



The Journey of Wamba dia Wamba and the Struggles for Emancipatory Politics in Africa

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Abstract

This tribute centralises Ernest Wamba dia Wamba's commitment to committed scholarship, including his contributions to the challenges faced in the quest for popular democracy in Africa, in the emancipatory project. Tracing his journey from the village community with the remnants of the palaver and *mbongi* through the Dar es Salaam School, this homage highlights his contribution to the understanding of African philosophy. His immersion in the experiences of the Sovereign National Conference and his foray into the multi-sided struggles for a new mode of politics distinguished Wamba from intellectuals who pontificated about the struggles against militarism from the safety of seminar rooms. This celebration of his life echoes his call for the importance of re-dynamising African cultures in the process of restoring the humanity of Africans.

Keywords: Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, emancipatory politics, Dar es Salaam School of History, African philosophy, committed scholarship, CODESRIA, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Résumé

Cet hommage essentialise l'engagement d'Ernest Wamba dia Wamba en faveur de la recherche engagée, dans ses contributions aux défis rencontrés dans la quête de démocratie populaire en Afrique, dans le projet d'émancipation. Retraçant son parcours depuis la communauté villageoise avec ses vestiges de palabre et de *mbongi* à l'école de Dar es Salaam, cet hommage met en évidence sa contribution à la compréhension de la philosophie africaine. Son immersion dans les expériences de la Conférence nationale souveraine et son incursion dans les luttes multidimensionnelles pour un nouveau modèle de

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politique distinguent Wamba des intellectuels qui pontifiaient sur les luttes contre le militarisme dans la sécurité des salles de séminaires. Cette célébration de sa vie fait écho à son appel à la redynamisation des cultures africaines dans le processus de restauration de l'humanité des africains.

Mots-clés : Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, politique émancipatrice, École d'histoire de Dar es Salaam, philosophie africaine, bourse engagée, CODESRIA, République démocratique du Congo

By way of introduction

Ernest Bazunini Wamba dia Wamba, philosopher, teacher, and activist for peace and social justice, walked this earth in the period 1942–2020. While on this journey, his life encountered the rich and layered spirits of the Congolese people, the genocidal legacies and traditions of colonialism, Mobutuism, racial capitalism in the USA, the ravages of neo-colonial plunder, along with the music and songs of freedom. While studying in the USA he communed with brothers and sisters in the country and married into the USA branch of the struggles of the global African family. His journey also took him into the ranks of the robust scholarly community of the Dar es Salaam School, which he enriched by deepening the understanding of African philosophy. Persecuted by the Zairean state, a Free Wamba Campaign provided the context for the unification of some of the political tendencies at the University of Dar es Salaam. Through the History Department seminars and the Philosophy Club, Wamba held forth to those who opposed the neo-liberal onslaught on the University. Activism with social movements brought him to the centre of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar, where he became one of its illustrious presidents. After the sequences of genocidal violence in East and Central Africa, culminating in the 1994 Rwanda pogroms, Wamba worked full-time on the questions of popular democracy in Africa and the elements of emancipatory politics.

Following the Walter Rodney dictum that the committed scholar must get his or her feet wet in the struggles of the people, Wamba was immersed in the struggles for a new mode of politics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In this tribute we will trace his journey from the colonial Belgian Congo through his new intellectual home at the University of Dar es Salaam to his clarification of the tasks of the progressive African intellectual. From books, papers, interviews, and lectures, we were exposed to Wamba's ideas on emancipatory politics and the importance of the spiritual well-being of the human being. In his quest to unearth African

democratic forms before they were distorted by colonial institutions, he exposed African scholars to the important tradition of the palaver and the centrality of institutions such as the *mbongi* in collective self-rule. Surrounded intellectually by philosophers who were trained in Catholic seminaries and who were wedded to monotheism, Wamba was clear that his audience was not bounded by narrow conceptions of human possibilities. This article proposes that the body of Wamba's work provides a rich library from which one can further develop the tools for the liberation and unification of the peoples of Africa.

Starting the Journey in the Womb of the Congo

When Ernest Bazunini Wamba dia Wamba came to this earth on 16 April 1942, through the issue of Enoc Ngila Bibuasa Wamba and Judith Luezi lua Nzeka, the people of the Congo were dominated by a special type of colonialism that had been initiated under the rule of King Leopold II of Belgium. It was a particularly gruesome and genocidal colonial rule in which 10 million people lost their lives in short order. Catholic missionaries provided the ideological cover of 'civilising' Africans, while the Force Publique carried out the day-to-day repression. In the village where Wamba originated from, it was the Swedish Protestant missionaries who offered formal religious teaching to the peoples of his community. Protestant missionaries offered a gentler form of domination, but one that was nevertheless integrated into the colonial exploitation of the peoples of the Congo.

African resistance to colonialism took numerous forms, but at the time Wamba was born, strikes, armed resistance, and other forms of protests were linked to the opposition to European cultural and religious ideas. The most distinctive anti-colonial force at the time was the religious political movement that was called Kimbanguism, named after Simon Kimbangu, who had fashioned a gospel of anti-colonialism that fused African ideas of spirituality with western Christian beliefs. In the book *Kinship: A Family's Journey in Africa and America*, written by his son Phillippe Wamba (Wamba 1999), we are introduced to the environment and family members who influenced Wamba in his youth, an environment where the 'spiritual and physical realms overlapped'. As Phillippe Wamba explained, 'I learned that the balance between African and Christian beliefs was an important theme of his childhood'. The most important takeaway from reading about his relatives was that though he went to a mission school and his father was a Protestant leader, Wamba spent time to learn the important links between

humans and nature and the traditions of his clan. This book, *Kinship*, introduces the reader to elders who cherished the traditions that afforded the living to remain in communion with their ancestors. Wamba in his later years revelled in the knowledge that he gained with respect to totemage and the era when Africans could move around on continent before the colonial borders of Berlinist states sought to imprison African peoples. In one conversation with this author in 1995, Wamba regaled how one from the Leopard totem could travel throughout the sub-region of Africa and find solace and support from fellow totem holders, regardless of ethnicity.

