

Africa and Vietnam in a Changed World Economy: Building Relations for the Transformation in the 21st Century

Horace G. Campbell

INTRODUCTION

Global politics, economy, and cultures have been undergoing profound changes that demand a new epistemological and ontological approach to the relations among peoples and between human beings and planet earth. In the emerging global order, there is an unprecedented shift in the locus and configuration of economic power from Western Europe and the Atlantic powers that have dominated the international political system since the 18th century. Over the past decade, we have seen the rise to prominence of societies in Asia and Latin America, where countries labeled as emerging economies, including Brazil, Russia, India, and China are fast changing the power configuration of the international system. Besides these countries, there are other societies that have made tremendous strides in confronting the imperial tendencies of Western powers and are in the process of transforming their societies. One of such countries is Vietnam.

The peoples of Vietnam have embarked on an impressive program of reconstruction and transformation and the forecasters of the changed international system have remarked that by 2025, Vietnam will be among the top twenty economies in the World. According to a forecast of bodies as diverse as the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and investment firms such as Goldman-Sachs, Vietnamese economy will become the 17th largest in the world with a nominal GDP of \$ 436 billion and nominal GDP per capita of \$ 4,357 by 2025.¹ These same forecasters envisage China to become the largest economy by 2025, when Nigeria will be the 19th largest economy.² These forecasts, however, do not envisage a United Africa by 2025. But Pan Africanists from Kwame Nkrumah and Cheikh Anta Diop to Tajudeen Abdul Raheem have made it clear that a United Africa would accelerate the continent's ascension to the top tier position in the global political economy.

Vietnam, like Brazil, Russia, India and China (called BRIC economies), has understood the significance of Africa in the changing international political economy, and has sought to build relations with the continent in order to be able to access the rich and rare earth elements that are abundant in Africa. One of the many challenges will be whether the access to Africa's natural

¹ According to official publications of the government of Vietnam, the impressive economic growth statistics confirm the forecasts of the Western and Asia investment houses such as Goldman-Sachs. For one analysis "Vietnam: The Next Asian Tiger in the Making," see Helen (Hong) Qiao, Global Economics Paper, No. 165.

² Matin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: the Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, Penguin Press, New York, 2009.

resources and energy resources will follow the path of plunder and brutality that emerged from Western colonial domination. Like Africa, Vietnam has been through periods of brutal imperial domination and wars, and therefore shares the aspirations of moving to new forms of relations. The Vietnamese aspiration for alternative social relationships within the context of socialist transformation has been formalized in Vietnam by the constitution that stressed the importance of “Independence, Freedom, and Happiness.” Under the political leadership of Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party of Vietnam, it was recognized that independence, freedom and happiness had to be defended so that the defense of the sovereignty of Vietnam is now recognized as one of the major epic struggles of the 20th century. Vietnam came out of this history of struggle to transform its society in the late 20th century. The thesis of this paper is that transformation, not depoliticized development, should be the goal of Vietnam-Africa relations in the 21st century.

What lessons can Africa learn from the Vietnamese experience and what can Vietnam learn from Africa, especially since the center of gravity of the Cold War shifted from Asia to Africa after 1975? How can Vietnam and Africa take advantage of the changing international system to deepen their own transformation; and what are the ideological and political changes required to advance people’s rights and freedom beyond the freedom of capital? The three changes in the international system that we will focus on in this paper are: 1) the rapid decline of unilateralism with the debasement of the Breton Woods Institutions and the imminent end of the US dollar as the world reserve currency, 2) the end of US and Western military/cultural hegemony, and 3) the opportunities for energy transformation orchestrated by the other changes in the international system.

The relations between the peoples of Africa and the peoples of Asia, especially Vietnam, have in the past been based on struggles, common interests and the quest for transformation. These questions of transformation will now have to be clarified to specify whether this is within the framework of capitalist “development” or that of a new mode of social and economic organization. As Samir Amin rightly argued,

Capitalism is currently in a crisis. This is not just a financial crisis which started with the breakdown of the financial system in September 2008. The financial crisis is itself the result of a long, a deep crisis which started long before, around 1975 with as of that time, unemployment, precarity, poverty, inequality, having grown continuously. And this real crisis of really existing capitalism has been overcome by financialisation of the system and the financialisation of the system has been the Achilles heel of the system.³

The Vietnamese people understand the interconnections between this crisis and the “ecosystem of corruption” that informs the world of finance capital.⁴ It was this blatant corruption that

³ Samir Amin, “Capitalism in Crisis: An Obsolete System,” Pambazuka News, December 2, 2010.

<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/69276>

⁴ The term ecosystem of corruption has been associated with banking institutions in the United States and the role of oil companies. Bernard Madoff was one example of the extent of this corruption just as Enron was the poster child of

rendered the West lame in its military effort to roll back the independence of Vietnam between 1954 and 1975. In this paper, I will seek to grasp the positive foundations for deepening Vietnam-Africa relations based on peace and reconstruction in an effort to locate this call for transformation in the context of the long term struggles for reparative justice in Africa and Vietnam. It will be this repair that can ensure that Africans and Vietnamese remain on the planet as human beings. In this sense, the conception of humans and human worth will be at the forefront of revolutionary ideals for the 21st century. This paper will look at four quadrants of the 21st century (2001 -2025, 2026-2050, 2051-2075 and 2076-2100) to elaborate on the threats to humanity posed by the obsolete system of capitalism.⁵ The Vietnamese have recognized this obsolescence and the challenge will be to forge new relations based on higher principles of the humanization of the planet. In this regard, the transformation of education will also be of crucial importance.

Since the successful defense of independence and freedom after 1975, the Vietnamese peoples have escaped the worst ravages of plunder. Despite this escape from external domination, the challenges posed by global warming are forcing a reconceptualization of livelihoods beyond development to capture the meaning of economic transformation. Humans in all parts of the world want peace, a decent life, health and a planet where future generations can live in peace and harmony. In the present context of increased cultural onslaught on Africa from outside, there is an urgent need to clarify to the Vietnamese peoples the implications of “modernity” for Africans. African scholars are producing their own analysis of the impact of capitalism on the world, and have been unsympathetic of those sections of Asian society who uncritically yearn for closer relationships with international capital and for a capitalist project for Africa. In every period of global competition, Africa figured as a scene of great power rivalry, whether it was Napoleon Bonaparte, Bismarck or Cecil Rhodes. The onus will be on the political and business leadership in Vietnam to show that Vietnam understands how in the past “aid and humanitarianism” have been used as levers for great power penetration of the African country side. During the anti-colonial struggles, the West sought to pre-empt the struggles against racism and colonialism by presenting an anti-communist project. The US and European chambers of commerce were in full collusion with this project to roll back independence.

In Africa, the changing global realities and the new vigor of Vietnamese and Asian relationships should open new possibilities for reconstruction, away from the old forms of relations with the West. But the language from some Vietnamese and Asian intellectuals and leaders incorporate some of the same humanitarian discourse and “sympathy” that devalue Africans. Africa must be

international corrupt practices. For one of the many books on the corrupt practices of Wall Street in the USA see, Greg Farell, *Crash of the Titans: Greed, Hubris, the Fall of Merrill Lynch, and the Near-Collapse of Bank of America*, Crown Publishers, New York 2010.

