship.

I am particularly intrigued by the idea that love lies behind the practice of governance. What can we make of this claim? It is clearly wrong to read this view as an indication that some people love governance. I assume that in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*, love is not merely the love of something, but is the ground for and basis of a particular experience and action.⁸ Love with all its passions then becomes the driving force behind many activities, including public life. The lovers in Plato's dialogues are not the only ones who give us the impression that love could be used to motivate public life and governance.

Saint Augustine, who like Plato believed in ideal forms, stated that love was central to the political community. He developed this idea by sketching and distinguishing between the heavenly and earthly city. Augustine thought that Jerusalem was the ideal city. It was the City of God, which he contrasted with the earthly city, whose first political leader was Cain. People in the earthly city spent their time dreaming of the heavenly city and worked very hard to make it as good as the heavenly one. Therefore, they worked hard to bring into the earthly city such virtues as love and friendship. Augustine thought that love and friendship were the foundation of social life:

For a state is neither founded nor preserved perfectly save in foundation and by the bond of faith and of firm concord when the highest common good is loved by all, and this highest and truest thing is God; when, too, men love one another in God with absolute sincerity since they love one another for his sake from whom they cannot hide the real character of their love.⁹

Augustine thought that God was the highest good; for that reason, he argued, people should love God. He admonished people to love one another for the sake of God. In *The City of God*, Augustine also advised rulers to "serve one another in love: superiors with a loyal care: subjects by their obedience."¹⁰ He did not give up on an earthly city in his quest for the ideal city in heaven.

The admonishment to love all, serve in humility, and cultivate friendships was intended to make earthly life as pleasing as possible.

In separate instructions, Augustine told rulers to carry out their duty with such grace that their followers would obey them with pleasure.¹¹ He argued that leaders ought to remember that they too were human and that they had weaknesses. They needed to control their desires, practice justice and mercy, and execute the law with love and kindness.¹² Augustine saw governance as a service. Although Augustine had some good ideas about governance, he was not always what one would today call a democrat. He accepted monarchy, arguing that God chose David to rule as king. On the other hand, he also suggested that people could select their leaders directly themselves. He pointed out that in a state where the leaders were not good, the people could take over the responsibility of choosing leaders and set up a monarchy or oligarchy of the best.¹³ One cannot, however, rush to argue that in this Augustine anticipated Marx, because it is likely that Augustine had oligarchy in mind.

Africans striving to reconstruct their societies would do well to learn a lesson from Augustine and develop an abiding love for Africa. I am not referring to love for fatherland or motherland, which could lead to a radical nationalism and reckless wars caused by people who want to show how much they love their fatherland. What I mean is a moral ethos that is expressed in love for others, for the land, and for the institutions of their states. These institutions are not frozen in time, but are dynamic and have to reflect the complex interplay between the local and global. A future agenda does not have to rehash the opposition of "tradition vs. modernization" but should rather negotiate the human experience in a critical dialogue with the past, present, and the future.

The practice of such love calls on Africans to think beyond racist stereotypes and negative media images in order to renew their love for Africa as a human and political praxis. Such love is not devoid of its sentimental quality; it could be used to motivate people to show a new appreciation for fatherland or motherland. Such sentiments serve as a basis to appreciate the natural beauty of Africa's environment. A sentimental attachment to Africa would make people cultivate, nurture, guard, enjoy, and protect that beauty from abuse and despoliation.

The object of love should also include fellow Africans. Africans need to extend their love to people from other parts of the world too, but it is important that they do not lose sight of their overwhelming obligation to love other Africans: their relatives, colleagues, and fellow politicians. Love could motivate them to see each other as individuals—people with names, identities, histories, and social location—and as partners in development. They cannot love African institutions and traditions if they do not love the

people who have created those institutions and who have to carry those traditions forward. If Africans see love as praxis, they have a responsibility to engage in loving social practices that promote the common good.