Wamba attended primary school at Sundi-Lutete and completed formal secondary school in Kimpese, both at Protestant mission schools. His village education provided the foundation for Wamba to escape the alienation of being an *évolué*.¹ This village education enabled Wamba to grasp the reality that the University of Lovanium (Léopoldville/ Kinshasa) had been established by the Belgians to groom alienated *évolués*. After graduating from high school, he spent a short time at the University of Lovanium before receiving, in 1964, a scholarship from the African American Institute. In 1964, when Wamba travelled to the USA, the West under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson and Operation Dragon Rouge were bombing the peoples of the Congo and employing mercenaries to crush the second independence movement. After intense study of English, Wamba enrolled at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In that period no section of the US society could escape the ferment of Black liberation. He became immersed in the Black Action Movement (BAM) in the university. During the struggle he met another student activist, Cornelia Elaine Brown. Their relationship blossomed to the point of marriage and having children.

Fredy Perlman was one of Wamba dia Wamba's early teachers at Western Michigan University. Perlman introduced Wamba to historical materialism and Marx's Theory of Value. Wamba dia Wamba and Elaine Wamba developed a lifelong relationship with Perlman and his spouse Lorraine Nybakken. The Black uprisings of Detroit in the summer of 1967 and the May 1968 struggles in Europe were two seminal moments that exposed Wamba to the history of rebellion and political struggle. After Perlman left the University and went to Detroit to set up a left-wing press, Wamba was introduced to the left politics of the Student Democratic Society (SDS) through Perlman and to the vibrant liberation struggles in Detroit via Elaine's family.

After graduation in 1968, he returned to the Congo and worked, from 1968 to 1971, as an advisor and then as director of cabinet for Minister of Social Affairs, Labour and Housing Sophie Lihau Kanza. During this

time, Wamba had a close-up view of the impact of the destructive political culture that was built around the leader Mobutu Sese Seko. To escape being drawn into the inner sanctum of the regime, Wamba refused promotion in the system and returned to the USA in 1971 to pursue graduate work at the Claremont Graduate School in California. Afterwards he taught at Brandeis University, Harvard, and Boston College. After Wamba had concluded his studies, the Zairean government pressured Wamba to return to Kinshasa under the terms of his scholarship and visa which required him to return home. The University of Dar es Salaam rescued Wamba from the Mobutu regime by giving him a job and provided the family an alternative to Zaire.

Wamba and the Dar es Salaam School

The Tanzanian leg of his earthly journey was one of the longest in his life, and after more than twenty-eight years of working at the University of Dar es Salaam, he retired in Tanzania. When Wamba arrived in Tanzania in 1980, he encountered an intellectual culture that had been enriched by the Arusha Declaration of 1967 and the fact that the liberation movements of Africa (Organisation of African Unity Liberation Committee) had their base in Tanzania. Karim Hirji and Mahmood Mamdani were two colleagues who very early embraced the arrival of Wamba to the University of Dar es Salaam. Hirji was not trained as a historian but today his recollections on the radicalism at that time has placed him in the ranks of the historians of that important historical conjuncture. His archive is very important to this period and some of that archival work has already been produced in the book, *Cheche: Reminiscences of a Radical Magazine* (Hirji 2018). The History Department had become one of the central pillars of the University and its publications and activism had fashioned what was to become the Dar es Salaam School of History. Initially, the Department had been dominated by nationalist historiography, but the ferment of the wider society affected its curriculum and outreach. By the time of Wamba's arrival the two important books that came out of the Department were *A History of Tanzania* edited by I. N. Kimambo and A. J. Temu (1969), and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney (1972). The Department supported two journals that became the anchor of the Historical Association of Tanzania (HAT). Several books were written under the auspices of this association and its strength was linked to the teachers of history in secondary schools across Tanzania. The History Department and the School of Law were the two most prolific sections of the Dar es Salaam School.

The senior colleagues of the Department of History who Wamba encountered on this leg of his journey were established scholars who had been labouring for some time and did not share a common starting point in the writing of history. By 1980, Fred J. Kaijage, Isaria Kimambo, Bonaventure Swai, and Abdul Sheriff were internationally well-known as African historians. The junior scholars were Joseph Mbwiliza, Kapepwa Tambila, Nestor Luanda, Josiah Mlahagwa and G. T. Mshambi. There had been a raging debate on 'proletarian history' within the University and Wamba could not escape this debate on the place of historical materialism in the context of an African university. The centrality of the resistance of the African peoples had been chronicled by Professor Gilbert Gwassa, who had undertaken painstaking work on the Maji Maji rebellions in Tanzania and had steered the Maji Maji Research Project. Gwassa had been a real force at that time but, by the time Wamba arrived on the campus, Gwassa had been redeployed to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Hence, he was not a regular member of the Department but still active in the history seminars. In that period, the History Department of the University of Dar es Salaam came closest to the Wamba understanding of being an intellectual environment dedicated to cultivating 'a culture of awarding outstanding historians for the purpose of promoting creativity, commitment, and devotion to the discipline'.

By the time Wamba joined this distinguished community in January 1980, the debates on imperialism and nationalism had created cleavages within the Left in Dar es Salaam. The disputations on 'Imperialism and the National Democratic Revolution' had polarised the progressive forces while those who believed in advancing 'proletarian history' took to international platforms to distinguish themselves from what they deemed to be 'nationalist historiography'. One of the more egregious publications of this period was an assault on the scholarship of Walter Rodney that came in the publication, *Utafiti*. The review by one of the junior scholars of the History Department, G. T. Mshambi was entitled, 'The Mystification of African History: A Review of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*' (Mshambi 1977).