⁵ Samir Amin, “Capitalism in Crisis: An Obsolete System,” Pambazuka News, December 2, 2010. <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/69276>

decisive in steering its relations towards a new course so that the continent becomes a force in a multi-polar world. Reconstruction after wars of devastation offers opportunities for societies to make a break with old forms of economic and social relations.

From this introduction on the key themes of transformation, this paper will examine the historical context of Africa and Vietnam relations in the 20th century in order to set the stage for a deeper grasp of the third section on post colonial transformations in Vietnam and Asia. The final section then lays the basis for an examination of Africa and Vietnam relations in the 21st century. The conclusion revisits the challenges for deepening the struggles for renewal in the face of the plans for further dehumanization of Africans.

HISTORICAL COONTEXT OF VIETNAM-AFRICA RELATIONS

It is here important to re-assert the realities of imperial capitalist expansionism at the end of the 19th century. These forms of imperial military outreach continue in the 21st century under the banner of globalization, and it is vital to recognize the major victories of the peoples of Asia and Africa. French colonial occupation and domination of Indo-China followed the same logic of capital accumulation and racist domination that informed the “imperialist partitioning of Africa.”⁶ Thus, at the dawn of the twentieth-century the peoples of Asia and Africa shared a common desire for self determination and independence. Early enough, the communist parties of Asia grasped the fact that capitalism could not guarantee sovereignty and independence.

Ho Chi Minh was one of the leaders of the national independence movements in Indo-China. In his youth, he had traveled widely in Europe and the Americas to learn firsthand of the struggles for independence. Ho Chi Minh followed the struggles for independence in Ireland and he attended the rallies of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Harlem where he grasped the vibrancy of the Pan African movement and the culture of Africans in the Americas. When Ho Chi Minh returned home and became one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Vietnamese peoples as well as the peoples of South East Asia and China waged a protracted revolutionary struggle full of hardships and sacrifices. In Vietnam, this revolutionary struggle resulted in the triumph of the August Revolution. On 2nd September 1945, President Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into existence.

Between 19 August and 2 September 1945, the Vietnamese independence movement consolidated their political hold on the country. When the Japanese surrendered and the clarity of the new era of self-determination was clear to the peoples of Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh read an appeal to the Vietnamese people to rise in revolution. On Sunday 2 September 1945, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the declaration of independence: “We, the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly make this declaration to the world:

⁶ Walter Rodney, “The Imperialist Partitioning of Africa,” *Monthly Review*, April, 1970.

“Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence...”

Four years later the peoples of China also successfully declared the formation of a new communist government in China under the leadership of Mao Ze Dung. The Vietnamese victory of the August 1945 revolution had a great influence on the struggles for independence in exploited territories across the world at that time, especially in African. Africans who had fought against fascism in all corners of the world were also of the view that Africa should become free and independent. In October 1945, the 5th Pan African Congress was held in Manchester, UK, and the African peoples also demanded self-rule. From 1945 to 1960 most of the countries of Africa rapidly moved from formal colonialism to political independence. Political independence in Africa and Asia reinforced the worldwide aspiration to end colonialism and occupation.

The victories in Vietnam and China led to a major international war against the peoples of Third World in what is now known as the “Cold War.” In our discourse, we will also have to develop new understandings because there was nothing cold about the brutal war against the peoples of Asia, especially the Vietnamese peoples. After the Vietnamese defeated the French colonizers in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, the US political leadership intervened to prevent the full unification of the Vietnamese peoples. It is the same intervention that was carried out in Africa to assassinate Patrice Lumumba and derail the Nkrumah vision of the united peoples of Africa. Goaded by the ideas of capitalist “development and modernization,” the political and military leadership of the USA, while bombing Vietnam, said it wanted to prevent the spread of communism and advance modernization in Asia. The meeting of Afro-Asian solidarity in Bandung established a movement for solidarity between the peoples of Asia and Africa. Out of a radical critique of capitalism that emerged after the carnage of World War II, leaders such as Sukarno, Nehru, Chou En Lai, Ho Chi Minh and Nkrumah met in Bandung to rise above the artificial division of the world that had been orchestrated by the Cold War ideologues. It was in Bandung that the non-aligned movement was born and the relations between Africa and the anti-colonial movements were nurtured in the spirit of Bandung.

Vietnam was able to resist the Western modernization and development theories as it did the Western bombardments. Robert McNamara epitomized the intellectual modernizer who supervised the Pentagon during the war against the Vietnamese people. McNamara went on from the military war against the Vietnamese to supervise the intellectual and economic war when he became head of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) or World Bank. This institution had been created in 1944 as one of the sister arms of the international financial institutions to support US military and financial dominance. At the intellectual level, the ideas of development propagated by the World Bank emanated from political scientists such as Walt Rostow, who later graduated from the academy to become the US national security

adviser. Rostow was one of the advocates for “war and development,” and had written two anti-communist tracts on development: “The Process of Economic Growth” (1952) and *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960). Rostow elaborated a vision of development rooted in American history and national interest. In fact, the subtitle of *The Stages of Economic Growth* was “A Non-Communist Manifesto.” The book was written to oppose the kind of socialist transformation that was being undertaken in Vietnam and China.

Aggressions against Socialist Transformation: Bombing Vietnam Back to the Stone Age

Samir Amin who wrote about the division of the world and summed up the intellectual, political and ideological climate of the period 1950-1975:

Since 1947, the United States of America, the dominating imperialist power of that epoch, proclaimed the division of the world into two spheres, that of the ‘free world’ and that of ‘communist totalitarianism’. The reality of the Third World was flagrantly ignored: It was felt privileged to belong to the ‘free world’, as it was ‘non-communist’. ‘Freedom’ was considered as applying only to capital, with complete disregard for the realities of colonial and semi-colonial oppression.

According to this characterization by Amin, under the banner of freedom, the United States assigned itself the task to roll back the independence and self determination of societies that chose an alternative path from the capitalist mode of economic organization.

Both Vietnamese and Africans experienced the brutal unleashing of the Cold War’s anti-communist machinery. Whether it was in the wars against the peoples of Angola or the support for the racist apartheid regime in South Africa, the United States became politically and diplomatically energized as they carried out crimes of war against the peoples of the world. Mahmood Mamdani has documented the ways in which one can chart the militarization of the planet from the wars against the Vietnamese people to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mamdani wrote:

“1975 was the year of American defeat in Indochina. 1975 was also the year the Portuguese empire collapsed in Africa. It was the year the center of gravity of the Cold War shifted from Southeast Asia to Southern Africa. The question was: who would pick up the pieces of the Portuguese empire, the US or the Soviet Union?”

As the center of gravity of the Cold War shifted, from Southeast Asia to Southern Africa, there was also a shift in US strategy. The Nixon Doctrine had been forged towards the closing years of the Vietnam War but could not be implemented at that late stage - the doctrine that "Asian boys must fight Asian wars" - was really put into practice in Southern Africa. In practice, it translated into a US decision to harness, or even to cultivate, terrorism in the struggle against regimes it considered pro-Soviet. In Southern Africa, the immediate result was a partnership between the

US and apartheid South Africa, accused by the UN of perpetrating "a crime against humanity." Reagan termed this new partnership "constructive engagement."⁷

It is this interconnection between wars in Africa and Asia that should encourage African youths to learn the full realities of the Vietnam War that is now called a "mistake" by mainstream intellectuals in the USA.⁸ As the United States carries out its present campaign to launch its Africa Command, it is an opportune moment for business and political leaders in Africa to recall one of the most sustained crimes of war against a people that was manifest in the wars against the Vietnamese peoples. The irony was that the Vietnamese had used the ideas from the US Declaration of Independence as the basis for their own declaration of independence. By the period of the Cold War, the US opposed further decolonization of the world. The history of the crimes of war against Vietnam needs to be written in many languages so that the permanent war machine of the USA can be vigorously opposed. Millions of tons of bombs were dropped on the Vietnamese peoples in one of the most sustained bombing campaigns of any war; and chemical and biological weapons were used against the people. General Curtis LeMay boasted about the massive bombing campaign that, "we're going to bomb them (the Vietnamese) back to the Stone Age." LeMay advocated a sustained strategic bombing campaign against North Vietnamese cities, harbors, ports, shipping, and other strategic targets.

