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## POLITICS, SCHOLARSHIP AND AFRICAN EMPIRICISM:

## "THE NORMATIVE IMPOSSIBILITY IN CHIPEMBERE"

by

Mekki Mtewa

Chipembere is a paradox and a normative contradiction. Genetically, he was born between two political extremes in a temperate zone without violent historical storms and tempests. Generically, he was born a "Man", a categorization which Plato denies to use in matters of serious scholarship. Whether by accident or predestination, his political persona failed him. In the case of a *Steppenwolf*, a bourgeois (which Chipembere was) never dies a martyr nor agrees to give up his own destruction. There are times, however, when a Kazantzakis' spirit of daring overcomes a bourgeois and the end becomes a complex paradox.

To begin then, it would take a great deal of scholarly analyses and masterly application of sophisticated methodological tools to unveil the paradox in Chipembere. They say he was a 'shy' and 'reserved' man. This becomes in itself a stylistic concealment of the true aspect of one's political and real persona.

There is the conventional approach of treating personalities as if, in Lasswell's 'Manifold of Events', they were mere political instances, events, and accidents. Further, scholarship impresses upon the use of a language, itself impregnated by apodeictic logic, which oscillates between logical deductivism and, inductivism. The analyst, the convention itself impresses, *ought* only be familiar with the gist of the event or instance and, sadly not, with its crust.

In the above, lies a dangerous normative difficulty. This difficulty has heretofore appeared in writings of scholars who have attempted to offer authoritative and categorical sketches of tragic personalities. To be candid, John Chilembwe, a Malawian, has been victimized thus.

It is possible to conceive of a scholarship which will

devote its energies to understanding Chilembwe and Chipembere. These men share a common denominator - they were Malawians, both from the Southern Region of the Republic. Chilembwe was himself a devoted religious man and he saw politics in the British Central Africa of 1900-1915 as a bifurcation of the Ethiopian kingdom. Linden and Linden pursue this argument intelligently. Chilembwe was, during the 1900-1915 era, without malice, a contradiction.

What is probably important to understand here is the contradiction in Chipembere, not as it derives from diabetes, but as it relates to the Marx in him. Recall that the Marxist imperative on "freedom" directly relates to the question of being historically and materialistically free. Maybe there is nothing wrong with this. Now, however, notice that Chipembere underwent his education at Fort Hare in the Republic of South Africa. It is possible to excuse him for this historical confusion. But, education at Fort Hare was the best that a Malawian could hope for in the 1950's. There is again something peculiar about Fort Hare - its mood of political tolerance. Witness, for example, Herbert Tapfumanei Chitepo of Zimbabwe, a 1951 graduate of Fort Hare.

The Marxist method, when applied to Chipembere, defeats all reason and calculus of objective analysis. For example, in Marxist terms, it would have been possible to hypothesize that Chipembere would not have resigned his Ministership and from active politics, given his socio-economic origin. To say this, however, would be to escape the inevitability - that he did resign and, in fact, attempted to overthrow a constitutionally formed government of the Republic of Malawi. Scholarship allows us to apply speculative hypotheses to explain the inevitable. I find this requirement very hard to justify for the following reasons.

Mangochi district (then Fort Johnston) lost many young lives to the political cause of Chipembere. This is characteristic of revolutions; the human dimension lacks a moral justification. It becomes, instead, a problem of Hegelian deductivism that the human element, under revolutionary circumstances, is an 'instrument'. In the process of the revolution, it is this innocent human 'instrument' which is made obsolete. Fanon is aware of this obsolescence when it has become so obvious that it is "the wretched of the earth". Also it is precisely this human condition which caught the sympathy of Marx. Marx, in other words, was a moral and very sympathetic individual. However, if and only if, Marx instrumentized human obsolescence turning it into a mere revolutionary instrument, then we have a vicious cycle, and a real normative difficulty. Only if this is true, then

Chipembere was a neo-Marxist, and strangely a Kazantzakis who sings:

*I do not hope for anything.  
I do not fear anything.  
I am free.*

What sort of freedom was this? The personal? The "tribal"? The political or the economic? These are all possible variants of Chipembere's freedom. There are, however, two strong medieval influences in his thoughts. We now can introduce Dunduzu K. Chisiza, a Parliamentary Secretary in the Malawi Ministry of Finance (1961-62) who died in a car accident in 1962. Before Chisiza's death, he had raised a complex series of political issues viz-a-viz the question of political co-existence in Southern Africa and the question of economic regionalism.<sup>1</sup> It would be gratuitous and, indeed, erratic, to suppose that Chisiza created an oedipal complex in thought which nourished revolutionary visions.

