

# Walking in the footsteps of Moïse Tshombe: Pro-West Africans a greater threat to Africa than Western saviorists

In a February 2020 article in the Financial Times, a “specialist” in Africa casually wrote that in the 60s DRC was “unprepared for independence from Belgium [...] and soon disintegrated, engulfed in a violence where there were no good guys or bad guys”. In addition to Westerners’ deliberating on whether Africans were mature enough to govern themselves, most African countries acquired their independence in a period when the landscape was dominated by the political paradigm of the West vs. the Soviets dichotomy. In that competitive context, the former colonies attempted to forge a position for themselves as “non-aligned” nations. But like President Bush would say later, in this world either you are with or against America.

Just a few weeks ago, during a Prayer Breakfast in the margins of the February 2020 AU Summit which focused on “silencing the guns”, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia said that “the ultimate solution for Africa is Jesus Christ”. One of the AU Commissioners applauded and commented that “United in prayers for the Africa we want”!

In view of that global context, African political discourse generally has a Western, rather than an African, perspective.

Is 21st century turning out to be the time Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, and Julius Nyerere’s dream of self-reliance and political integration of Africa is irreversibly undermined

by pro-West perspectives?

## **Pro-West perspective and Pro-West Africans**

In a recent [article by Dr Lonzen Rugira's in The Standard](#), he described Prof. Mutua, a Kenyan politician and presidential aspirant, as “part of that African ‘intellectual breed’ that doesn’t believe in Africa.” He argued that Prof. Mutua “doesn’t believe an African country can craft democracy and development outside a foreign yardstick.”

On this reading, Prof. Mutua represents the impasse many African leaders, past and present, believe they have to cope with, because they imagine the success of their governments is determined by or dependent on how the West perceives them as pro- or anti-West. In the meantime, the Western perception of Africans hasn’t changed much since colonization. If anything, it has worsened. Today, Western propaganda justifies the domination of Africa with the same arguments with which they justified colonization.

***The contemporary “pro-West” paradigm refers to the penchant to consider the West as the yardstick and the standard in any appraisal or criticism of an African country. Similarly, a “pro-West” African persists in a perspective consisting of aligning with Western powers and turning African interests in a direction more amenable to Western sensibilities. A “pro-west” perspective is either a conscious survival mechanism or an internalized paradigm, but both cases operate from a Western perspective.***

## **African “darlings” or “good students” of Western donors or NGOs**

Generally, pro-West Africans proclaim their wholehearted loyalty to the Western agenda for Africa and seek to govern their countries under Western patronage. Those who don’t make their countries or themselves more trustworthy partners in the eyes of the West automatically lose Western favors.

At the individual level, pro-Westerners are mis-identified as the only Africans who get "it". Western diplomats and NGOs operating on the continent identify potential 'pro-democracy' Africans, human rights champions, and free-speech advocates; then Western think tanks invite them for seminars, and from the perspective of the West they are declared the only trustworthy sources on anything about or from Africa. Their pay or rewards depend mainly on the enthusiasm and the stubbornness with which they challenge 'whataboutist' criticisms of the failing aspects of their masters' system ("it is a work in progress", they say of the West).

### **Is Africa the most pro-West continent in the world?**

Observers categorize solutions for African challenges and the rapport with the West, as coming from two diametrically opposed schools: on one side a pro-West liberal approach (encouraging compliance and obedience to the West, almost in a "Our Father, who art in America/Europe; thy will be done in Africa as it is in US/Europe" fashion), and on the other hand, "an empty anti-imperialist rhetoric from leaders who do that after stuffing their Swiss Bank accounts while letting their people starve" (reflecting corruption practices in many African liberation movements).

***If considered from that perspective, most of the countries in Africa are more pro-West than pro-Africa.*** One internet user even commented that "it would probably be easier to make a small list of the African countries that are non-pro-West, than it would be to list all those remaining as pro-West."

The question that Dr Lonzen Rugira raised in his response to Prof. Mutua's statement that "Love him or hate him, Kagame could be Africa's Lew Kwan Yew" is whether an African country can effectively exist and thrive outside the pro- or anti-West categories. Is there life outside the Western yardstick which would not be deemed an enemy or a danger? Can an African country be **FOR** itself, and not necessarily against the West?

Isn't it possible to catalyze democratization in Africa beyond pro-West catchphrases?

The undeniable truth is that decolonization liberated Africans from their status as colonial subjects, but so far independence has failed to rid Africa of the predatory control of the former and present Western masters' political sway and economic exploitation.

In that context, most African countries are very pro-West, more specifically, pro-United States, and this does not happen by a free choice or by accident. History timidly teaches how after the independence, the US government and former colonial powers aided by collaborators within Africa, did overthrow and even assassinate leaders who were pioneers of a pan-African vision (like Nkrumah and Lumumba), and propped up pro-West Africans whose sole required virtue was to be immune to the Soviet sway, and to protect the businesses of Western corporations on the continent.

