

Englisches Originalinterview, Übersetzung in: Berliner Entwicklungspolitische Ratschlag (Hrsg.): Bon Voyage! Rassismuskritische Wege in der entwicklungspolitischen Bildungs- und Projektarbeit, Berlin 2016, S. 76-79.

Development means: getting better. Perspective of a Cameroon self-organization

an interview with Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh

Timo Kiesel: You are CEO of PEACE (Peer Exchange of African Communities for Empowerment). What does PEACE do?

Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh: Actually PEACE is a young organization and it's been almost two years now since it was formed. If I had to describe PEACE in one sentence, I would say: PEACE is an empowerment tool for Africans. And this empowerment tool has to do with the principle of giving and taking within African communities. The vision is if not to make Africa a superpower, but I'd say stronger than all the other continents. It is to create equity - a balance of power. One of our main mottos is finding African solutions to problems arising in Africa. So it's not like getting solutions from outside but trying to analyze things from within. Our main base line is critical thinking, and one of the main issues that we critically analyze is the power dynamics between the South and the West. We want to create a network that could lead to influence a lot of civil and political issues in Cameroon and also in all of Africa.

At the moment we are still in a phase where we are identifying the institutions, organizations, civil networks, traditional counsels and individuals also, that are ready to work with us and that have the same objective as we do; then getting in contact and networking with them. Once this base of working relationships is created, the second phase would then be to actually establish the first scientific journal of Cameroon. This is a long-term-project. And finally we aim to create a PEACE Institute for critical African studies. After eighteen years in Europe I've realized that a lot of Black people would like to claim their Africaness but don't know anything about Africa. And there are a lot of German – “white” – programs which encourage students to go to Africa and learn about the culture there, while at the same time Black students have difficulties getting into these programs. This is where PEACE gets involved; what we intend to do is to create a situation where African students leave Europe or America and come to Africa, perhaps to Cameroon first. This program should be called GiBaCO, through the learning programs they give back to the community and also learn from the community. So it's a win-win-thing. A strong connection between Africans in the continent and Africans in the Diaspora will open a lot of academic possibilities and a lot of political, economic and social awareness. What Africans can gain from Africans in the Diasporas, basically, is a lot of knowledge about white people, about Europeans. We tend to appropriate Western factors of living because we have a feeling that this is the better way of life, only because of a lot of propaganda and lies-selling. These aspects of life can be explained better by Diasporans. Talking about reparations, for example, are also mostly Diasporans. But African countries should be calling for reparations too; they should be playing a pivotal role in demanding reparations. It's a mutual relation between Diasporans and the Continent. You could say: Africa has to deal with some sickness, and PEACE sees Africans in the Diaspora as a vaccine.

Timo Kiesel: Which role plays decolonization in this?

Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh: I think decolonization is a process that has to entail different steps, and I would say PEACE can help in making decolonization possible through deconstructing colonization and emancipating the former colonies. I wouldn't say PEACE is a decolonized organization, I would say: PEACE is in the process of facilitating decolonization. PEACE wants to consider pre-colonial times also - meaning the time before the white man came to our continent. One of the problems that we have is that our history was destroyed. Destroyed by us and destroyed by those who colonized and

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enslaved us. And part of the objectives of PEACE is to regain our history. Although we point fingers to the colonial masters and enslavers, I think we ourselves have also a very important role to play in our emancipation and empowerment. Of course we are not the forefront organization in doing this; we're first of all young. We have a lot to learn from stronger organizations that have been in this field for a long time.

What we are doing now is organizing workshops on empowerment, on critical thinking of African history and geography. Someone said: Geography has divided us, but history will unite us. We say: Critical geography and critical history will reunite us, so it's not just taking everything that was written before, during or after colonial times - by the colonial masters and not the colonies themselves - but instead trying to take this history with a pinch of salt. One example concerns the so-called slave trade shrine in Victoria, Limbe, where PEACE has its office. We've organized tours with Africans from America - I always say Africans from America, because I think all Black people that have African heritage are Africans, so for me there are no African-Americans or African-Germans or whatever, there are just Africans. Those Africans from America who have traced their DNA back to Cameroon are trying to trace the so-called slave roots. We say so-called slave roots because we think that this people were enslaved by the Europeans and they fought against their enslavement, but they were not slaves. So we try to make the words as resistant as possible. This is one of the things that have connected us a lot. While Africans from America see the route of enslavement, we see how this route impacts our present situation. So when these people come, they take with them the message of PEACE and this is how we spread, how we network.

You cannot talk about African history without talking about enslavement and colonization. But we see this in force terms. We see the slave times where Africans were not seen as human beings but as commodities for European and Arab markets. Enslavement is one issue that has impacted our present situation and that is going to impact our future, if we don't take hold of it. We see mental slavery as a sub-level of slavery itself that has stayed until now and that has contributed to our underdevelopment. How do we want to talk about this? One of our objectives of what we've been doing is to talk about religion. Foreign religion has been one of the things that have destroyed Africa. If you look at colonization, you will see that religion came before the real proper colonization. It came as evangelization, missionaries - I'll call it crusade. These were the people that started colonization. So there's a link between religion and colonization and there's also a link between then and now, because you have evangelists and missionaries that are still there today and that are still going to come in the future. One of our aspects is to try to come back to our African religions. This is difficult because part of the process of evangelization was the destruction of our religion. If people say they can choose their denomination, their vocation freely, it is not true. They were whipped and killed to accept a foreign religion. And after one or two centuries of whipping and kicking and killing, you become used to that religion. You see it as your only tool. This is what we try to make people understand, that it didn't happen out of free will - it's a colonial heritage, it is a slave heritage, it is mental slavery. So this is part of what we're saying: that part of decolonizing is cutting the vein. The white man would say: But if you cut the vein, Africa is going to suffer. Instead, we have to be sure that we can create our own entity. There are different aspects of this: One of them is to identify ourselves. For us, self-identification, self-pride, but also self-consciousness are the aspects that we should use to empower and inform the people. Decolonizing and deenslaving the mind is one important issue to fight this battle. One of the elders said: The most important weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Africa is not poor. But we have a poor mentality and a poor way of thinking about ourselves, which is only a reflection from somewhere else. The task of PEACE is to try to facilitate a process, where we see ourselves from our own mirrors, playing a very big role in the development of the world.