There is a temptation here against which people need to guard. It is important for members of the political community to work with the realization that love for other people does not depend on one's social location and anticipation of love in return. People ought to engage in social practices that are loving because they love and respect people as people. The giving and receiving of unconditional love could have a powerful impact on social practices that promote the common good. To see love as a praxis is to open the possibility of tapping into the rich reservoir of human creativity and desire and employing them in political life.

Regarding love as an integral part of one's political praxis demands several things from members of the political community.

First, love invites Africans to listen to one another. People have been traumatized through direct and indirect acts of violence. The mental and verbal abuse of people by government officers has forced them into a state of fear and anxiety. African leaders need to start listening to their people, and the people ought to listen to each other, in a new way so that they can hear each other tell stories about their lives, their struggles, their hopes, and their visions. The ordinary people, peasants, workers, mothers, and youths who experience hardship have something to say. Their leaders cannot assume that they know the needs of the young people growing up in Africa today. In order to understand the needs and yearnings of African youths, the leaders ought to listen to them and hear them speak about their experiences in their own voices.

If African leaders listen to their people, they will hear alternative visions from the catastrophic projects that they have imposed on them. When I visit and talk with people in Cameroon, they invariably share their dreams of living in a free society where the gendarmes and police will not always stop them and demand papers. It does not immediately occur to the individuals who bear the brunt of abuse, to think in terms of systemic violence. Thus, they first blame the perpetrators, and only later the system these perpetrators represent. Although members of the public do not use the vocabulary of specialists when they talk about the absence of freedom, they know that law enforcement officers who are hired to protect them often brutalize many people. The leaders have a responsibility to listen to these people, understand their agony, and take steps to bring justice to them.

If leaders listen, they will also hear people talk of their dreams to start a business. But the individuals who aspire to start a business often also complain that they do not have the "power" to do so. By this, they do not mean that they cannot do the work. Rather, they complain that state officials

repeatedly hinder their efforts to establish a business by imposing bureaucratic bottlenecks that make it difficult to get the business permits and licenses. People who succeed in acquiring a permit often face prohibitively high taxes and constant demands for bribes from officials who appear frequently to carry out inspections without any warrants.

The one area about which people experience the most frustration is the transport business, where entrepreneurs face many difficulties. Mr. Tamngwa,¹⁴ a man in the Northwest Province who had a transport business in the towns of Ndu, Nso, Bamenda, and Douala, told me that the transport business in Cameroon reflects everything that is wrong with the society. Only a few people can afford to buy, license, and insure new vehicles, so most people start transport businesses by importing used vehicles from Europe. But if an individual imports a vehicle, he or she needs to be prepared to bribe custom officers at the port when the vehicle arrives. Even offering bribes does not guarantee the individual that he or she will receive the vehicle intact or that it will be operable, since people believe that thieves posing as employees of the port authority often remove parts from vehicles when they arrive.

Business people who surmount these difficulties and start a transport business tell difficult stories about the licensing process. Here again, the entrepreneurs say they often have to bribe several people before they can obtain the required papers. Once they have won this stage of the battle, they face a problem that remains every transporter's nightmare and demonstrates a lack of love for people and country: the police and gendarme checkpoints. The Cameroonian police and gendarmes are notorious for mounting roadblocks and checkpoints, which they call "control," purportedly to check motor vehicle papers. Even when the operators in fact have all the required papers, both police and gendarmes still extort bribes from the drivers. When a driver sets out from one town to another, he or she needs to carry enough change to bribe the police and gendarmes at all the checkpoints.

My informant also told me that entrepreneurs have to deal with the dishonesty of the drivers they hire to operate their vehicles, especially township taxi drivers. Most entrepreneurs prefer to pay the drivers a monthly salary. However, the taxi driver's union and the drivers prefer that the owners agree with them on a daily sum. Most drivers work only on the condition that they will deliver to the owner of the taxi a fixed sum of money everyday, regardless of the amount of money they make for the day. This makes it seem as if the driver has leased the vehicle for the day. This contractual arrangement works to the advantage of the driver in most cases. The drivers can earn more than the required amount, but only turn in what they have agreed to turn in. This is not good business practice.