I visited the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City and one of the most striking features of the Vietnamese memory of this war is their call for forgiveness while never forgetting the criminal actions that were carried out against innocent civilians. The extent of these crimes was summed up by the Bertrand Russell Tribunal of 1967:

The United States bears responsibility for the use of force in Viet Nam, and has, therefore, committed against that country a crime of aggression, a crime against peace.... In subjecting the civilian populations and civilian targets of the D.R.V.N. to an intense and systematic bombardment, the U.S.A. has committed a crime of war. There is on the part of the U.S. armed forces utilization or testing of weapons prohibited by the laws of war (C.B.U's, napalm, phosphorous bombs, combat gases, toxic chemicals).

The prisoners of war captured by the U.S. armed forces are subjected to treatments prohibited by the laws of war.

The U.S. armed forces subject the civilian populations to inhuman treatments prohibited by international law.

⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslims, Bad Muslim, An African Perspective," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September 2002.

⁸ For one analysis that shows the linkages between the war against the people of Vietnam and the permanent war machine of the USA see, Andrew Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War (American Empire Project)*, Metropolitan Books, New York 2010.

The U.S. government is guilty of genocide vis-a-vis the Vietnamese people.⁹

Edward Herman in his summation of the lessons of the US war against the people of Vietnam noted:

The final toll in Indo China will never be known, but it continues to grow. The death toll may be as high as four million; the numbers injured and traumatized also run into the millions. Since the formal conclusion of the war in 1975, thousands have been killed and wounded by some of the millions of unexploded bombs still littering the ground. There are also many victims of the ecocidal Agent Orange program, and the land destroyed by that and other chemicals may never recover.¹⁰

In fact, the West fought the Cold War differently in many parts of the world than they did in Africa and Vietnam. For example, to counter communism, the US invested in countries that are now referred to as the Asian Tigers – Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea. This anti communist strategy meant that the West supported the breaking up of large landholdings and supported land redistribution programs. At the same time, the West adopted policies which allowed Asia capitalists to copy patents, and for governments to support local industries and opened their markets to imports to help build indigenous capitalists linked to global markets. But in Africa, they supported killers and dictators like Mobutu Sesse sseko and Jonas Savimbi, they overthrew Kwame Nkrumah, joined in the killing of Patrice Lumumba, orchestrated military coups, supported apartheid, and fuelled wars and conflicts that are till date the bane of the continent's destabilization. In short, after Vietnam, the West fought Africans militarily and economically by (a) using armed forces/violence to defeat “nationalist” forces labeled as “communists,” and (b) using neo-liberal policies, tied to foreign assistance programs which prevented indigenous economic transformation and perpetuated colonial based economic relationships to global markets.

In the aftermath of this epic struggle, the society of Vietnam was unified and this unification in 1976 laid the necessary foundations for economic transformations. Immediately after the victory, the Japanese worked closely with international organizations to penetrate Vietnam to pursue the strategy of depoliticization which had been the guiding principle of foreign policy after the start of the Cold War. The Asia desired by Japan after World War II was one drawn together by economic aspirations; in other words, what Japan wanted and what the West supported was for Asia to become depoliticized through the myth of development and economic growth.¹¹ This

⁹ Conclusions of the Bertrand Russell Tribunal - Stockholm Session, May 2-10, 1967; and Copenhagen session, November 20 - December 1, 1967.

¹⁰ Edward S Herman, “Back to the Stone Age: Lessons of the Vietnam War.” <http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/lessons.pdf>

¹¹ For an analysis of the Japanese project of depoliticization see: Miyagi, Taizo. 2008. “Looking Beyond Cold War History in Asia , The Tokyo Foundation.” <http://www.tokyofoundation.org/en/articles/2008/foreign-and-security-policy/looking-beyond-cold-war-history-in-asia>

idea of development and growth fitted into the economic doctrines of Robert McNamara and Walt Rostow. It is therefore not surprising that in spite of the war crimes, the US information doctoring experts in the CIA have sought to play down the gravity of their crimes and their eventual defeat, as reflected in this reductionist statement in the CIA fact-book: “US economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew through the 1960s in an attempt to bolster the government, but US armed forces were withdrawn following a cease-fire agreement in 1973.”¹² The fact remains that the US withdrew from Vietnam after a decisive defeat following its crimes against humanity.

It is this disinformation by the US military-industrial-complex that guaranteed the continuous warfare which expands the recursive crimes against peoples whether in Nicaragua, Angola, Iraq and Guatemala. Intellectually and politically, the mainstream media of Western societies have been crippled by an information infrastructure that allows the record to be distorted by reference to the idea that the US military aid was in opposition to “communist aggression.”

Thus far, the Vietnamese peoples have been able to re-organize their society so that Vietnam has become a self-supporting society working for the improvement of the lives of its people. The media and the cultural networks of the 54 different nationalities in Vietnam reinforce the values of independence and peace, thus creating a barrier to the complete capitulation to the culture of capital.

The history of the struggle of the Vietnamese people is an inspiration for those who want another world beyond capitalism. The failure of the US militarists who believed they could subdue the Vietnamese people is everywhere evident in the vibrancy and focus of Vietnamese citizens. It is a vibrancy of a people who gained confidence from the knowledge that they were able to withstand the military might of the biggest military machine on earth. In the process, the Vietnamese pointed to the fact that political mobilization and heightened political consciousness can be a counterweight to imperial military and economic might. This failure of the USA has been manifested beyond the battlefield into the ideology of development versus transformation. On the walls of the War Remnants Museum in Vietnam, the Vietnamese display the words of US military henchman turned director of World Bank, Robert McNamara: “We were wrong, terribly wrong, and we owe it to a future generation to explain why.”

This explanation is not only one requirement of intellectual transformation but needs to be well amplified so as to underline the failure of Western militarism and their economic logic that devastated the lives of people in Africa, Vietnam, and elsewhere. This clarification in the present period of the global capitalist crisis would be enough to demonstrate that the US and their Western allies were not only wrong in orchestrating the political destabilization of Africa and

¹² See the CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>

Vietnam, but that they were also arrogant in imposing the neoliberal economic torture on Africans through the structural adjustment program.

During the last twenty five years when the peoples of Vietnam were consolidating their economic transformation under the guidance of the Vietnamese government, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were imposing deregulation, privatization and the dismantling of services in health and education in Africa. After twenty years of neo-liberal damage, the same international organizations returned to deepen external control through the humanitarian and foreign aid projects. Progressive intellectuals in Africa and outside have been using various means to expose the reality that Africa could not achieve social and economic transformation under the imposition of Western development, modernization, and militarism.