Mshambi's view did not reflect the real approach of Walter Rodney's work, something which was very evident in the collaborative research and writing he had undertaken with Kapwepa Tambila and Laurent Sago on 'Migrant Labour in Tanzania During the Colonial Period: Case Studies of Recruitment and Conditions of Labour in the Sisal Industry' (Rodney 1983). For Walter Rodney, the question of the history of the working peoples of Africa was central to his concerns in the recovery of African history. Walter Rodney had met Wamba dia Wamba in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1975,

but the meeting with Wamba in his old office in May 1980 had a very different focus. The debates on history were not the most urgent question. Rodney passed to Wamba the necessity for the committed intellectual to enter the fray of the struggle against imperialism, beyond the seminar room and academic journals.

In entering this maze of disputations, Wamba engaged the residue of the discussion via the seminar series of the History Department. Some of his early forays into this terrain were in papers such as 'Brief Theoretical Comments on the Quest for Materialist History: Concerning the Article "The Object of History"' (Wamba dia Wamba 1980) and 'African History and the Teaching of History in the University of Dar es Salaam' (Wamba dia Wamba 1993a). The 1980 seminar paper expressed his reservation because he did not see how a 'proletarian history' of Africa could be produced outside of an organised proletarian movement. He argued that evidence showed that hardly any of the practising historians of Africa were organically linked with a proletarian movement. For an elaboration of the context, see "Three Decades of Production of Historical Knowledge at Dar es Salaam" (Kimambo 1993).

This climate of scholarly debate within the confines of the University were soon shattered by the arrest of Wamba when he visited the DRC, then called Zaire, in December 1981.

Free Wamba Campaign – Zairean Detainee

Wamba was arrested in Kinshasa in December 1981; his crime was possessing historical notes on Mobutuism. Wamba had gone from Tanzania to the US and then to the Republic of the Congo that December with the plan for his family to join him for Christmas in the Congo. He was accused of possessing subversive documents and detained on 18 December when he landed at Kinshasa's Ngobila Beach after arriving by boat from Brazzaville. The Security services seized a text he had written on 'The Authenticity of Neo-colonialism: Ideology and Class Struggle in the Congo-Kinshasa'. As a Congolese intellectual in correspondence with other intellectuals in exile, the secret police of Mobutu had been keeping tabs on Wamba and arrested him even before he could get to his family in Zaire. His own immediate family learned of the arrest when they reached Kinshasa on 20 December. It was then that a massive international campaign was unleashed to free Wamba. The three forces that came together were organised within the international human rights community and spearheaded by Elaine Wamba, the colleagues of the University of Dar es Salaam under the leadership

of the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA), and progressive academics internationally, especially the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars in the USA.

This campaign was effective in saving Wamba's life. A month later, he was released from detention but kept under city arrest in Kinshasa for another nine months, having to report to the government security office regularly. The Free Wamba Campaign had galvanised the newly formed staff assembly of the University. Abdul Sheriff, the Secretary of UDASA anchored the painstaking and dogged work to bring all of the different intellectual and ideological forces of the University of Dar es Salaam together to pressure the Tanzanian state to save Wamba and then to have him returned to Tanzania. This combined pressure from the family and from the University, which contacted President Julius Nyerere, who personally intervened by asking Mobutu Sese Seko to allow Wamba to return to his teaching job.

Wamba returned to Tanzania by the end of 1982 and again immersed himself in the academic life of the University, writing often for the bulletin of UDASA and organising the Philosophy Club. This club held occasional seminars and called for the establishment of a Philosophy Department at the University of Dar es Salaam. Wamba's brand of committed scholarship deepened in this environment where the University came under cost-sharing pressures from the Bretton Woods institutions. By the end of the decade of the 1980s, Wamba worked vigorously with UDASA colleagues to draft the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics. UDASA members were also involved in later drafting the CODESRIA-led Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (Kampala Declaration). This Africa-wide statement had a lot in common with the Dar es Salaam document, and laid emphasis on regarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy as embedded in wider popular struggles for democracy and people's rights. The one limitation of Wamba in Tanzania during this period was that he did not take time to become proficient in the Kiswahili language.

The Philosophical Journey and Theorizing Mobutuism

The career of Joseph Désiré Mobutu who became President of the DRC after coming to power in a coup in 1965 was a textbook case of a leader who sought to manipulate the cultural yearnings of the people in the service of imperialism. This manipulation was aided and abetted by social scientists and scholars on both sides of the Atlantic with tracts on 'personal rule' and 'neo-patrimonialism'. Mobutu's ascendancy from being a foot soldier in the colonial army of the Force Publique to becoming the president has been too

well documented elsewhere to bear repetition here. What was significant about his tenure as president was that after complicity in the execution of Patrice Lumumba, Mobutu turned around to both fight the Lumumbists in the country while celebrating Lumumba as a national hero. The United States, France and Belgium supported Mobutu as he bought the country into becoming the regional ally of apartheid and the centre for militarism in the heart of Africa. Larry Devlin, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station chief when western intelligence services orchestrated the capture, detention and killing of Lumumba, has written his own account of managing Mobutu in the book, *Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting the Cold War in a Hot Zone* (Devlin 2007).