The ramifications of such business practices become clear when we multiply these stories. A picture begins to emerge of a society locked in corruption and dishonesty. One of the partners of Vatican Enterprises, which operates vehicles from Bamenda to different parts of Cameroon, told me that he preferred working with an agency, a corporate entity that is licensed to run transport businesses, because if he tried to work alone he would not be able to survive financially. Leaders who love their people ought to listen to such stories and regulate the industry, eliminate corruption, encourage fair business practices and restore trust.

Political leaders ought to listen to parents tell stories about negotiating admission for their children into schools. Many parents complain that they have to bribe school officials to admit their children into government secondary schools, which are supposed to be free. They have to pay bribes to register their children for competitive examinations into the public service and to get them admitted into professional schools. When you ask parents why they do this, they tell you that they love their children and want them to have a good future. As parents, they believe they owe it to their children to do all they can to get them into the right professional schools, even if it means giving bribes. They are clearly motivated by love, but I must emphasize that this type of love will not take Africans out of the present crisis. The love that will rescue society has to contribute to a position where all people are equal under the law.

When leaders listen to ordinary people tell their stories, they will also listen to families, quarters, villages, ethnic groups, or parts of a political district and a political community. Hearing individual stories is only a prelude to hearing the stories of larger political communities. Love for a district or any larger political constituency that pays no regard to individuals is abstract love. While such love may be necessary when we are thinking of large communities, it does not have to replace concern for the individuals—the women, men, and children of Africa.

Second, a spirit of love has to cultivate dialogue with the people. Such a dialogue could take place at all levels of society and give people an opportunity to reflect honestly on difficult issues, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, political corruption, fiscal mismanagement, democracy, the economy, human rights, and gender disparity. A dialogue that is motivated by love cannot merely be an information session where politicians read and explain the decrees of the head of state. It has to foster an open critical engagement with what is wrong with the state. Political leaders cannot claim that they alone understand the crisis that their communities face. The formation of policy on HIV/AIDS must involve people living with AIDS, activists, and medical experts. The outcome of dialogue must ensure that all policies and treatment options are based on a spirit of love and dignity.

Third, love ought to translate into a working relationship with the people. It is the responsibility of leaders to establish a working relationship with the people at all levels. At the local level, authorities ought to realize that their job is to work with the people on the most pressing needs of the community, such as healthcare, education, and good drinking water. It is necessary that leaders give people the opportunity to come up with local initiatives and that they support these initiatives by committing resources to these projects. Leaders need to make sure that there is adequate funding for worthy projects and that the funds are accounted for.

In working with people, leaders at all levels ought to set an example for people to follow. One area in which leaders could set good example is political corruption. If the local leaders, such as school principals, municipal authorities, divisional officers, and local law enforcement groups, all decide to work together to eliminate corruption within their district, political leaders ought to highlight this and give them support by using the system to punish those who engage in corruption.

A good working relationship with the people would be strengthened if the leaders improved their communication with the people. Take the case of the senior divisional officer in Cameroon who is appointed to serve in an area where the people speak, say, French (one of the major official languages), and he does not speak that language. What can this official do in order to have a dialogue with the people? He or she could learn one of the official languages specific to the area (usually French or English). This often does not happen, and so there are officials working in one area who do not speak the major official language of the people they are supposed to work with. Some of the administrators do not see this as a problem, because they are mainly career administrators who are posted to a division to administer ministerial orders and presidential decrees: a large part of their function is to attend meetings and tell the people the program of the head of state or read messages from him. This makes local administration a top-down affair, lacking any dialogue with the locals. If leaders want to serve their people, they would do well to communicate in a language that the people understand.

A remedy to this situation might involve rethinking political decentralization, which means, "taking the administration nearer to the people." If decentralization is to mean anything, it is important that it includes the decentralization of power by creating a system through which the people in each locality will elect their own divisional and provincial administrators. Those who campaign for these offices and are elected might just love the people enough to listen to them, talk with them in a language they understand, and be ready to work with them to set the priorities of the district and province.