However, Chisiza's diagrammatic distinctions of economic regionalism embrace a great deal of Nkrumah's thoughts. Further, Chisiza's socialism conceptually eliminates the socialist paradox of economic exploitation. This, Chisiza thought, could be achieved through a synthesis of all forms of social ideologies in Africa. Not only was his synthetic socialism to serve normative, prescriptive, descriptive and analytic functions but, also animate the political emotions of participation.

Chipembere's philosophical discourses are not radically different from Chisiza's aforementioned work. Both men, each in his own scholarly virtue, were concerned with the question of political purpose, direction, and style. The democratic usage of power, they both seemed to suggest, was a matter of style. The degree and direction of its application determined the rate of political freedom, economic liberation and, in the abstract sense, normative justice and liberty. Political power was organizational, thus institutional. The political party took these organizational values as a symbol of political unanimity and nationhood. It was, for this purpose, a moral personification of all that was "political". Democratic decision-making was an aspect of politics which the political party took of its own volition. Witness Chipembere's compliment to Malawi "as a paragon of political organization and discipline and understanding", in Rules 15 and 16 of the Malawi Congress Party which Chipembere and Chisiza, then as members of the Central Executive of the Party, helped to devise. It was for this reason, apocalyptic, that Chipembere could devise a mode of his own political fate.

For Chipembere and, indeed, Chisiza, democratic leadership is revelatory. Instead of viewing political conflict as a shapeless ground surrounding political institutions and processes, they view it as a character, an aspect, or a unique process of politics. The democratic symbolism of Malawi as a nation, offered them this possibility. Recall their enthusiasm in wanting to endow Malawi with a revelatory leadership because "human nature is such that it needs a kind of hero to be hero-worshipped". Notice that this is not only Machiavellian in principle, but is itself largely a contemporary problem of logical positivism.

But, it could be suggested that the political vision which Chipembere and Chisiza held, was compatible with the kind of a political utopia in which Cabinet Ministers "like nationalists could hob-nob with their former Party colleagues in the old hide outs". In other words, political activities were to be collapsed without distinctive class boundaries or hierarchies.

Chipembere's position in this complex manifold of political and historical events can then be partly explained by the paradox of power which he himself at one time had embraced. Chipembere, as an individual, gives us a metaphorical measure of, not only the generic quality of his "manhood" suggested hereinbefore, but, importantly, as an African whose philosophy of politics (as a vocation) and life (as an existential process of humanity), is shrouded in the Pan-African imperative. Chipembere can only give us a nominal measure of what it genetically means, in Fanonic terms, to be the "wretched of the earth". But classificatory selection excludes Chipembere from this class of people.

Chipembere was aware of the political marginality which his constituency manifested in Malawi. Without the co-operation of the Yao, of Chief Makanjila, Chief Jalasi, and Chief Mponda, in the Mangochi (then Fort Johnston) district, Chipembere's political credibility in Malawi would have been more problematical. The Nyanja of Likema Island, and Malindi mission in the Mangochi district where his father was stationed by the University Mission to Central Africa (U.M.C.A.) Church, gave Chipembere a symbolic, if not, a pivotal support.

His universalism can perhaps be explained as a vision which he intended to compensate for this tribal and political marginality. This aspect of universalism seems to have been more idealized during the decade of his political exile in the United States of America. It is, for this reason, not gratuitous to consider Chipembere as a Pan-Africanist. The place to look for his Pan-empiricism is not Malawi, but in his

historical discourses on Africa.

Chipembere seemed to follow the logically obvious path of the Pan-African imperative. Here, it is important to understand the theory of distribution of political costs in the process of African political independence. For example, Nkrumah, Fanon and, indeed, Chief Albert Luthuli gave Pan-Africanism what we may correctly call, a quantum theory of political cost and, the unit of its political predication is the nominal "state". The kind of political nominalism entailed in this quantum theory of unity, required the application of a logic for "knowing", "discovering", and "exploring" that which was Pan-African. There are two major assumptions which a nominalist makes in this respect: prudent utilization of the method of knowing, discovery, and exploration, and the knowledge of the structures, elements, and components of that which is being sought.