Thus, we had the first characteristic of Mobutuism, an African leader in the service of western imperialism. As the regional militarist, Mobutu was the grand-père in relation to the petty dictators in Rwanda, Burundi, and Central African Republic. Bent on manipulating the deep cultural values of the society in 1971, Mobutu launched the authenticity movement as official policy with a sweeping obliteration of colonial names. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which became the name of the country at independence, was changed to the Republic of Zaire. The Congo River and the national currency were also designated Zaire. This manipulation was so devoid of a real understanding of African history as much as the word Zaire was the Portuguese distortion of Nzadi, the original Kikongo name of the river. President Mobutu, dropping his Christian names, Joseph Désiré, adopted the ancestral names Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga meaning 'all conquering male in a fearless land'. Mobutuism was based on deformed masculinism. This was the male conqueror who could take any woman in the society, even the wives of ministers so that the wives could inform on their husbands.

Mobutu organised fake nationalisation of Belgian assets as part of the 'Zairenisation' of the society and economy. In his recent book *US Foreign Policy Toward Africa*, the former assistant Secretary of State for Africa Herman Cohen boasted that, as a junior diplomatic officer, he acted as a proconsul in Zaire and facilitated the accounting gymnastics that allowed Mobutu to present himself as having nationalised foreign property (Cohen 2020). Herman Cohen and Robert McNamara of the World Bank arranged for the nationalised copper mines owned by Belgian conglomerate Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) to continue operating the mines with its managerial personnel. Instead of paying compensation to UMHK, the Zairean government paid massive management fees, which ensured that UMHK continued to operate as before the so-called nationalisation.

Wamba dia Wamba had worked in the administration for three years, from 1968 to 1971, and had observed Mobutuism up close. His paper 'The Authenticity of Neo-colonialism' had landed him in the notorious inhuman and degrading conditions of the Kinshasa penal system.

Wamba was very aware that the authenticity was based on manipulation and European reading of African philosophy. Early in his career as a scholar he had encountered the work of other philosophers from the French-speaking tradition such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus. Wamba's approach to this body of work was not to digest it with any kind of alienation or sycophancy, but to interpret the philosophical traditions that served imperialism and distinguish them from those focused on thinking about human freedom. During many sessions at the UDASA club at the University of Dar es Salaam, Wamba recounted the work of academics and journalists in the Congo and their pre-eminent role in the 'Cold War'. The 1982 book by Madeleine Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa from Eisenhower to Kennedy*, came in for Wamba's assessment. Similarly, attention was drawn to the work of anthropologists in the service of the US military and intelligence agencies. Wamba repeatedly mentioned the US military study on 'Witchcraft, sorcery, magic and other psychological phenomena and their implications on military and paramilitary operations in the Congo'.

This body of work pushed Wamba to write about the differences between good and bad sorcery. Mobutu's authenticity was bad sorcery in this analysis. Jan Vansina, *Introduction à l'ethnographie du Congo* (1966) and Placide Tempels, *La Philosophie bantoue (Bantu Philosophy)* (1945) had provided the intellectual framework and 'evidence' of Zaire's cultural heritage for proponents of authenticity. *Évolué* scholars in the service of Mobutuism had refined and promoted the ideas of Tempels. Wamba's work as a philosopher at the University of Dar es Salaam was to debunk the understanding of African knowledge systems that had been placed in the service of empire. In African universities up to that point, Tempels's book had been demarcated as the starting point for the study of African philosophy. Nationalist scholars all over Africa were clearly aware that the intent of this body of work was to undermine the precolonial ethnic consciousness of indigenous Africans in the service of colonialism. It was well known that Tempels's aim in writing *Bantu Philosophy* was to assist the European 'civilising mission' by exposing and appropriating the intellectual productions of the Bantu/ African in order to better anchor the colonialist project in the consciousness of the colonised.

In his essay 'Philosophy in Africa: Challenges of the African Philosopher' (Wamba dia Wamba 1991c), Wamba maintained that the practice of African philosophy ought to be aimed at reversing Tempels's efforts in the service of the concrete self-emancipation of the peoples of Africa. In his work as a philosopher and by creating a space for independent reflection, Wamba maintained that 'only very rarely does African philosophy concern itself with the struggle against the African people's own weaknesses'. His argument in the essay was that,

ethno-philosophy is a philosophy of and for the dominated Africa. It does not matter whether or not actual ways of thinking of some real Africans fit in this way of viewing things. The fact is that this specificity is discovered, theorised in the face of humanity that dominates it and requires it to be so dominated (Wamba 1991c:10).

Throughout his period at the University of Dar es Salaam and inside African academic circles, Wamba worked hard to put more attention on the relationship between the ideas of ethno-philosophy and the fight against the four ideological illnesses that continue to plague the African continent: fetishism, ethnic chauvinism, religious intolerance, and male chauvinism. These illnesses multiplied in the body politic and exploded from time to time, informing the generalised disillusionment with African politics in what was now termed 'Afro pessimism,' 'state failure', or 'Congo pessimism'. Wamba recognised that the scholarship that reproduced and celebrated these illnesses had to be challenged.

Wamba dia Wamba and the Emancipatory Project

On his journey, Wamba grappled with Mobutuism as a cancer in the heart of Africa and was clear that the removal of Mobutu would not mean the end of Mobutuism. This awareness inspired Wamba to spend time on understanding the role of the African intellectual in transcending Mobutuism. In this regard his work on 'social movements' in Africa and 'emancipatory politics' became the focal point of his scholarship. Wamba turned to the activism and scholarship of Amilcar Cabral and Cheikh Anta Diop to ground his explorations. With the passing of Diop in 1986, Wamba made a presentation in the history seminar series at the University of Dar es Salaam which was later published in *Quest*, 'Homage to the great African Savant, Cheikh Anta Diop' (Wamba dia Wamba 1991a). In this homage, Wamba grasped the contribution of Diop as part of the

new advanced trends in human thought and as such, part of the world cultural revolution unfolding under our eyes. All the philosophies of 'identity'

(including Marxism, Christianity, etc) are being challenged in favour of pluralism (Wamba dia Wamba 1991a).