POST-COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIETNAM AND ASIA

After the consolidation of independence, the Vietnamese leaders attempted to build a new society, and in the process transformed the society from a poor, underdeveloped state to an integrated, self-reliant economy whose rapid transformation points to the positive possibilities from socialist planning. While the Vietnamese celebrate their socialist economy, Western scholars have credited the “economic growth” of Vietnam to the movement away from a socialist economy toward a “market oriented economy.” There is no public record from official Vietnam sources to accept the Western view that the Vietnamese have turned their backs on socialist planning. The record of Vietnam proves that a society can transform itself from colonial heritage by the empowerment of its citizens, especially the most oppressed sections. Indeed, all human indices locate the Vietnamese success around this path of transformation. In this way, transformation can be translated from abstract ideas to concrete realities in relation to health, education, agriculture and aquaculture, democratization of water resources, electrification and energy, infrastructure, housing, and information and computer technology (ICT). Official statements from the Vietnamese government point to socialist industrialization as the foundation of the sovereign economy. However, in the 21st century, we want to identify the above eight indices that reflect Vietnam’s transformation. It is also necessary to argue that health cannot be separated from education or water management just as infrastructure cannot be separated from housing and the environment. The fact that the inland water ways system in Vietnam carries more freight than railroads is itself impressive and points to how the Vietnamese have been able to build on their knowledge of the natural environment. This inland water transport system is most impressive in the Mekong Delta where the US had sought to carry out total destruction. From an African point of view, one of the most fascinating aspects of the Vietnamese transformation has been the control of malaria and water borne diseases in a society where there is one of the most developed aquaculture systems in the world. This is one impressive accomplishment from which Africans can learn from the Vietnamese.

Over the past two decades Vietnam has recorded sustained GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 7–8 per cent, making it second in the region of Asia after China. Forecasters have

observed the trajectory of the Vietnamese economy, and it is estimated that in the next 14 years Vietnam will be in the top tier of the twenty leading economies in the world. Vietnam has been recognized globally and by the United Nations as a successful model for poverty reduction.¹³ While the Western investment houses salivate on the prospects for return on capital in the society, inside Vietnam the political conditions that made the transformation possible is everywhere trumpeted by the party organs and the constant restatement of the socialist path of renewal. The trajectory of Vietnam's transformation has been so people-oriented that the country did not have a stock exchange until 2000. All indices prove that Vietnam has since its embrace of socialist planning been a success story. The country has an impressive 95% literacy rate, 72-75 years of life expectancy, and a quality of women and maternal health that is among the best in the world.

Additionally, Vietnam has demonstrated that the training of health workers and the educational transformation are all part of the strategy for structural transformation. It is noteworthy that Vietnam's ability to transform education of the people as a bedrock of its human capital base during the past decades, is now positioning its society to utilize greater amounts of technology as reflected in recent investments by multinational corporations in such areas of microchips (Intel) and the aerospace sector. In a sense, Vietnam's socialist based education transformation path is now viewed by global capital as "high tech/skilled" in the same way Cuba's society is viewed in areas like health and biotechnology.

These achievements were possible largely because post-colonial Vietnam made a break with the imperialist Western model of societal organization; they reorganized to build a new society based on the improvement of the lives of ordinary people. Thus, the elements of Vietnamese transformation are the following:

- A. Alternative mode of economic organization in which Vietnam embarked on central planning with socialism as the basis of economic prosperity and improvement in standards of living.
- B. Reform of agriculture, education, housing, and health sectors based on the needs of the masses. There was no housing policy based on bubbles and speculations. Vietnam's alternative economic policies were not based on private property in land and there was no runaway speculation that is associated with the financialization of the economy. In this way, Vietnam escaped the worst effects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.
- C. A political organization of society based on the relocation of power to the people and a political process dominated by working people.

Space will not allow for a further examination of the empirical details of the legal changes that have been undertaken inside Vietnam since it became a member of the WTO in 2007. In one

¹³ *Viet Nam and Africa: Cooperation for sustainable development*, page 80.

report on Vietnam as the next Asian Tiger, the writers quoted Thomas Siebert, chairman of the **American Chamber of Commerce** in Vietnam:

"One of the attractions here is a stable government that is becoming more business-friendly." These writers further remarked that,

"Laws encouraging foreign investment and domestic private investment started to appear in the late 1980s. These culminated in July 2006 with a new Law on Investment and a Law on Enterprises, both of which went a long way towards ensuring that both foreign and domestic companies are treated equally under one set of laws."

For African business leaders and those in African Chambers of Commerce, it will be important to examine the ways in which commerce and trade with Africa differs with commerce and trade with entities such as the American Chamber of Commerce. The concrete evidence on the ground in Vietnam point to the fact Vietnam is at a crossroad of either deepening its transformation or opening up the society for international and Western cultural penetration based on modernity and development.

This crossroad is however most evident in the lag that can be seen in the literature and statements of the Communist Party in its communication to the people. The old vanguardism and democratic centralism is facing a youthful population that is seeking new understandings of the world. When faced with this assertiveness of the youth, some sections of the Vietnamese intelligentsia accepted the ideas of "modernization and development" in order to seem relevant to the young. This acceptance of modernization is simultaneously a manifestation of the growing social differentiation inside the society between those with access to higher incomes and the majority of the workers of Vietnam. Not to be left behind the associated ideas of the Bretton Woods institutions are smuggled into the society through exchanges with European institutions of higher education. In this way, a younger generation is being encouraged to sugar coat the experiences that the Vietnamese underwent during the war. It is my position that the demands by young people for the organization of a society beyond vanguardism and political centralization are compatible with the goal of transformation, and could be achieved or deepened without falling into the snare of modernity and Western development paradigms. The navigation of this terrain is one common challenge for Vietnam and Africa in the 21st century.

The changing global realities and rise of China as a global power is also forcing current Vietnamese leaders to develop strategic alliances at the international level. One could see this in not only the tripartite relations with some African states, evidenced in the Vietnam–Japan–Mozambique initiative, but also in the series of Vietnam's meetings with Africa. The first Vietnam–Africa International Forum was held in Hanoi in May 2003. At this forum the government of Vietnam set out its national action program for promoting better relations with Africa. The second international forum was called in August 2010 under the banner of "Vietnam-Africa: Cooperation for sustainable development." This second international forum

was called to discuss the ways in which Africa and Vietnam should interact to promote cooperation. The Vietnamese used the second forum to showcase the rapid transformation of their society, especially the changes in agricultural production and the integration between industrialization, agriculture and aquaculture.

The economic growth and changes in Vietnam are comparable to the rapid growth that one has seen in Korea, Taiwan, China, Singapore and countries that have broken from the ideological stranglehold of neo-liberalism. However, despite their impressive economic growth, all of these societies need to take another look at the long-term consequences of forms of industrialization that do not consider the consequences for human health and the health of the ecosystem. The Vietnamese have already gone down the road to lay the foundation for transforming their society. But like Africa, they are at a crossroad, going by the language that they use, *viz*: industrialization and development.

Since 1986 when the leaders opened up to Western investors, the Vietnamese economy has been socialist in form but somewhat capitalist in content. How could Africa-Vietnam cooperation help realize Africa's transformation and deepen that of Vietnam beyond the diction of modernization, development, and industrialization? How should Vietnam and Africa focus on critical areas of transformation, and why are these transformations different from capitalist development and modernization. My position is that a unique feature of these transformations is reparations, ultimately repairing the planet earth.