The assumptions are made easier because there are given, basic definitions. *Pan Africa* would, therefore, seem to be a "syllogistic" quantity, entity, or an abstract, which is arrived at through the process of summation of its differentiated but, equally unique parts. Pan-Africanism then, becomes the body of knowledge, or correctly, the process of summation, a principle of summation, or the scientism necessary for the summation, differentiation, and discrimination of the structures, elements, and components of the very thing or quantity that is being quantified.

For Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism was probably best known in its major political aspect and less in its procedural, normative, or scientific form. Its political aspect remains in the form it was debated at the Addis Ababa Conference in May 1963. Its procedural, normative, and scientific aspects are shrouded in the philosophical myth of African nominalism. It is, for this reason, that scholarly treatment of Pan-Africanism in the true spirit of a DuBois and a Garvey has receded into a kind of historical metamorphosis. In Kuhnian terminology, Pan-Africanism has undergone a paradigmatic crisis and "is now sleeping".

The theory of abstinence, when applied to the empiricism of Pan-Africanism, raises a series of difficulties of scholarship. In order to revive and solve the Kuhnian paradigmatic inevitability, scholars should provide themselves with a workable and meaningful framework, and meaning, of what it is they call Pan-Africa, or its derivatives. This can only be obtained by reconciling two levels of empiricism: the traditional and, the universal. To argue in this vein is,

in fact, to provoke a series of unsolicited, unintended, reactions of those scholars and politicians whose modus operandi of the paradigm under discussion, is traditionally rooted.

Pan-Africanism, or its scientific empiricism, is not opposed to the traditional, but compliments and embraces it. While the traditional is a standard of the "particular", Pan-Africanism is of the "universal", and in this process of intersection, a convergence of the two systems of thought is inevitable. It is this convergence theory of African systems of thought that probably allows statesmen to apply either the particular or the universal interchangeably.

The utility, of course, is relative as to which of the above aspects are used and when. By this utility function of Pan-Africanism, it is suggested that there is an aggregative quality of this theory which deserves scholarly criticism. Further, it seems to be deeply rooted in Benthamite utilitarianism. For example, in a community of many differentiated governments, the hierarchy is based on such nominal considerations as: land size, population size, Gross National Product, Private Income Index, social and economic infrastructures and, importantly, on the personal autobiographies of the statesmen. Recall, for example, the trend and futility of the Addis Ababa debate in May 1963 where the statistical correlations of .90 per cent on the Pearson Correlation, strongly suggested Pan African efficacy of certain 'large' African states than 'small' states.

The rationale of Pan-Africanism was, suggestively, lost in the cobweb of the statistical game. We do find in it the still unresolved question of "motive" and "intent". This question cannot be abandoned behind the linguistical and, logistical difficulties of its logic, which is systematic and coherent, but in the semi-scientific language of traditional empiricism hereinbefore discussed. The problem is precisely this: we *cannot* and *should not* (normatively speaking) use traditional lingua(themselves denotative and aspect languages) for the scientific analysis of universal empiricism of Pan-Africanism. The difficulty is this: traditional empiricism, unless it has traditionally treated universals as universals, and particulars as particulars, a conceptual impulse is quite likely to occur. And this will continue to raise the question of empirical "motive" in Pan-Africanism.

Pan-Africanism, as a system of concepts, theories, and an independent body of knowledge, seems to have its own language. The scholarly task is to map out the structures

of this scientific language. Such a language should also contain its own tonal tensions which, when applied to different situations, would emphasize the use of a particular psychology and methodology.

And observation can, in fact, be made which seems to have greater relevance to the problem of banishment or exile in Africa. If perceived and analyzed apodeictically, banishment or exile is deeply rooted in the procedural and methodological difficulty of establishing a point of congruence between the traditional and the universal aspects of politics. The traditional empiricist, like the physicist and the naturalist, is quite contemptuous of the rampant scientism of the social scientist. Recall in political science the intensity of the debate between the 'pure' political scientists against the 'behavioralists' and, between the 'behavioralists' against the 'post-behavioralists'. There is between them a kind of scholarly tolerance under which the 'behavioralist' can appear on the same panel with a 'post-behavioralist', with a tacit agreement that none of them will 'comment' on the other's paper.