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Timo Kiesel: What is your interpretation of the notion of development?

Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh: Development is a positive influence in your own engagements. There are negative developments now, too, but development per se, without any strains, should be seen as something positive. If you want to talk about Africa concerning development, we see that Africa has the best statistical development figures within the world. But it comes with a price. And this price has been the heads of a lot of our elders. Western countries have preached development and especially democracy for a long time. But one of the first so-called democratically elected leaders of Africa, Patrice Lumumba from Congo, was assassinated by the West. Development has to do with sovereignty and independence. And when you kill people that preach development it means: You are not in favor of development. If we think about the colonial times and now we have a certain level of political liberty which we can also call development. But again: This has come with a price and the price was the assassination of our leaders that preached and fought for this development. Development should be an equity process that everyone is entitled to have. Development should be progressive and positive, and development should always leave a significant mark. Development means for me: Getting better.

The definition I gave before is also an African perspective on development. We see our present situation as a developmental aspect per se, but we actually see the development itself as not being development because we are still entangled with neo-colonialism. If you think of development as colonial process – we made a mistake. We were preparing for political independence without realizing that it is combined with economic and social independence. We neither have economic nor social independence. We have a little bit of political independence, so we call ourselves sovereign states. What I as a pan-Africanist want -is a reunited States of Africa, or a United African States: Something that links all African territories so Africans identify and recognize themselves as a people and are ruled or rule themselves as a people. The European development definition means that someone stands on top and there's someone below. But this is not how I see development. For me, it means getting to a better situation. And this is what I've been doing for the last eighteen years: Trying to combat racism, trying to combat police brutality, making the society better, making the society not to be a police state, not to be a fascist state. You see, this society was a racist and fascist society before and there are still racist and fascist sectors of the society. I'm trying to eliminate them. This is development for me, but is it seen by people from this country as development? No.

Timo Kiesel: What does your practical work look like?

Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh: I talked about Bimbia, the enslavement shrine. Bimbia has been an outlet of enslaved or kidnapped Africans from the African continent to Europe or to the Americas. I was doing research on the community forest there which reminisces about a lot of instruments used to enslave Africans, like rusting shackles and dilapidated slave buildings, coves or a lot of other things. And the tourist guides there were explaining to the tourists how the historical impact of the Bimbia people had to do with enslavement of Africans, and when you saw shackles, the guides would tell the tourists: this is where slaves were handcuffed or tied, when they were stubborn. I see two problems in this statement: "Slaves" and "stubborn". I think, those people were not slaves, they were captured Africans, and they fought till the very end, but the message of the statement is rather that our ancestors were slaves and not enslaved or kidnapped Africans. And the second problem that I found was «stubborn», which describes someone who doesn't respect rules, who doesn't play with the norm, who doesn't want to be part of a good society, who is always looking for negative things and who doesn't follow orders. We're everything but that, we're fighting people and we are still fighting today. Some died fighting, even in the ships. Will you call them stubborn? Will PEACE call them stubborn? No. These

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were resistant ancestors. So this is part of our practical work that we tend to do, with school children for example. We need a way of teaching our children to understand what enslavement really meant for us. When I was a kid - and this is a very pivotal issue - all the geography books and history books that I was taught were disempowering and not empowering me. But we want to create a children's book or whatever handout that could be given to secondary, primary or nursery schools, to show another image of a Black man. Not in shackles, but in a liberated form. This affects the mentality of our children. In our geography books we read about the different territorial administration of the enslaved, but PEACE is talking about people that had to break territories, running away from slavery and fighting white people. We saw pictures of Black people in chains, but we want to show pictures of Black people breaking the chains. This is what PEACE is trying to do. In a nutshell, we don't need to be academic to really create or facilitate decolonization. What we're seeing now within the academic society is a top-down confrontation of the problem. PEACE wants to come with the bottom-up way of confronting the problem – meeting the civil society but also the academicians from below. I don't need a PhD to understand that I was brainwashed when I was small, to see that I don't have to be resistant, when I'm enslaved. PEACE tries to give the consciousness to people that they themselves can solve their problems. It's not about being a high person in the society or having connections to a particular person, it's about understanding that you should do everything possible to fight for your own existence. And this is one of the ways we're trying to bring up the self-consciousness and self-emancipation of the people.

Mbolo Yufanyi Movuh is director of PEACE (Peer Exchange of African Communities for Empowerment, <http://peace-int.org/en>) which was founded 2014 in Cameroon. He has rejected his Christian name Cornelius because of a colonial and somehow religious undertone. He is an activist against police brutality, racial profiling and deportation and is working with THE VOICE for the past 18 years.