Wamba's appreciation of Diop's work concludes by saying Diop's theoretical work is a 'protracted research for the Afrocentric subject (maker of history), the history of African emancipation which is also the condition in the emancipation of the whole world' Wamba dia Wamba 1991a).

In summation, Wamba dia Wamba was searching for 'an Afrocentrically informed Marxism'. It was this that inspired the theorisation of what Wamba termed emancipative politics in his essay, 'Democracy, Multipartyism and Emancipative Politics in Africa' (Wamba dia Wamba 1993b).

At the time of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Birth of Marx in 1983, Wamba submitted an article to the UDASA Bulletin on the 'Crisis of Marxism in Africa'. (Wamba dia Wamba 1991b). In his article in the cyclostyled bulletin, Wamba critiqued the orthodoxy of the idea of the 'vanguard party' and the one-party state.

Gail M. Presbey noted about Wamba's insights,

'even Marxists have played the role of missionaries bringing 'enlightenment' to Africa, and suggest that African Marxists do wrong when they treat Marxism as a technology to be applied to Africa like any other context. Being an intellectual requires avoiding one-sidedness. Instead of kowtowing to the Marxists or the capitalists, he insists that what Africans need is the revitalization of their capacity to think (especially free from the influence of donors) (Presbey 1998:42).

Wamba was clear that to rethink revolutionary politics in Africa, revolutionary politics must be anchored in new communist forms of social consciousness among the masses. For Wamba, revolutionary politics

does not seek to represent the victims – even through a scientifically elaborated programme, by self-styled representatives; it interprets what is said in workers' and people's interventions. Contrary to the two dominant historical forms of politics, now in crisis (parliamentarian and one-party State models), the new politics takes consciousness as thinking and not a simple reflection of antagonism. It asserts that people think and that this fact constitutes the material basis of thought. The old politics tended to start from the belief that people don't think (at best they only reflect/mirror social antagonism) and the masses of people are viewed as a force in revolutionary tactics but not as processes of thinking. The party has often substituted itself in place of people's thinking. (The party thinks for you and defines what is good for society and what is not). Recognition of this thinking implies fundamentally the need to have confidence in the masses of people. (Wamba dia Wamba 1988: 97).

It is from these reflections that Wamba clarified the nine basic conditions of emancipatory politics as elements of emancipatory politics in Africa as follows:

1. African peoples think.
2. Politics must be based on the revitalization of orality and orature in popular participation in politics.
3. Collective Leadership.
4. The Politics of Inclusion.
5. The Management of Diversity.
6. Emancipatory politics and the liberation of African women.
7. Defending the natural and human resources of the Congo.
8. Security of the producers.
9. Regional Cooperation of Democratic States and Societies.

According to Wamba dia Wamba, for emancipatory politics to exist, in the case of the Congo, one has to have a sense of the peoples of the Congo, the conditions of their existence, their cosmos and the quest for a new mode of politics that serves as the basis for emancipatory politics. This requires developing a new profile of the DRC that places emphasis on the people as human beings with a capacity to make history and to change the history of conquest and militarism.

In the words of Wamba dia Wamba:

Without a revitalization of African traditions of solidarity community to deal with the urban-based process of expropriation threatening that community, even the call for democracy will be led by/favour capitalist despotism. Beyond democracy, what? The answer may not be easy to conceptualize without the revitalization of oral traditions, immediate reaffirmation (at the level of the individual and the community) i.e. cult of life process. The African masses think, they are also people and not living machines, they can/do/must self-program and cannot be fed programs by servants of capital, etc. Capitalist despotism is not against African unity; only mass movement beyond political capacities will give a different content to it. The call for democracy, outside of the revitalization of the community, cannot go beyond multipartyism.

In his article 'Democracy, Multipartyism and Emancipative Politics in Africa: The Case of Zaire', Wamba explained that the ideas behind emancipatory politics are both precarious and sequential.

Emancipative Politics does not always exist when it does, it exists under conditions. It is thus precarious and sequential: it unfolds until its conditions of subjective break disappear. When people lose the consciousness of the subjective break by ceasing to be involved in political processes, emancipative

politics disappears. The completion of a sequence of progressive politics does not lead automatically to another. In the absence of emancipative politics, the state problematic or imperialist influence prevails in the treatment of matters of politics. To reduce every political capacity to a state capacity is to abscond from politics (Wamba dia Wamba 1993b:96).

Wamba then goes on to outline five sequences of emancipatory politics in the Congo from 1921–1992 (Wamba dia Wamba 1993b). The first embodied the Kimbangist movement in which the main task was to break with the *évolué* consciousness as well as the traditional consciousness. Wamba calls this ‘historical mode of politics the independence mode. Ngiuzist, meetings, healing-universal meetings and solidarity communities were the sites of that politics’ (Wamba dia Wamba 1993b:99).

The purpose was to develop the capacity for healing and cleansing the society from the barbarism and genocide imposed as salvation under Belgian colonialism.

The second sequence was termed the self-determination sequence, embodied in anti-colonial struggle, and epitomised in Patrice Lumumba’s speech on 30 June 1960. This sequence ended with Mobutu’s coup, external military intervention, the manipulation of the United Nations (UN) and the assassination of Lumumba. It is a sequence that needs more study to grasp its errors, given Lumumba tended to view state apparatuses (parliaments and governments) as the primary sites of politics. The dictum of that period was Kwame Nkrumah’s ‘Seek ye first the political kingdom and all will be added’. Lumumba, therefore, found himself a prisoner in his own government. The mere occupation of colonial state apparatuses proved to be a contradiction with the politics of self-determination. What is of significance for the future unity of Africa is the reality that Africans cannot use the instruments of the colonial state machinery as the basis for the emancipation of the people.