VIETNAM AND AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

It is on the terrain on the future content of economic transformation for the 21st century that the common interests and struggles converge on the questions of new energy requirements in a world where the crimes against humans are now compounded by the crimes against nature. Africa, which has been called "the most vulnerable continent" to climate change, suffers disproportionate negative effects of anthropogenic global warming, climate change, and the resultant reductions in people's security. While the African continent holds over a billion people, constituting an estimated 14.72% of the world's population, and possesses 6% of the world's land area, it only produces an estimated 2.5% of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Anthropogenic changes, meaning those that result from human activity, are inducing climate changes that far exceed natural variability. Scholars such as Bill McKibben have argued that the survival of the globe is dependent on a fundamental, philosophical shift in the way we relate to nature.¹⁴ It is this philosophical shift that is sharpening the question of environmental transformation in an era where the anthropogenic climate changes are driving the earth's climate past critical "tipping points," beyond which the detrimental effects are irreversible. This idea is echoed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which was compiled by hundreds of expert scientists worldwide: "Anthropogenic warming could lead to some

¹⁴ Bill McKibben, *The end of Nature*. Anchor Books, New York, 1997.

impacts that are abrupt or irreversible”¹⁵. These impacts are already evident in Africa with: (a) rising temperatures, increasing warm spells, and decreased numbers of cold nights, (b) continued decreases in precipitation, (c) Impacts on hydrological systems, (d) Sustained drying of the Sahel, increased desertification, and increased atmospheric dust loadings (e) Disasters of increasing frequency and intensity, particularly flooding and drought, and (f) more forest fires in the African rain forests.

Increasingly, the evidence from the social, economic, political and environmental crisis is that the present social and economic system of production and consumption is unsustainable. We have reached a tipping point and drastic changes will have to be made in the modes of consumption and production. It was in the glare of the world’s press that activists and scientists argued in Copenhagen that climate debt must be accompanied by fundamental changes in the international political economy.

One central component of the radical Africa project is the call for reparative justice to be able to repair the planet earth and in the process engender a new understanding of economics and politics. This question of reparations has been outside of the terrain of the traditional left. It was a demand that has been put forward by oppressed and indigenous peoples and was spelt out at the meeting of the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001. The Pan African position on reparative justice and the transformation of the world economy was more explicitly articulated in the Copenhagen conference on climate change. A new Pan African formation called the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) has been at the frontline of the international debate with the clear and consistent position that the industrialized countries that created the climate crisis owe Africa a debt, and owes Africa tangible reparations for the creation of this environmental crisis. With its motto, “one Africa, one voice, one position,” the position of the Pan African alliance was that it was the polluter and not the poor who should bear the costs of the environmental crisis. Lumumba Stanislaus-Kaw Di-Aping, a Sudanese diplomat, who was the chief negotiator for the G77 group of developing nations at the United Nations Climate led the movements and governments of the South to clarify the position of the African states that, “It is unfortunate that after 500 years-plus of interaction with the West we [Africans] are still considered 'disposables'...we’ve got to get together and fight the fight.”

Transformations and climate debt (reparations) are interrelated and the challenge is how to move the African peoples in a direction away from the structures of environmental racism that dumped toxic waste in Africa and carry out the exploration of petroleum resources with gas flaring that endangers all of humanity. This environmental racism was made explicit by Lawrence Summers, former president of Harvard University and former director of President Obama’s National Economic Council who, as vice president of the World Bank, wrote in a memo that it was more economical to dump toxic waste in Third World Countries. This idea is also manifest in the operations of the petroleum companies who are at the forefront of the fossil fuel chain that

¹⁵ This is quoted in the 2007 IPCC report. http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/mains3-4.html

contributes the greatest share of greenhouse gases. Africa and Vietnam cooperation in the 21st century must move beyond commercial arrangements which prioritize profits over the environment, health, safety and welfare of Africans. In other words, these relations must be steered away from dehumanization of Africans and the destruction of our environment through the exploration of fossil fuel.

How can our work as intellectuals and activists assist in the transformation of society, to develop human potential for self-emancipation from all forms of bondage and restrictions – mental, racial, economic, gender, social and cultural? This is the essence of an understanding of transformation, a tremendous change in social organization, modes of thinking as well as cultural and gendered practices. In this sense, transformation involves far more than legal changes, such as political independence or the transition from one mode of production to the next. Transformation involves a thorough change in society from top to bottom.

Africa must do its homework to well position itself and forge the kind of cooperation that can help it tap into the changing world realities for its own transformation. The cooperation between Vietnam and Africa should be geared towards this mutual transformation and toward the deepening of the gains of transformation. Indeed, the quest to break with old forms of social relations should bring the peoples of Africa and Vietnam together. This break involves a rethinking of the basic ideas of linear thinking and the view that associates development with European stages of growth. Progressive Africans take encouragement from the outline of the two major meetings of Vietnam and Africa Cooperation. Despite the contradictory language of “growth and development,” there is great merit to the observation of Tien Minh who envisage a quantum leap in Vietnamese relations with Africa. Quantum understandings of reality assist us in understanding the unpredictable, contradictory nature of people and social phenomena. It alerts us to political and economic philosophies that are more appropriate to the realities of the 21st century. The call for transformation involves the move to create new forms of community and forms of associations that can unleash the creativity of the human spirit. This will be necessary for the revitalization of society away from militarism and destruction in a fast changing international system.

Changed International Situation

The imperative for a mutually beneficial relationship between Africa and Vietnam is also urgent in the context of the revolutionary changes unfolding now and reaching its apex by the end of the first 25 years of the 21st century. I want to reiterate these changes underlined by the following: 1) the looming end of the US dollar, 2) the impending end of the US empire, and 3) the opportunities for energy transformation (as reflected earlier in this paper) which could lead to repairing planet earth away from the impending environmental cataclysm.

It is against the background of the changed international system and the reality of global warming that one grasps the intense pressures by the emerging economies to sign new trade

deals with Africa. African intellectuals and thinkers have to interrogate the old models of industrialization and the meaning of work in the 21st century. This attention has also been inspired by the awareness that there is an alternative economic framework that builds on alternative clean energy that can exploit the new and emerging technologies such as computers, communications and associated information systems, space science and technology, genetic engineering, new materials, energy, photonics, superconductivity and nanotechnology. This preoccupation is driven by the potential of these technologies to greatly enhance the productive capabilities and wealth of those countries, including their public and private entities, that have the foresight to make judicious and appropriate investments in them.¹⁶ African potential in this era of transformation is well recognized by all societies, hence the pressures for cooperation agreements between numerous societies and the African Union: Brazil, China, EU, India, Japan, Russia, Turkey, and Korea. Vietnam is also building the foundations for a cooperation agreement and the challenge will be whether the socialist orientation of the Vietnamese economy will guide these new relationships. Nearly every year, there are new books and articles on the rise of the BRIC economies. Of these economies, the Chinese experience is of particular importance for Vietnam in so far as these two societies share many characteristics, including a long history as neighbors and the history of socialist organizing in the era of the Cold War.

