

# A Time of Celebration and critical Reflection

South African Psychology Congress  
Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre,  
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal | 16-19 September 2014



By Mireille Fanon-Mendès-France

Was the South ever perceived as equal to the North? Looking at the conditions under which the United Nations Charter was drafted and adopted in 1945, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, when more than half of the world was living under colonisation, we can see that the West's desire for world peace and justice has been biased from the start. We can see that the resolutions in the preamble of the charter and the UDHR are paradoxical injunctions with the purpose of giving the Western world a good conscience.

These injunctions are a subterfuge that those in power practise well. The whitewashed side of the world imposes rules on populations yet give themselves permission to break the rules to set up a world order in their favour.

The idea of a “new world order” was first mentioned in the United States in 1932, then named the “new deal”. It returned as JF Kennedy's “new frontier”, and was again introduced in 1990 by George HW Bush. Addressing the US Congress, he said: “The crisis in the Persian Gulf ... provides a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. In these difficult times ... a new world order can emerge. A new era, less threatened by terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace.”

We now know what this led to, and how one of the first principles of the charter was violated — the call “to maintain international peace and security, and ... to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace and the suppression of acts of aggression ...”

The desire to “develop among nations friendly relations based on respect for the principle of equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination” is another principle transgressed by military and financial domination. Those paradoxical injunctions were already in existence when international legal instruments emerged. Currently, a number of Western countries keep under subjection countries that have gained independence, an interplay that forces these countries to concede power to the detriment of their populations' economic, social, cultural and political development and self-determination.

At the Bandung Conference in 1955, member states rebelled against the status quo imposed by the violence of colonialism. They sought alternative models. Yet ingrained in Eurocentric models of interaction is the insidious concept of the hierarchy of races and cultures and the superiority of the North over the South.

From that time, systematic violations of states' international obligation in terms of the charter and the UDHR were made to appear as the norm required to achieve a phantasmatic universalism and to guarantee a political, cultural and juridic hegemony.

The state has been turned into a guardian of private interests, losing its grip on economic, social and financial policies. Political power has become a vehicle for capitalism.

The international political climate has worsened in the unipolar structure imposed by the US. This includes its unconditional support of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and war against Lebanon, the invasion of Iraq without UN backing, authorisation, the attack on Afghanistan and the establishment of a satellite government, and the setting up of Africom bases in Africa.

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This strategy has serious consequences for the collective security system built after World War II, and for the rule of international law.

The US has become the main state actor in international relations. Its allies and satellites actively participate in the restoration of a world order we thought was gone forever. The concept of “civilised” states is returning, with a Western tendency to give orders to the “uncivilised”, who are marginalised by colonial power relations.

In the past, one spoke of certain civilisations being superior to others. Now one says that some civilisations are incompatible with others. Africa and people of African origin are particular targets. Afrophobia becomes prevalent together with Islamophobia. People are subjected to widespread poverty in the name of this civilisational incompatibility, and natural resources are pillaged.

Those self-proclaimed civilised states are acting as they did long ago, but in the name of a new civilisation. This crusade barely hides its intended subjection of people and the appropriation of resources. Its violence has neither a legal nor a political framework.

The UN is not shy to introduce the “responsibility to protect” by force, allowing it to intervene in other countries while being directly in violation of article 2(4) of the UN charter. Syria is a shocking example of the carelessness of the security council and the international community. The US delegates its powers to allies, who in turn find “good reason” to send troops to their old colonies, as France did in Côte d’Ivoire and Mali.

In the eroding of the collective security system, the neocolonial order’s politics become most shocking, specifically the attempt to abolish, de facto, the prohibition of the threat or use of force, as in article 2(4) of the charter. This violence attacks human rights, self-determination and democratic gains. These violations mean the reitroduction of the archaic *jus ad bellum* — “the right” of the strongest over the weakest.

The international neocolonial order is based on violence. It goes hand in hand with an impoverishing economic and social regime set up to exclusively benefit private interests. This violence has breadth: because of this endless war and the organised impunity that protects the powerful, they will without hesitation hand over a president to the International Criminal Court for war crimes, as happened in Côte d’Ivoire.

International law has become irrevocably economic in nature. It is the misuse of legal instruments that best reflects the political and legal changes witnessed by the world. As a legal framework, it is characterised by the confusion of rights with trade interests. The human body, health, education, culture, scientific research, medicines and the production of goods — all these are subject to the free market and are “legally” appropriated by private firms and transnational corporations.

Multinational institutions of an economic nature (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation), international courts, tribunals and de facto powers (G8, The Paris Club, G20) guide this new economic order. It requires external enemies, created through wars, and internal enemies on whom security measures are imposed. These measures conflate criminal activities, terrorism, cross-border crime, migration, union protests, social movements and all those identified as “the other”, which are placed in the “illegal” category.

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This return to an ideology of domination shows that financial capital and human beings are seen as no more than resources to be exploited. They can be displaced, replaced, selected, evaluated and eliminated, as happened during colonisation and enslavement. These “beliefs” are built on the idea of the superiority of the European race and culture. The consequences include the rewriting, mystification and even denial of a common history.

Race, “as a reason and result of modern colonial rule” (in Anibal Quijano’s words), is still being spread across all sectors of capitalist power. Frantz Fanon said of racism that it became “the most visible element, the more everyday [... and] the coarsest of a given structure”.

How do we stop thinking about the world through this unipolar Western lens ?

The meeting of the Group of 77 (G77) developing countries, called by Evo Morales in Bolivia, could help to bring about a different discourse. Some countries of the South may be so exasperated by further colonisation that they will renegotiate the terms previously forced by the West upon the East and the North upon the South. They could perhaps be joined by social forces from the North that can no longer cope with the financial crisis and reduced social gains.

Isn't it time that the earliest violence experienced during enslavement and colonialism forms the focus point of transfiguring the world economic order? The place where international law mutated is precisely where laws should be redefined to change the relationships between the main role-players in history. Shouldn't people today react like those of the past, in the non-aligned movement, by saying no to the threat of permanent war and to a world order that keeps them in subjection and excludes them from sharing power and the common good?

*Professor Mireille Fanon-Mendès-France is the chairperson of the Frantz Fanon Foundation. This is an edited extract from her keynote address at the Psychological Society of South Africa's 20th Congress in Durban.*