The third independence movement sequence occurred between 1963 and 1968 with Pierre Mulele and several other militants (including Che Guevara). Politics in this period, considered the third sequence, was organised under the conditions of mass *armed insurrection* in constant attachment to the rural masses. This politics had to distinguish various contradictions operating among the people to provide appropriate solutions correctly. The *maquis* or liberated zones, the national liberation councils and the village assemblies and councils became its site of contestation and politics. The glaring omission was the neglect of the cities and the factories as *sites* of politics. This sequence ended with the Mobutu coup of 1965, the massive counter insurgency operations of the French, Belgians and the US, the murder of Mulele, etc.

The fourth sequence beginning from 1969 incarnated a politics under the cultural break with western domination and a reactivation and elaboration of indigenous civilisation. Wamba called this the cultural mode. The sites are called *maziku* and are scattered all over West Africa. It was in this period that to keep pace with this cultural revival that Mobutu declared the policy of *authenticity*.

The last identified sequence is that of the Sovereign National Conference (Conférence Nationale Souverain – CNS). It began with the formation of the civil society coordinating committees and ended with the forced closing of the CNS on 6 December 1992. Wamba referred to this as ‘the democracy mode of politics, politics under the conditions of people’s capacity as a political subject (people’s sovereignty). The whole nation as a universal palavering community’ (Wamba dia Wamba 1993b:100).

The principal thread linking various upsurges of emancipatory politics has been the emphasis on principled subjective break with submissive consciousness (rejection of every form of domination) and people’s capacity as politics subject (people’s sovereignty).

Wamba’s Contribution to the Understanding of Democratic Struggles and the Palavering Principle in Africa

Space does not allow for detailed analyses of all nine elements of the emancipation project, but what is of significance to understand Wamba’s journey is the way in which he attempted to link theory to practice. In the Dar es Salaam School, Wamba had written the important essay, ‘Experiences of Democracy in Africa: Reflections on Practices of Communalist Palaver as a Method of Resolving Contradictions’ (Wamba dia Wamba 1985).

K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau had elaborated on the *mbongi* as the central democratic institution of the village community and helped to shed light on the intricate checks and balances against arbitrary politics that had been developed in the precolonial village community. The palaver is simultaneously a political process as well as a community healing process with its rules, rituals and functions. There are numerous functions of the palaver, but in the case of the kingdom of the Congo the main task was *tunga sani* – self-mutual questioning.

The rules and rituals of the palaver seek to ensure maximum participation by all in the community. In this precolonial form of democratic participation,

the palaver emerges first as a semi-organised or mostly spontaneous form of mass total outrage against experienced restrictive one-sidedness in the community. It asserts the living autonomy of the living humanity, of everyone in the community as well as the cementing organic solidarity of the whole community

in its originality, complexity and living (as opposed to artificial) organizability organisation. It asserts the 'liveness' of life in each individual and of the entire community against all the obstacles to its normal flow. In the palaver, as a social moment, it is important that major, even very serious, conflicts be resolved and not just be rechannelled elsewhere (Wamba dia Wamba 1985).

The palaver takes place in the community with active conciliators or speakers called the *nzonzi*. The *nzonzi* were the village dialecticians who ensured that everyone spoke. In his words, 'The *Nzonzi* are literally "speakers", masters of the clarification of speech. They function as competent handlers of dialectics: they are therefore dialecticians' (Wamba dia Wamba 1985).

This experience of democracy could only take place inside an independent community with independent organs. This essay is one of the most important contributions of Wamba to the study of the struggles for democracy. Wamba outlined in an article in *Quest* that the democratic struggles in Africa have implications for humanity.

Democratisation or re-democratisation has to be conceptualised at the level of the whole planet Earth. It involves world global relations of power and not just those inside a specific territory. It is good to have full democracy in a reservation; the most crucial thing is to democratically abolish the reservation itself. Democracy has also to be grasped from the point of view of its entire history (Wamba dia Wamba 1992).

Lessons of the Sovereign National Conference

The CNS had been convened by the people as a grand palaver to formulate the form of state that was to be developed after Mobutu. The conference was held from May 1991 until the end of 1992. In 1992, Wamba was invited to participate in the Sovereign National Conference of Zaire. He arrived in Kinshasa on 7 July 1992 and joined the political commission. He participated in the sub-commission of internal politics and wrote the basic document on national reconciliation. Wamba was very impressed by the level of popular participation at the CNS and he compared the CNS to a grand palaver.

This attempt at modernising the palaver to bring public discourse to a higher level was the high point of the democratisation process in the DRC in the period of the anti-Mobutu struggle. The palaver brought to the fore the second important principle of emancipatory politics, 'Revitalization of orality and orature in popular participation in politics'.

The community was the repository of different forms of knowledge – scientific, technical, spiritual, and medicinal knowledge, knowledge of society, politics, etc. The colonial state suppressed African knowledge, institutions, and spiritual reflections.

According to Wamba,

Mobutism like colonial politics and the colonial state was made of bad sorcery. The resistance of the people in the fifth sequences of emancipatory politics depended on good sorcery or good politics. Good sorcery is politics that protects the community. The arbitrary exercise of power is bad sorcery, this is the domain of bad politics and dictatorship, lack of transparency, secrecy and attempts to isolate the people. This form of politics is based on intellectual abasement, presenting untruth as truth, denial of the pursuit of truth, spreading of rumours and reinforcing insecurity in society (Wamba dia Wamba 1992).