Inside Europe, the changes in China are being followed by the officials of the European Union and these changes have rekindled a discussion among the last vestiges of sections of the Marxist left. Perry Anderson of the *New Left Review* argued that, “If the twentieth century was dominated, more than by any other single event, by the trajectory of the Russian Revolution, the twenty-first will be shaped by the outcome of the Chinese Revolution.” Marxists and non – Marxists have weighed in on this debate on the meaning of the Chinese Revolution noting that Anderson did not distinguish between transformation within socialism and the modernization project of international capitalism. These authors examined the commodification of land in China and other non-capitalist societies, the growth of an internal market along with the strength of the capitalist classes within the Chinese Communist Party. Martin Jacques has stirred up a storm in the left with his book, *When China Rules the World: the Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*. Jacques noted that the rise of China is not only “unstoppable but irreversible.” Mainstream writers such as Will Hutton who wrote the book, *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21st Century*, have argued fiercely that the only way for China to become a superpower is by internalizing the principles of Western enlightenment, or the “soft infrastructure of capitalism.” Hutton disagreed with Jacques’ formulation of a “civilization” state and argued that the Chinese project will disintegrate unless it internalized the principles of

¹⁶ Adigun Ade ABIODUN, “21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGIES: Challenges and Opportunities for Africa,” *FUTURES: The Journal of Forecasting, Planning and Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 9, pp. 944-963, Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, Oxford OX2 8DP, UK, (November 1994)

the Western democracy and human rights. Hutton's position was that Chinese growth is built on an unsustainable model – impossibly high levels of export growth largely driven by assembling half-completed imported goods, plus state-driven capital accumulation and cheap labor, with very low productivity, little technical innovation and the absence of an appropriate business culture or legal structure. Western leaders have also been making the argument that for Vietnam to completely gain full acceptance by the West it has to deepen its embrace of Western democracy and human rights.

Africans are following these debates very carefully because African thinkers and activists understand the European rational enlightenment project and its impact on the dehumanization of Africans. Inside the United States and Western Europe, African peoples had to wage prolonged struggles for the democratic right to be recognized as human beings. Rational Western philosophers had engaged in the Trans Atlantic slave trade and justified genocide in the name of progress. It is against the background of this debate on Africa and China that one must locate the new engagement between Vietnam and Africa to examine the extent to which the Vietnamese and Chinese model of socialist-oriented-market economy is influencing the direction of political debates in Asia. In so far as the 'language of "market economy" and "modernity" has been the fig leaf for the dehumanization of Africans, the progressive Pan Africanists are clear that there must be a fundamental break with old forms of economics and politics that was justified with the guise of modern or Western democratic practices. Z. Baumann has critiqued the entire project of Modernity with his scathing exposure of the relationship between modernity, efficiency, bureaucracy and social exclusion. Bauman was sending a message that the mass killings of the Holocaust could happen again. Africans have produced their own rendition of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and the *Black Holocaust for Beginners*. Samir Amin, as one of Africa's leading scholars has also drawn attention to the need to design alternative social relationships.

Leveraging Changes from the Impending Fall of the Last Western Empire

The gradual demise of the United States as an empire is a major change that is reshaping the international system in the 21st century. This change does not only mark the end to Western hegemonic bully, it opens up vistas of opportunities for peoples around the world to deepen their self determination and transform their society without the kind of imperial dictates and bombardments that the world has experienced in the past centuries. Our task is to grasp the imminence of this imperial demise and understand the kind of ideological thinking required to prepare our society for it as well as to forge the international cooperation that will enable Africa to take adequate advantage of it for continental transformation. Scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein and others from the Republican past such as Paul Craig Roberts have been writing on the Curve of American Power.¹⁷ Paul Craig Roberts wrote more than three years ago that,

¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Curve of American Power." *New Left Review*, July-August 2006.

In the 21st century, the US economy has ceased to create jobs in export industries and in industries that compete with imports. US job growth has been confined to domestic services, principally to food services and drinking places (waitresses and bartenders), private education and health services (ambulatory health care and hospital orderlies), and construction (which now has tanked). The lack of job growth in higher-productivity, higher-paid occupations associated with the American middle and upper middle classes will eventually kill the US consumer market.¹⁸

These utterances were written well before the financial implosion of September 15 2008 when the massive fraud of US capitalism was exposed to the world. Books such as *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* and *Too Big to Fail : The Inside Story of How Wall Street and Washington Fought to Save the Financial System and Themselves* have shed light on the recklessness of the financial oligarchy and the ecosystem of corruption that is associated with these forces. In the book, *Lords of Finance: The Bankers who Broke the World*, Liaquat Ahamed spelt out the recursive processes that emanated from the rapacious activities of the bankers in the 1920s. The author quoted John Maynard Keynes, who said at that time: “[W]e have been involved in a colossal model, having blundered in the control of a delicate machine, the working of which we do not understand.” What the author did not properly connect was how this blundering was also manipulated by fascist forces that brought fascist leaders to power in Germany and Italy with the strengthening of fascist parties all across the world of white supremacy. In both Vietnam and Africa, the present activities of the Lords of Finance must be watched closely as the decline of US hegemony inspires militarism and conservatism.

According to one prominent US historian, Alfred McCoy, “The demise of the United States as the global superpower could come far more quickly than anyone imagines. If Washington is dreaming of 2040 or 2050 as the end of the American Century, a more realistic assessment of domestic and global trends suggests that in 2025 ... it could all be over except for the shouting.”¹⁹ In other words, Africa has less than 14 years to keep its house in order and decisively forge the kind of international alliances and cooperation that the continent could use for its transformation in the new world order.

The accelerated economic decline of the US offers a veritable compass as to the direction that this last Western empire is headed. America continues to lose economic strength as its share of global trade shrinks while the country goes about financial speculation instead of investing in the real economy. In 2008, the US fell to third place in global merchandise exports, behind China

¹⁸ See Paul Craig Roberts (2007), “American Economy – R.I.P.” <http://www.rense.com/general78/amecon.htm>

¹⁹ McCoy, Alfred W. 2010. “The Decline and Fall of the American Empire: Four Scenarios for the End of the American Century by 2025.” http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175327/tomgram%3A_alfred_mccoy,_taking_down_america

and the European Union.²⁰ America invests in imperial military overreach in lieu of adequate investment in education and innovation. It has been reported that, “in 2009 the U.S. hit rock bottom in ranking among the 40 nations surveyed by the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation when it came to ‘change’ in ‘global innovation-based competitiveness’ during the previous decade. Adding substance to these statistics, in October 2010 China's Defense Ministry unveiled the world's fastest supercomputer, the Tianhe-1A, so powerful, said one U.S. expert, that it ‘blows away the existing No. 1 machine’ in America....”²¹ In the sphere of education, which produces the innovators and future scientists, the Economic Forum has ranked the US as 52nd out of 139 nations in terms of the quality of university science and mathematics instructions in 2010.²² Almost half of all graduate students in the sciences in American universities are foreigners. Unlike previous generations, many of these future scientists may not find the worsening economic climate in the US conducive enough for them to remain in the country. This may lead to critical shortage of brilliant scientists in the US compared to other industrialized countries by 2025. Furthermore, the domino effect of US’s military preoccupation and neoliberal economic logic is manifesting in devaluation of the dollar and the looming end of the dollar as currency of world reserve. In fact, this demise of the dollar could be the last straw. Alfred McCoy comments more on the consequences of America’s economic degeneration, stating that:

Such negative trends are encouraging increasingly sharp criticism of the dollar's role as the world’s reserve currency.... In mid-2009, with the world's central banks holding an astronomical \$4 trillion in U.S. Treasury notes, Russian president Dimitri Medvedev insisted that it was time to end ‘the artificially maintained unipolar system’ based on ‘one formerly strong reserve currency’.