This step will move love away from a one-dimensional and sentimental trajectory that administrators develop toward the president who has

appointed them and direct it toward the people who have elected them. Love that results in action springs inevitably from those who seek office in a district because they love the people and want to work with them to accomplish specific goals. Leaders elected at the local level can then demonstrate their love by carrying out an agenda established in communion with the people.

In order to serve people well, one has to establish a relationship of respect and responsibility as well as respect the laws of the land. Such respect might not come easily if leaders are given enormous authority over people with whom they have no connection, or especially if these leaders consider their transfer to districts that they perceive as being backwards as a form of punishment. However, were the local leaders elected, they might respect and act in a responsible manner toward the people they serve, since they would owe their power to the people rather than to some central authority.

Some might argue that such a decentralization, which involves the election of local administrators, could lead to an ethnicization of politics, because only indigenes of a particular area might stand the chance of winning an election to become a divisional or provincial administrator. I must concede that ethnicization might be one of the outcomes of such a radical decentralization. But I am also hopeful that with political education, maturity, and legal instruments, residency requirements would outweigh indigeneity, and political issues and the ability to define a vision and set goals to accomplish that vision would outweigh ethnic considerations.

This approach calls for a radical reinterpretation of citizenship. In this regard, citizenship *should not* be linked primarily with ancestral land, autochthony, and indigeneity but rather with cosmopolitan considerations that include length of residence, participation, and commitment to the goals and well-being of one's political community. In Cameroon, these issues have become central to local politics. In Anglophone Cameroon for example, members of some communities in the Southwest province have argued that some of their neighbors who came to the area from other parts of the country to work in plantations are "come no go," a designation that means they have come, settled, and do not intend to return to their place of origin. The debates on these issues involve internal migration, right of settlement within the same country, and a sense of belonging to the political community where one lives.

Cameroon needs to have an open debate on whether those who have moved from one province to another are citizens or resident aliens. Such problems are not unique to Cameroon. When I lived in the Nigerian town of Gembu (in the present Taraba state when it was still part of Gongola state), the locals considered the Fulani people "foreigners" to their land. During the 1979 transition to democracy, local leaders campaigned on a

platform that called for the restoration of power to the indigenes—the Mambila people—because the Fulanis had dominated them for a long time. One could therefore argue that were local leaders to campaign and be elected in Cameroon, a similar situation might occur.

One must concede that to many people, "local" might be synonymous with "indigenous." However, I contend that citizens of a country ought to come to accept residence in a locality as a basic qualification for public office. People ought to settle where they can afford to settle and participate fully in local politics. It would be wrong to carry out acts of discrimination against others because they moved to the area from another part of the country. Following this logic, an individual who was born in one part of the country but who has taken up residence in another part could compete for political office in the area where he or she is residing. While I do not think that practices in other continents should be imposed on Africans, it is dishonest for Africans in the diaspora, who have claimed a right to settle in any place of their own choice, to insist on referring to others back home, who also claim a right to settle in a place of their choice, as "come no go." Cameroonians debate these issues on Camnet (an email subscription group) and other discussion groups on the Internet, and one would think that they would want others to enjoy the liberty to settle where they choose to, but that is not the case. If broad-based liberal approaches to settlements (and I am not claiming that there is no discrimination in settlements in the United States or in other Western countries) work in other places in the world, it could also work in Cameroon. Cameroonians have no difficulty with it in the United States, Canada, England, or France. If anything, they profit from it; why then is their ancestral land back in Cameroon different? If they expect their fellow Texans, Californians, and Parisians to love them, they ought to support such ideals back at home.