The Palaver as a Community Effort to Repair Bad Politics, Bad Talk, Bad Sorcery

Wamba believed that the national conference could inspire ‘emancipation’; unfortunately, the process was blocked by the powerful political class who comprised the dominant block in Congolese politics. Wamba had identified three groups of political actors in the struggles for democracy:

1. The camp of those in power around Mobutu giving itself different names at different times. This camp was and is fundamentally opposed to any form of people sovereignty and wanted by any means to reoccupy state positions.
2. The second consisted of the political class in opposition, essentially internal class opposition organized in parties such as the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), Sacred National Union, front of progressive national parties and Front of Lumumbists. This is the camp of elite politics of democracy. The occupation of state positions, by good people, through fair elections, constitutes the horizons of this camp’s politics.
3. The third group consisted of groups involved in armed uprisings and others scattered around various sites – including parties, churches, civil society organisations, women’s groups, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, trade unions, study groups, organic intellectuals of the producers, patriotic NGOs and the independent mass media.

For Wamba dia Wamba, the three groups had different conceptions of politics. The first group firmly believed in the culture of submission. The second group vacillated, depending on the balance of political forces, and the third always sought openings for articulating a vision of a democratic and independent society. Wamba intensified his work among social scientists in Africa, and in 1992 he was elected President of the CODESRIA. He served in this position from 1992 to 1995.

From Theory to Practice: When the Seminar Was Not Enough

The genocide in Rwanda marked a fundamental turning point in the journey of Wamba dia Wamba. Wamba was a participant at the Seventh Pan African Congress in Kampala in April 1994 as the full horror of the mass slaughter unfolded. He listened intently to the international and African positions on the unfolding genocide. He had noted that US President Clinton announced that what was happening in Rwanda was a massacre, not a genocide. This is despite the explicit content of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. He noted, 'The people with the means to stop it did not. I felt very powerless' (Wamba dia Wamba 2010).

After the genocide, Wamba wrote the Africa Declaration Against Genocide with Jacques Depelchin and Elaine Wamba. Working with Julius Nyerere and the Nyerere Foundation in Dar es Salaam to find solutions to the genocidal violence in Burundi, Wamba became strongly opposed to genocidal thinking and genocidal economics. In a 2010 interview, Wamba pointed out that there came a time when the seminar was not enough. When he became engaged in the struggles in the Congo at the military/political level, he noted,

I believe that even academics have rights and responsibilities as citizens. For me, the Rwandan genocide in 1994 was the turning point, my road to Damascus. Here you are, a social scientist who has been theorizing about social movements, trying to understand how African societies work, how they might be changed for the better. Then you see that genocide is taking place right in front of your face, and you find yourself powerless to do anything. I was in Tanzania, at Dar es Salaam University, in the middle of the semester.

The event was widely reported, even in the Western press. This was the first time that there had been such extensive coverage of an African tragedy. Apparently, there was a massive journalistic presence in South Africa, for the elections. The journalists were not very satisfied – the elections went fine – so they found something that they could report on in Rwanda, just as the genocide was at its height. So, you had all these images on CNN: machetes, bodies in the roads, bodies dumped in the river (Wamba dia Wamba 2010).

Wamba's scholarship at this time moved from academic papers to clear policy guidelines on the struggles for peace and democracy in the Great Lakes Region. One of the most lucid and succinct summations was in his unpublished paper, 'Protracted Political Crisis, Wars and Militarism in the Regions of Central Africa and the Great Lakes' (Wamba dia Wamba n.d.). This paper written during the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) campaign headed by Laurent Kabila, which sought to grasp the militarisation of the region and why the removal of

Mobutu had necessitated a regional war. Noting that the conceptual work necessary to grasp the regional dynamics represented a bottleneck, Wamba lamented the short-sighted and partisan scholarship that made it difficult to grasp the unfolding dynamics. Working with Julius Nyerere, Wamba was able to make a clear evaluation of what he considered the weakness of the military removal of Mobutu. He had argued in this presentation that the ADFL removed Mobutu but Mobutuism was still present.

After travelling to the DRC, Wamba arranged for Julius Nyerere to travel to Kinshasa to have discussions with Laurent Kabila and the new government. Kabila had sent emissaries to Tanzania to seek the support of the Tanzanian government and, during the visit, Wamba organised for Nyerere to meet with members of the opposition. In fact, Kabila was very unhappy with the meetings that Wamba arranged, especially the meeting between Julius Nyerere and Etienne Tshisekedi of the UDPS party. Former President Nyerere was offended by the rogue elements surrounding Kabila and the fact that Kabila wanted diplomatic and political support from Tanzania while turning a deaf ear to those elements calling for a new mode of politics.

One of the first decrees of the Kabila government was to place a ban on all political activities. This decree strengthened the former Mobutu political careerists with financial and political resources at the same time as it silenced the internal opposition that had been at the forefront of the civilian opposition to Mobutu. The internal opposition elements had supported the outcome of the Sovereign National Conference and wanted an all-inclusive government to replace the personalist and absolutist traditions of Mobutuism. Within a short space of time, even those who initially supported Kabila inside and outside of the DRC had to distance themselves from the repression, nepotism, and arbitrary rule of his regime. Kabila refused to open dialogue with the internal political forces that had opposed Mobutu, calling many of these elements Mobutuists.

By February 1998 Wamba, who was now working full time as a diplomat for peace and ending genocide, wrote a letter to the leaders of Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Angola. That letter explicitly identified the genocidal language and postures that were being deployed by the Kabila government. Angola, in particular, was very open to the contents of the letter in so far as it exposed elements of the Kabila regime that were previously not quite clear.

The resort to ethnic manipulation and xenophobia by the Kabila regime was compounded using military courts instead of civilian courts to deal with civil cases. In August 1998, a new rebellion broke out in the DRC and Wamba was elected President of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie – RCD*) and leader of

the rebellion. This new military struggle brought changing alliances. In particular, the Angolan leadership that had been favourable to the diplomatic overtures of Uganda in February changed its position as soon as it became clear that Wamba dia Wamba was at the head of the rebellion. The alliance between Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe with Kabila brought in the government of Sudan under Omar El Bashir.