Simultaneously, China's central bank governor suggested that the future might lie with a global reserve currency ‘disconnected from individual nations’ (that is, the U.S. dollar). Take these as signposts of a world to come, and of a possible attempt, as economist Michael Hudson has argued, ‘to hasten the bankruptcy of the U.S. financial-military world order.’²³

We also have to take into account that the US is indebted to China to the tune of more than \$1 trillion. The US cannot continue to sustain its empire with its present neoliberal economics that privatizes profits and socializes risks, borrowing trillions of dollars from China to prop up its reckless financial oligarchs who care less about ordinary people’s welfare and the environment.

²⁰ See the World Trade Organization report of March 2009, “WTO sees 9% global trade decline in 2009 as recession strikes.” http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres09_e/pr554_e.htm

²¹ See Alfred W. McCoy (2010).

²² See Alfred W. McCoy (2010).

²³ See Alfred W. McCoy (2010).

This economic logic, that what is good for Wall Street is good for all, is flawed, obsolete, and fatal. The US economy cannot be sustained by financialization and gambling through the derivative market in lieu of real production economy. The US cannot continue to make huge investment in prison-industrial-complex and the military-industrial-complex while education and health care suffer with dire consequences for a future when present crop of brilliant scientists, engineers, and educators retire without adequate replacement.

To worsen the scenario painted above, US militarists and forward planners have been blinded by imperial hubris, and have continued to increase military budgets in the midst of this capitalist crisis. The health care corporations and political lobbyists have hijacked every attempt to carry out real reforms that could reduce government deficits by providing universal health care for all Americans. The American power elites –military, political, and financial – selfishly prey on the opportunities to invest in human beings, thus consolidating the demise of the American empire. These are the same folks who are using the US Africa Command as the new face of US Africa policy at a time when Africans are yearning for a new kind of engagement beyond militarism and elite exploitation. It is up to us to resist the ideological blinders of the American empire and invest in human beings and the environment to bring about the transformation of Africa. Our task is to ensure that Africa and Vietnam forge a formidable cooperation for this kind of investment different from the unsustainable American model in order to take proper advantage of the changed global order. Ultimately, this quest to work out an alternative socio-economic mode of societal organization adapted to our needs to ensure that we leverage the changes taking place in the world is a critical challenge.

It is up to Africa to ensure that Vietnam Africa relations, unlike that of Africa and the West, follow a path of mutual solidarity instead of exploitation of and/or sympathy towards Africa. Africa has to be assertive in crafting a Vietnam-Africa relationship that concretely envisage the changes in the international system and adequately execute plans to leverage the opportunities created by these changes to transform Africa. Africa must collectively articulate its position and prepare itself to be seen as an equal partner. Africa must help Vietnam move beyond the discourse and action of sympathy for Africans – Africans need solidarity, not sympathy.

KEY AREAS OF VIETNAM AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Since the first International Forum between Vietnam and Africa in Hanoi in May 2003, the government of Vietnam has set a National Action Program, promoting the relationship between African and Vietnam for the years 2004-2010 in order to boost the comprehensive relations with African countries. At the second International Forum in August 2010, the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Vietnam brought out the figures on the two-way trade turn over that has soared from US\$ 372.4 million in 2003 up to US2.07 billion in 2009. In the documents presented at this Forum in 2010, the government of Vietnam spelt out plans for future cooperation in trade, industry, energy and investment between Vietnam and Africa. The government of Vietnam elaborated on the fact that they were going to give priority to the areas of agriculture and energy.

This emphasis on agriculture is welcome in so far as there are millions of poor persons employed in the agricultural sector and the positive lessons of socialist agricultural planning in Vietnam can strengthen the rural poor in Africa who must be the foundation of the changes that are necessary for independence, happiness and freedom.

The Vietnamese have celebrated the transformation of their agricultural base. I have written for wider circulation on Pambazuka News a reflection on my visit to the rural cooperatives in the Haidoung region, where I witnessed what practically was being done in the rural areas of Vietnam.²⁴ Both in that visit and in the documents from the officials, there was an emphasis on the planned integrated approach to agriculture so that there were no sharp contradictions between industrialization and agricultural transformation. The Haidoung province located in the north delta showed that a society can provide for a better standard of living for people in the rural areas, making available electricity, water, good quality housing, healthcare and food. The infrastructure of both land and water transport were geared from the mobility of the people and not the mobility of capital. It also showed the success of a society that places human needs before and above the needs for profits. Centuries of experience in wet-rice agriculture and new breakthroughs in aquaculture have enabled the cooperatives in Vietnam to achieve a high level of growth and a good standard of living for the people. Water puppet shows demonstrated the reality that the culture must be linked to economic activities.

Increased standards of living in Vietnam did not come from “poverty alleviation strategies” but from an integrated approach to planning. The discourse of “poverty alleviation” and increased marketization, commercialization and diversification was latched onto ideas about a “green revolution” for Africa as if increased standards of living could be achieved without the kind of integrated approach that Vietnam adopted. The ideas on marketization and commercialization were dominant in the materials handed out in the English language at the second International Forum in August 2010. What was not clear was whether this same discourse was being delivered within educational institutions in Vietnam.²⁵

In Vietnam, one cannot but be impressed by the advances made in the areas of biotechnology with the work being done on food crops. But this work must be vigorously distinguished from the activities of agribusiness firms of the West in Africa who are out to deny Africans their food

²⁴ Campbell, Horace. 2010. “Vietnam–Africa: Beyond ‘Development’ and ‘Modernisation.’” *Pambazuka News*. <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/66782>

²⁵ In one power point presentation, a Vietnamese scholar quoted liberally from the presentation of Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania at the 20th World Economic Forum in Dar es Salaam in May 2010. This quotation reads in part, “Africa’s potential is immense in terms of human and natural resources. It is a contradiction that Africa remains poor. Poor as we are, our capacities are limited. We need partnerships with the private sector to investing the development of the continent.” Kikwete was using the frameworks of NEPAD and the UN Millennium Goals but these quotations did not interrogate the extent to which Tanzania had departed from the principles of Ujamma and self reliance.

sovereignty because of profits. It is still not entirely clear how the substance of genetically engineered foods in socialist Vietnam will in the long run be different from the GM (genetically modified) products of the big agribusiness firms of the West. Although this question has been posed more than once to the Vietnamese, the emphasis was on self-sufficiency in food and not on the questions of the long-term consequences of a particular form of genetic engineering.

However, for Africa, this question is urgent in so far as the reconstruction of African Agriculture for securing health and harnessing the knowledge of seeds, plants and knowledge of the rich biodiversity of Africa will be a fundamental requirement for the 21st century. Scholars who are studying the biopiracy of biodiversity have brought to the fore the fact that the biggest cultural and economic aggression being carried out against the African poor at the moment is in the struggle by rich countries to monopolize Africa's biodiversity, particularly in seeds. Under the intellectual property rights clauses of the World Trade Organization there are numerous examples of how global private corporations, with the backing of states in Western Europe and North America are plundering Africa's genetic resources. In the big push to dominate the property relations in Africa and to dominate the distribution and delivery of food, major agribusiness companies are seeking to control the supply of seeds in Africa. Something different is expected from Vietnam-Africa cooperation in this respect.