What I say about local political elections might be considered to apply to the election of religious leaders as well. If people were to elect their own leaders, that might make things easy for the community and the church at large. Leadership in the Catholic Church has caused a number of problems in recent years. In 1998, when the former Roman Catholic archbishop of Yaoundé, Mgr. Jean Zoa, died, the pope appointed Mgr. Andre Wouking, president of the National Episcopal Council and bishop of Bafoussam to replace him. Members of the Beti ethnic group did not approve of this appointment and organized a group of people to block the road into Yaoundé so that Mgr. Wouking would not come there to take up his position. Similar problems arose in 1991 in the Douala archdiocese when local priests, who feared that another Bamileke could be appointed to head the archdiocese, wrote a letter to the Vatican protesting against what they called "the Bamilekisation of their diocese by expatriate clergy."¹⁵ It is surprising

that the priests who wrote that letter chose the term "expatriate," used in the past for missionaries and religious workers from other countries, to describe a Cameroonian bishop. The protesting priests claimed that the expatriate clergy who worked in the Douala archdiocese promoted Bamileke priests for purely political and economic reasons.¹⁶ The Vatican, wanting to avoid a problem, appointed Cardinal Tumi, who came from the Anglophone side of Cameroon, to lead the Douala archdiocese. Although his appointment calmed down feelings because Cardinal Tumi had a higher rank, it did not address the problem of indigeneity, which is still a source of tension within the Catholic Church in Cameroon. The Vatican makes these senior church appointments and one cannot talk of decentralization as one would while discussing a country's politics. My point here is that a more cosmopolitan attitude could have resolved the appointment of bishops from different ethnic backgrounds.

Fourth, love has to translate into specific political behavior that is consistent with the ideals of a democratic and free society. Leaders need to conduct themselves as servants of the people, not as their masters. Love also demands that the leaders defend and protect the constitution and institutions of the state. They do so when they enforce the rule of law equally. It ought to be clear that leaders cannot use the law to protect themselves from the crimes they have committed. Instead, they have an obligation to use the law to protect the people who have elected them to serve. In order to do this, checks and balances between the executive, legislature, and judicial branches of the government ought to be created. One cannot love one's country, constitution, laws, flag, and all the symbols around which political life is organized and still disrespect the law or run the state as if it were a mafia.

Fifth, love ought to translate into respect for human rights and freedoms. This is perhaps where the African postcolonial state has failed most pitifully. Since African leaders believed that they could solve all the problems of their country without regard to their constituencies, they have taken away the rights and freedoms of their people. What has emerged is a state where inhumane treatment of people is the norm. People arrested on suspicion of committing crimes routinely suffer beatings and torture, especially if they are suspected of making anti-government remarks. The criminalization and brutalization of political opposition has been the rule in most African countries. Regimes have forced most of the intelligentsia into exile, instead of working with them to create a vision of a society that would promote the well-being of all people. All of this has taken place because African leaders have paid no regard to human rights and freedoms. The civil strife, barbarity, civil wars, genocide, coups, and countercoups, reflect a culture where people have decided to abuse the rights of others and blatantly display a lack of love for one another. It is for these reasons that love has to become a political

virtue. Almost all the political killings in Africa have not occurred because the perpetrators loved the state any more than the victims did, but because the perpetrators did not love their victims.

Sixth, Africans have an obligation to use love to resolve the problems of the past and move forward into the future. Change is possible, and it will come if people work for it. A good example remains the transition to democracy in South Africa, where truth, reconciliation, amnesty, and reparations have offered a compelling way of dealing with the past and facing the future. But this is not an easy proposition. Proposals that offer the truth and reconciliation model of South Africa imply that Africans could deal with the rape of their economies by their own leaders in a similar way. To call for truth and reconciliation is to ask Africans to offer love as an antidote to brutality, violence, barbarity, genocide, abuse of power, human rights abuses, dishonesty in public life, and all that has dehumanized people in the postcolony. To adopt the path of love, reconciliation, and healing is not to expect quick fixes, because none exist. However, a call for truth and reconciliation invites reflection, deliberation, the cultivation of certain dispositions, and the articulation and implementation of virtues that could replace ruthlessness with the spirit of tolerance. Such an engagement does not deny wrongdoing, nor does it ignore the fact that it might take several generations before African states can dig themselves out of this pit of desperation into which postcolonial misadventure has thrown them. Furthermore, it does not sacrifice justice for the sake of peace, but instead asks tough questions about the nature of justice.