From the outset, Wamba was caught in a quagmire that could not be resolved with the social forces at play. His own essay on the 'protracted crisis' (Wamba dia Wamba n.d.) had offered clear insights on the limitations of the military option. For Wamba, his visions of collective leadership and the democratic management of diversity were to be tested in the RCD. But this was not to be. Even the original supporters of the rebellion against Kabila – the government of Rwanda and the government of Uganda – squabbled to the point of armed clashes inside the DRC. For the political allies of Wamba, it was the Global Pan African Movement in Kampala that was clearest in terms of the solutions to the militarism in the region. In its statement, the movement noted,

In our view the solution to the crisis is not less democracy but more democracy. The militaristic line had been tried before. While it got rid of Mobutu it failed in getting rid of Mobutism. Therefore, it is time to let the voice of the ordinary Congolese, the workers, peasants, women, the intellectuals, political parties, etc, rise above the ricochet of maxim guns and mortars (Statement of the Global Pan African Movement, Kampala, August 1998).

Wamba's interventions failed to produce the desired result – the democratisation of Congolese politics – an outcome that Rwanda and Uganda wanted to avoid, not least because of the example that a democratic Congo could set for the region. Wamba threw himself in the search for peace and worked hard for a peaceful resolution to the rebellion that had been initiated in August 1998. After the Lusaka Accords of 1999, and later the Sun City agreement in South Africa, the RCD disintegrated as a political military force. For a short period, Wamba operated in the zones of eastern Congo, but his lack of proficiency in the Kiswahili language (the principal language of eastern Congo), severely hindered his ability to develop a strong base among the people. Later Wamba served as a senator in Kinshasa, but the experiences of the armed rebellion and the inability to completely mobilise the political forces continued to be at the centre of the Wamba's concerns. He also faced personal loss when his eldest son, Phillippe Wamba, died in a car accident in Kenya on 11 September 2002. His son Remy had died of leukaemia in Boston in 1979, after spending a year in and out of hospital. For a long time Wamba mourned Remy, and the loss of Phillippe caused another great sorrow in the Wamba family.

Working for the Unification of the Peoples of Africa

In the last eighteen years of his earthly journey, Wamba had many opportunities to reflect on his scholarship, his involvement in the struggles for emancipatory politics, and the role of African scholars. Though there is no one document that sums up his experience in the struggles within the RCD, there are many interviews and short statements that give some indication of this part of his journey. Wamba expressed his disappointment that African intellectuals were not more engaged in the research and discussions about the wars in the Congo.

Journalists in Belgium such as Ludo Martens and Collette Braeckman have written extensive negative histories of the 1998 rebellion and after. Neither Wamba nor his comrades in arms have been able to put out their version of the unresolved problems of imperial domination. Today, US universities have encouraged more than a dozen doctoral dissertations on 'Africa's First World' war, but few of these studies grasp the historical conjuncture within which this war was prosecuted.

When the rebellion broke out, in Tanzania it was Chachage Seithy L. Chachage who came out as a significant voice raising concerns about the role of African intellectuals in the search for peace and democracy (Chachage 1998). Later Walter Bgoya, the publisher, presented a paper urging progressive intellectuals to engage seriously with the struggles against genocidal violence in the DRC. There had been no collective support group within the university in Tanzania like the support group that was organised around progressive intellectuals in the USA. Later in an interview, Wamba expressed his disappointment at the lack of engagement of African scholars, especially his former colleagues at CODESRIA.

I expected CODESRIA to send researchers into the field to conduct investigations on such an involvement and the motivations for that rebellion. This would have helped us. But this was not done and, frankly, I felt like there was some hostility towards me (Wamba dia Wamba 2010).

The hostility was linked to the war and this author saw some of this first-hand in 1998 at the annual Southern Africa Political Economy Series (SAPES) colloquium in Harare. Wamba was taken aback by the public position of some of his former colleagues, especially those who he collaborated with in authoring a book on social movements in Africa. Slowly Wamba became intellectually and politically isolated with a small following on social media. This isolation brought Wamba into communication with acolytes who did not push him to write his version of the struggles inside the RCD. For ten years, Wamba lived and worked in Dar es Salaam and Kinshasa. He threw

himself into the discussion of the people's unification of Africa and repeated the position that he had taken, like that of Cheikh Anta Diop, 'the existence of the states we find in Africa today has no justification in history other than the effect of the arbitrary partition at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 where only European countries were represented'. In other words, these states are nothing more than a colonial legacy.

His presentations at Rhodes University in South Africa and at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign stressed the importance of re-dynamising African cultures in the process of restoring the humanity of Africans. Wamba loved music, he loved to dance, and his smile was one of the most appealing aspect of his personality. Wamba worked hard for a new sequence of emancipatory politics and in the last two years of his life he inserted himself into a traditional organisation in the hope of gaining knowledge from the traditional intellectuals of Africa. In May 2017, he was appointed the head of the political-religious movement Bundu dia Mayala of Ne Muanda Nsemi. Wamba was spending his last year in Kinshasa when he left his earthly journey to join the ancestors. He left behind a significant body of work to inspire those struggling for a new mode of politics in Africa.

Note

1. Évolué (French: [evɔlye], lit. 'evolved' or 'developed') is a French label used during the colonial era to refer to colonised Africans or Asians who had 'evolved' by becoming Europeanised through education or assimilation and had accepted European values and patterns of behaviour, viz accepted the ideas of white supremacy. It is most commonly used to refer to individuals within the Belgian and French colonial empires. *Évolués* spoke French, followed European laws, and denigrated the remnants of African ideas and social mores. By graduating from high school and being fluent in French, Wamba had passed the test to be an evolved person, but he rejected this orientation and ideology.

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