

Jub, Jubal, Jubanti: a call for decolonizing Senegalese administration

Global Africa


The editorial board is headed by Mame-Penda Ba, Professor of political science at Gaston Berger University and Director of LASPAD.

redaction@globalafricasciences.org

There is a wind of change blowing in the air in Africa. There has been, for the past two decades a growing call for decolonization, manifested in the second decade of the 20th century by civil society movements such as *Y en A Marre* in Senegal, *le balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *la Lucha* and *Filimbi* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and *Rhodes Must Fall* in South Africa, etc. These movements have been particularly powerful in raising awareness and developing mass consciousness through their strong critique of the kleptocratic postcolonial state. They are also equally important given their radical critique of the Colonial Matrix of Power and its corollary, in Francophone Africa, *la Françafrique*, the neocolonial relationship between France and its former colonies. The renewed decolonial consciousness that was amplified by these movements on the continent has reached a new height in the past 5 years. In Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, for example, the critique of the post-colonial state, has in the eyes of some people, legitimized the coup d'états that placed, at the head of these countries, military officers, who have anchored their political rhetoric on an anti-colonial, more precisely, an anti-France message leading, at times, to the severance of diplomatic ties with the former colonizer.

This current political situation led by populist and anti-democratic military regimes in the above-mentioned countries has developed in a more sophisticated way in Senegal. PASTEF¹, the current ruling political party, which recently won the presidential elections in Senegal, founded its political engagement on a discourse that is similar: a radical critique of what they present as a post-colonial system built on coloniality and supported and legitimized by the

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¹ African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (French: Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité)

West. PASTEF's landslide victory in the Senegalese presidency and the popularity of its leader, Ousmane Sonko, across the continent invites us to ask the question: what is the centrality of the decolonial perspective on the continent and what are its (decoloniality perspective's) pertinence in public administration in Africa?

If the emergence of the PASTEF phenomenon is so important as to constitute the editorial for a special issue of a pan-African journal on **"African administrations: decoloniality, endogeneity and innovation"**, it's because it enables us to think clearly about the real possibility of a decolonial African post-colonial state. Senegal has always been presented as an intriguing laboratory for democratic construction, and for some, today's ongoing (decolonial?) experiment bolsters this reputation, as it allows us to see at work (and therefore to think about) the possibilities of engaging the state with concepts such as "decoloniality", "innovation" and "endogeneity", and the need, or otherwise, to engage African administrations in this perspective.

PASTEF's political endeavor is built on what its founders call the Project. The Project, a shortened name for "project for systemic rupture," is, they claim, geared towards a Pan-African ethos, founded on endogenous realities, and determined to decolonize the state and the administration. PASTEF proposes to get rid of a tradition that, they argue, has failed to change the exploitative nature of the colonial administration, thereby keeping the masses in a state of dependence relative to (erstwhile?) colonial powers. PASTEF asks, thus for nothing less than a complete systemic rupture. Such a project will materialize, they consider, through an epistemic, a political, and an economic delinking.

PASTEF's epistemic rupture is manifested first and foremost in the process of refounding imaginations and values, and in the centrality of local languages in the conceptualization and implementation of new public policies all geared towards the quest for sovereignty (in monetary or judicial policy, natural resource management, international relations, education, agriculture etc.). A pedagogical exercise to explain this turning point has been undertaken through the PROJET's new credo, that of *Jub, Jubal, Jubanti*, which celebrates the virtues of righteousness, probity and exemplarity, and which must shine through in all sectors. This credo took on a particular "decolonial tone" when the first correspondence sent by the new President, Bassirou Diomaye Diakhary Faye, to "all civil servants and agents of the Senegalese administration" - considered to be the "beating heart [of the] country" - encouraged them to understand that their primary mission is to serve the Senegalese constituency and the common good, and therefore "to fully embody the principles of *Jub, Jubal, Jubanti* PASTEF's epistemic stand and its consequences, the centralization of African masses. It is noteworthy that the vocabulary it uses is clearly rooted in the decolonial tradition. That is why Senegalese and African masses have fully embraced its discourse and continue to celebrate the possibility of starting a systemic rupture with the postcolonial tradition that has never been able to delink from the principles of coloniality.

The use of Wolof to conceptualize the Project and share it with the masses is not fortuitous. It continues the political party's tradition of questioning the supremacy of European modes of defining the world and their clear engagement with the possibility of thinking-the-world in African languages. Ousmane Sonko made it very clear, in several of his speeches and even goes all the way to suggest the use of Wolof in the Senegalese school system, which Moustapha Guirassy, the minister of education, has pledged to actualize.