A spirit of love that cultivates such a careful deliberation on ways of resolving Africa's difficult past is altogether consistent with the idea of politics. Politics involves resolving conflicts and assuming responsibility for the future conduct of an intersubjective community. Africans can open a new page and continue to write history, but they dare not construct such a history on the principles of revenge; instead, they must do so on the basis of love and tolerance. This applies even to Africa's national bourgeoisie, which has embodied its characterization by Frantz Fanon to extremes that Fanon himself could not have imagined.

My proposition that love ought to be seen as a political praxis is mainly to Africans because they alone bear the weight of the obligation to establish the kind of political community that would contribute to the enhancement of the human condition and replace pessimism with optimism. As they do that, the international community needs to show more love for Africa, love that exceeds mere emotional sympathy or postcolonial guilt and that involves instead a critical and practical engagement with Africans about the fate of the people. A new love for Africa will certainly engender a new ethic, one that will reject blood diamonds and looted wealth. Love can bring a new spirit of determination into the international community,

motivating it to work with Africans to pursue justice and resist the temptation to see corruption and abuse of power as something that happens "over there." The need to show love to Africa could be motivated by the view that an injury to the human species in Africa is injury to all humanity.

Finally, in an age of globalization, love ought to translate into fair trading practices. On that point, one can only state the obvious. Africans, who have been bombarded with the idea of globalization and transnationalism—terms that are not merely metaphors for this ever-shrinking world, but that reflect an economic and social reality—are waiting for the rest of the world to concede that there no longer exists any kind of "over there." In its report, the Commission for Africa (CFA) has pointed out that sustainable growth and poverty reduction will be achieved only if Africa's share of trade increases. In order to increase trade, Africa's capacity to trade has to be given a boost with investments in infrastructure that can create a climate conducive to trade.¹⁷ The CFA calls for "custom reform; removal of regulatory barriers, especially in transport; improved governance; air and sea transport reform; and regional integration."¹⁸ This is what African states could be doing with additional investment. However, trade barriers in other countries have to come down. "Rich countries must agree to eliminate immediately trade-distorting support to cotton and sugar, and commit by 2010 to end all export subsidies and all trade-distorting support in agriculture when they meet in Hong Kong."¹⁹ The CFA makes an important statement on liberalization that could spark a new round of debate.

... Liberalisation must not be forced on Africa through trade or aid conditions and must be done in a way that reduces reciprocal demands to a minimum. Individual African countries should be allowed to sequence their own trade reforms, at their own pace, in line with their own poverty reduction and development plans. Additional financial assistance should be provided to support developing countries in building the capacity they need to trade and adjust to more open markets.²⁰

This is an interesting development, especially coming from a commission mostly made up of Western leaders who have always insisted that trade and political liberalization go together. One way of reading this is to see it as a caution against imposing liberalization, not a rejection of liberalization. A failure to carry out political reforms and establish democratic and transparent institutions could lead to the same problems that created economic decline. Although trade has grown and continues to grow in China, there is every reason to believe that trade will fare better where liberal and open policies prevail. If the international community is in love with Africa and its people, fair trading practices will go a long way in transforming African states.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. *The Economist*, May 13–19, 2000, p. 17.
2. John Dunn, *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981–1989* (London: Polity Press, 1990), p. 193.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 202–203.
5. Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 1; Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 1; Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crises* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
6. Mbembe, 2001, p. 42. See also his "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa* 62, no. 1 (1992): 3–35.
7. See George Munda Carew, "Development Theory and the Promise of Democracy: The Future of Postcolonial African States," in *African Today* 40, no. 4 (1993): 31–53.
8. James S. Coleman and C. R. D. Halisi, "American Political Science and Tropical Africa: Universalism vs. Relativism," *African Studies Review* 26, nos. 3 and 4 (Sep., Dec. 1983): 25–62. This history of Afro-pessimism remains an interesting subject that will not be pursued here.
9. Mbembe, 2001, p. 2. Italics in original.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
12. Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 5–6.
13. See Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (London: Verso, 1997); D. Pal Ahluwalia and Paul Nursey-Bray, eds., *Post-Colonialism: Culture and Identity in Africa* (Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 1997); Bill Aschroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
14. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.