To be a darling of the West, you are required to reject political ideas that are people-centered (as counter to pro-Marxists). That was enough to be part of the family of "western allies" that were spared adjectives like "despotic", "dictatorial", "corrupt" or "autocratic" which Western media fashioned for pro-Soviet leaders but are today set aside mainly for African leaders.

### **Pro-West leaders engender popular pro-west sentiments in African youth**

Leaders and policymakers on the continent are not the only Africans caught up in the pro- versus anti-west dichotomy. Unfortunately, frustrations with both ineffective pro-West as well as corrupt anti-imperialist leaders both produce either a philosophical youth or a devoutly religious one that believes in "the ultimate solution for Africa is Jesus Christ" rhetoric, or an ambitious but desperate youth that are

conditioned to see opportunities and a future only in Europe, despite the very real likelihood of perishing in the Mediterranean Sea.

Though the popular envy in the average Africans of a Western lifestyle seen on the TV and in Hollywood movies is real and high, the majority of African youth, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, many of whom are university graduates, are essentially attracted by the prospects they are made to imagine are available in Europe or America. Unfortunately, almost no leader tries to convince them that Africa can and is working hard to offer them opportunities needed for them to actualize their fullest potential.

### **Where does being “pro-West” leave Pan African self-reliance?**

In the 1960s, Frantz Fanon argued that one of the many questions that African leaders faced was whether continued economic and political interaction with former colonial powers threatened their countries' autonomy and political viability.

For the foreseeable future, considering Western political and security interests and economic challenges, African countries seem to be in for a rough ride. African countries shall still alternate between, on one side, seeking guidance and Western embrace, and on the other, a firm sense of dignity and sometimes emotionally-charged defiance misunderstood as “anti-West”. Very few leaders will be allowed to imagine and peacefully experiment a more pragmatic and sustainable third way, because Africans aren't provided with the luxury of choosing from African perspectives.

Therefore, the easy choices available to Africans shall consist in seeking admission into the sphere of friends or allies of the West at almost any price or becoming bad students of democracy and, at most, pariah states, and incurring the consequences thereof. It's also worth noting that no country can easily be admitted in the circle of

Western allies or partners without fulfilling a minimum of pro-West requirements. The central challenge rests with the "requirements". For instance, Rwanda's inclusive politics and socio-economic policies are appreciated by Rwandans and seen by many observers as positive, while some methods used are criticized as negative albeit effective. However, ONLY compliance with Western diktat determines whether their media appraise President Paul Kagame as a "good student/darling" of the West, or if they depict him as a dictator. Hence the portrayal of his Government as authoritarian has nothing to do with what the opportunities the government delivers to the people of Rwanda are.

### **Kagame's concept of "Modern Africanisation"**

President Paul Kagame has been a consistent and strong defender of partnership with everybody rather than Western patronage. As he passionately said, "time for dictating Africans what they should do or be is up, and now is the time for better conversations and partnerships that can mutually benefit the West and the continent in a more respectable manner".

Certainly, in the past this aspiration of African self-reliance and defense of African perspectives proved anti-West and often was very deadly in the context of the Cold War divide, but it is the same principles on which it was founded that President Kagame is advocating to re-imagine and to build on an African path that is neither pro- nor anti-West.

President Paul Kagame summarized this pan African vision in the following famous terms: ***"What I am looking for is modern Africanization not Westernization. I want to be an African, a modern one, an African that can relate meaningfully to the rest of the world. Not an African lost in the jungle looking for gracious people to give me a sense of direction"***.

To sum up what Stuart Hall said, what is required of Africans

is a renewed sense of being on the side of Africa. Africans are faced with the imperative to question the "pro-West" status quo, and to re-imagine their countries not as inferior.

This invitation to withdraw intellectual participation in Western saviorism is premised on the hope against hope that pro-West Africans are redeemable. As one pan-Africanist commentator once suggested, "we have to protect our hope in Africa even when Africans are disappointing us, because white saviorism is much worse than pro-West entrepreneurs of false hope."

Pan African champions of equal partnership with the West are not easily going to change the mind of pro-West Africans, no more than the latter, despite all the support of Western NGOs, think tanks and the media, are they going to win out over Pan-Africans who genuinely endeavor to be good students of Nkrumah's call "to find in the African unity solutions to our problems."

If I may hazard to say, Pan-Africanism can still hope that, for most Africans, minus the pro-West Africans who have chosen to make peace with Western patronage and even make a living out of Western saviorism, the next ten years shall be the time we finally recognize that there are other perspectives and alternative possibilities beyond the captivity of the Western gaze.