Yet, despite this seemingly decolonial turn, the new government has also been implicated in the practices of coloniality. This is shown in their continuation of colonial tradition such as the patriarchy and the uncritical call for "modernity".

Despite the claim for systemic rupture, PASTEF has failed to escape the specters of patriarchy, one of the staples of coloniality. As Oyeronke Oyewumi, the Nigerian decolonial scholar shows in *The Invention of Women*², the colonial administration erased women from decision making processes. The act of erasure did not only read Africa through a gendered lens but it also organized the colonial administration in such a way that women were not given the same chance as men to attend school and occupy positions of power. The most direct effect of this gendered political culture

2 Oyewumi, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.

on the African continent, to which we must add the role of the so called revealed religions, is the naturalized occultation of women from spaces of decision-making in the post-colonial state. It is therefore important to note that a decolonial engagement with the state and the administration cannot be limited to a critique of the epistemic, economic, and political subjugation of the Global South by the powers of the Global North. A decolonial engagement also implies the necessity to revisit the historical processes that have led to the naturalization of patriarchy and find ways to delink from it. Decolonialization implies a willingness to engage with histories and historicities that have legitimized gender inequality. For that reason, the fact that PASTEF's leadership is dominated by men who are between 40 and 55 years old as well as the near absence of anatomically female bodies in the new government reveals the limits of their decolonial stand. This is particularly important in a country that until recently had made important strides on gender parity.

Moreover, despite PASTEF's call for the necessity to decolonize, there is a paradox intrinsic to the so called "decolonial" paradigm that it offers. Ousmane Sonko's call for decolonizing the administration, for example, is inseparable from his frequently stated desire to modernize the institution. In the decolonial tradition, however, there is no space for alternative modernities. The very idea of decoloniality is a critique of the anti-colonial and the postcolonial traditions that dissociate modernity from coloniality. The universalization of the provincial logos of the 18th century that led to the essentialization of the subject of the West, the idea of progress, the rule of law and the naturalization of big ensembles, are the very conditions of the dehumanization of African subjects and cultures. The decolonial tradition does not, thus, consider the possibility of an alternative modern Africa. From a decolonial perspective, a strong endogenous engagement with local epistemologies must lead to modes of being and imagining futures that escape from the throes of modernity.

As a matter of fact, from a scholarly perspective and starting from the postulation that decoloniality, as a concept, has a *precise* meaning rooted in a particular history, PASTEF cannot be presented as a decolonial movement given its incapacity to delink from the modern/colonial perspective even if it can be presented as anti-colonial, postcolonial, or even endogenous. Yet, that PASTEF is, or is not, a decolonial movement per se matters little. Our role, as academics, should not just be to limit our thinking to the vagaries of conceptual framing. The importance of the decolonial concept is not determined by the possibility to grant a badge to those who are worthy of entering the inner circle of the woke crowd. Rather, the concept of decoloniality is important as it allows us to understand the processes that can lead to a better understanding of the present and the complexities of the futures of Global South subjects. In this sense, who is decolonial or not matters less than how the concept of decoloniality can allow us to better understand why and how Africa can escape the throes of the colonial tradition. This perspective leads to the questions: in addition to engaging the concept of decoloniality: What types of innovation can endogenous engagements with local realities allow? How can innovation and endogenous engagements allow us to avoid the paradoxes linked to what seems like an inability to delink from realities that we have lived with for the past 400 years?

These questions give this special issue its particular timeliness. In an academic world where the politics of publishing too frequently lean towards fashionable perspectives, we apply the decolonial framework to one of the most important phenomena of the postcolonial moment: the postcolonial administrations. Yet rather than veer towards the celebration of the decolonial and a rejection of other frameworks, this special issue attempts to engage with the usefulness of the former. Rather than who is decolonial or not, the question that we grapple with implicitly, is: how the concept of decoloniality can help us better understand the current changing realities and even phenomenal self-described decolonial interventions such as the recent election of Bassirou Diomaye Diakhane as president of Senegal. In other words, what can decoloniality offer us as we attempt to think of the futures of the postcolonial administration. Better yet, should the impossibilities of implementing radical decolonial positions disqualify important scholarships and interventions in the postcolonial world? Rather than decoloniality are there other frameworks, namely endogeneity, or even, innovation, that allow us to develop the conditions for a good life that escapes the limits of coloniality, and its corollary, the condemnation of the African to what Césaire called, "the sterile attitude of the spectator."³

3 Césaire, A. (1996). Demetrio Yocum. *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, 221.