Problems of power, this discussion seems to suggest, manifest themselves in diverse ways. However, the political power, with its immense potential force, is of consequence to problems of conflict discussed here. Consequently, political exile, or death, is a corollary of the use of this kind of political power in wanting to silence the empiricist.

However, it is extremely important to understand the context within which force is used to 'terminate' logical, or empirical questions or discussions which cannot be easily resolved without stretching one's philosophical faculties. Nkrumah calls this difficulty, one which is situated between two polarities, subjectivism and/or objectivism, the final outcome of which is determined by the exhaustion of the philosophical faculties of either the subjectivist or the objectivist. Schelling, or the game-theory of politics school, calls this a kind of unsymmetrical, non-zero game. The outcome is either/or one of the empiricisms.

This discussion seems to suggest that, the real difficulty with politics is, indeed, the persistence of subjectivism and its immediate transformation into political nominalism, thereby constituting and founding revelational politics. This subjective approach, in the thinking of Nkrumah, defeats the objectivism of Pan-Africanism. While subjectivism is, on the one hand, non, or less-empirical and non-or less-reflective, Pan-African objectivism, on the other



hand, does not solely rely on the entological efficacies of individual statesmen and oral history, rather it relies so much on the storage of political and historical data, knowledge, and artifacts, in Museums and Archives for 'all' Pan-African generations to verify the efficacy of each political unit. While Pan-Africanism does not defy the significance of a chi-square in a statistical report of its total population, size, GNP, productivity, and the prive income index, it emphasizes greatly the notion of empirical efficacy of the empiricist himself rather than the method in itself. In other words, empiricism for Pan-African purposes is not considered as a ritualistic process of generating voluminous computer outputs of quantitative data for the support of the argument of political efficacy.

Knowledge (or its equivalent chiChewa term "Nzeru") is an objective technique for displaying certain acquired virtues. However, "Nzeru" has its own normative qualities upon which individuals display cognitive difference in the display of their skills. The objective scale for the judgment of such skills lies in technical elucidation and the common protocol of individual ability. "Nzeru" then, would seem to be equally cognitive of the aspects of Pan-Africanism which ought at times to be effectively displayed and emphasized.

There is, however, a problem of marginal empiricism and cognition which develops here. The discussion, in other words, has taken a new dimension of 'political teleology', not of the political systems and political statesmen, but those who are in it playing their pivotal political roles. The end of their politics would seem to suggest a political marginality which capitalizes on the idealism of Pan-Africanism during times of political crises or internal contradictions. This strategy reduces for such politicians the burden of explanation: 'why the crisis?', while those who lose such crises are rescued by the Pan-African imperative.

To summarise this long question on the contributions of Chipembere, Chisiza, and Chilembwe, to the debate on Pan-Africanism, the following must be mentioned. Scholarship has heretofore analyzed Chilembwe on the basis of his *asthma* from which a series of questions have been raised to the effect whether or not asthma has any negative, political reinforcements on the individual? The objection to this kind of speculative subjectivism is that while the speculation is proposed in Freudian terms with the intent of establishing an Eriksonian conclusion, one ends up being confronted instead with the Darwinist dilemma. Such is the viciousness of psycho-historical scholarship. For future purposes then,

while it might not be completely objectionable to analyze Chipembere, for example, from the "diabetic" perspective, it is, however, not more rewarding, in the final analysis, than to attempt to analyze him from the procedural. It is, in fact, this aspect of the question which is paradoxical. The bridging of this procedural gap is the one which is likely to contribute to the solution of the aforementioned paradox.

In the final analysis, what this discussion has attempted to raise is not a problem of politics of which this man was himself a personification, but rather one of a personal nature. The problem itself relates to the question of being a "man" in a political world and, the types of political difficulties one must encounter therein. The conclusion to such a complex question cannot and should not narrow itself to merely procedural answers but, also the philosophical. It is in this respect that Pan-Africanism is, and can be, an equally rewarding theory of African politics.

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#### Footnote

- 1 Dunduzu K. Chisiza (1963): "The Outlook for Contemporary Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1,1, pp. 25-38.

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