For centuries, the values of sharing and cooperation endured in rural communities despite the impact of colonial aggression. It was only in settler colonies where the seed cultures were fully expropriated. In this period of the WTO, the aggression is now coming from US corporations and humanitarian agencies and the Vietnamese need to grasp the dangers of the *Biopiracy of Biodiversity*.²⁶ In his book, *Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World*, Samir Amin critiqued the capitalist mode of agriculture and the threats posed to peasants throughout the world, especially African peasants. Amin argued that under the new mantra of modernization and property rights, the neo-liberal policies of capitalists in North America and Western Europe promise extermination for peasant agriculture. Peasant agriculture, accounting for 5 billion humans, faces economic extermination by 20 million modern farms. Amin asserted further:

We are thus led to the point where in order to open up a new field for the expansion of capital, it would be necessary to destroy- in human terms- entire societies. Twenty million efficient producers on one side and five billion excluded on the other.....If capitalism has "resolved" (in its own way), the agrarian question in the centres of the system, in the peripheries, because it is indissociable from imperialism, it has created a new agrarian problem of immense proportions that it incapable of resolving, except by destroying half of humanity through genocide.²⁷

²⁶ Andrew Mushita and Carol Thompson, *Biopiracy of Biodiversity*, Africa World Press, 2008.

²⁷ Samir Amin. 2004. *Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World*, Monthly Review Press, New York, page 34.

It is this slow genocide in the rural areas of Africa that is providing the basis for looting and genocidal economic relations throughout most of the African continents. Patricia Daley defined genocidal economics as the forms of economic management that require the physical elimination of competition:

This type of economics comes from a form of competition for resources which is militarized, racialized and linked to the characterization of economic opponents as vermins. This form of economics is heightened by conditions of capitalist crisis.²⁸

After the military aggression that was visited upon the peoples of Vietnam it is imperative that the Vietnamese understand the new forms of aggression and genocidal economics, especially against the women and rural poor of Africa. The current agricultural struggles in Africa with the expropriation of the land from poor farmers must be rejected by the Vietnamese so that the projects of Vietnam in Africa do not abet the liberalization and neo-liberal policies that now constitute a massive social-engineering project in Africa. This project is at present fueled by individualism, competition, greed and mindless, cut throat competition in the rural areas of Africa. Added to this are the activities of energy corporations who hold the belief that African lives are worthless, and that petroleum companies can destroy the natural environment. Such thinking must be exposed and refuted. The democratization of access to seeds and genetic resources is a major frontier for new directions in the cooperation between Vietnam and Africa in the 21st Century.

Another clear area of cooperation is the transformation of education so that both the peoples of Africa and Vietnam can build the new conceptions of renewable energy to make a fundamental break with the fossil fuel driven mode of economics. Generating clean energy is vital in combating climate change. The collective efforts to harness new sources of alternative energy to jump start a green economy must be one of the priorities for Africa. This is where the democratic access to energy and democratic access to water takes the question of democracy to a higher level in the 21st Century.

Africa has one of the greatest potential for the production of clean energy because of its deserts. “Every year, each square kilometre of desert receives solar energy equivalent to 1.5 million barrels of oil. Multiplying by the area of deserts worldwide, this is several hundred times as much energy as the world uses in a year. There are also significant amounts of wind energy in desert regions.” This is the proclamation of one major company, Desertec. These facts point to the reality that, with strategic planning and cooperation beyond borders, African peoples in societies such as Algeria, Angola, Libya, and Nigeria can move directly from being oil rich to solar rich.

With each passing day the technological breakthroughs in “concentrating solar thermal power” (CSTP) is reducing the cost of concentrating sunlight to create heat. Already, one European company has advanced plans for the distribution of solar energy and other forms of renewable energy from Africa to Europe. This planning ensures that European universities and technical institutions will seek to dominate the research on renewable and green technologies. The potentialities for greater energy security and new areas of business also require the reorientation of African institutions of learning.

²⁸ Patricia Daley, *Gender and Genocide*, James Currey, 2008.

The imperatives for a *green collar economy* constitute an emerging political alternative that links economic transformation to energy transformation and educational transformation. This new outlook is arguing that ecological problems cannot be solved without challenging capitalism, and that a socialism which does not respect the environment is worthless. For this reason, Pan African climate activists are searching for allies in socialist Vietnam to articulate a vision of future economic relations that is based on environmental justice. Africans from the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance are clear that the root of ecological crisis is economic.

This is where what the modernization theorists' labeled as Africa's backwardness can be turned into an asset for the 21st century. When Africa's low levels of waste and low conspicuous consumption are matched with proper political leadership, societal organization, the education, and partnership to prudently harness alternative energy sources, the continent could prove to the world that African societies have the keys to reduce environmental impact in ways different from the modernization theorist's growth and development models. Bold political leadership will be needed to ensure that Africa does not emulate the consumption patterns of the West, where a minority of the planet's inhabitants – mainly in North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand – have created a number of severe ecological problems.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the present political and economic relations is a central component of the struggle to restore the dignity of African peoples. Up to the 20th century, humanity was challenged by the eugenic conceptions of lower and higher breed of humans that justified the racism against the peoples of Asia and Africa. The vibrant Pan Africanism of the grassroots was one of the responses to the popularity of eugenics in Western Europe and North America. Today, that vibrancy requires a higher level of internationalism in order to focus on the bioethical questions that will face all humans, whether in Asia or Africa, Nigeria or Vietnam. Africa, like Indo-China was partitioned in the period when imperialism had divided the last remaining independent territories on earth. Pseudo-scientific racist ideas and religious justifications were later written to legitimize imperialist partitioning. Nkrumah stressed the fact that the breaking down of the colonial borders was an “inescapable desideratum” for changing the social, economic, and political patterns imposed on the continent by the colonial powers. The kind of Union that Nkrumah envisaged was one that would, among other things, resolve border conflicts and better the lives of all Africans. The Vietnamese people moved to unify all of the 54 nationalities in their society and this unity guaranteed that the transformation of the economy placed Vietnam on a platform of future prosperity in the 21st century. One of the basic arguments in this paper is that governments must play a role to ensure the dignity of humans.

The dignity and the unification of the peoples are paradoxically interconnected. This unification is also premised on the quest for the preservation of life and the endangered ecosystem of the planet. The exact meaning of life and the future of life forms are now new issues for humans in the era of synthetic life and technological determinism where it will be difficult to distinguish between humans and robots. This is the promised era where humans break off into two species,

namely “the Haves, who have superior intelligence and can live for hundreds of years, and the Have-Nots, who are hampered by their antiquated, corporeal forms and beliefs.”²⁹ According to some scientists, we are much closer to the period when rapidly increasing computing power in concert with cyborg humans would reach a point where machine intelligence would not only surpass human intelligence but take over the process of technological invention, with unpredictable consequences.

In this era of exponential technological change, some biotechnology companies have already deemed life as an invention. African peoples who carry the memories of enslavement and imperial domination are very alert to the intellectual property rights claims which call for the patenting of life forms. Africans are opposing the aggression of biotech companies who are now converging on the African countryside. Africans who have a deep understanding of the impacts of ownership and commercialization of life have opposed the World Trade Organization (WTO) in its headlong rush to allow patents for living organisms.

If we divide the 21st century into four quadrants we will see that in the first twenty five years the principal challenge will be to unify Africa and transform African relations with the world. Both Vietnam and Africa will have to redefine their relationship with the world because this will be the period of major international realignments when in the years 2006-2025 the US decline will set in and there is the end of dollar hegemony. The African peoples will be pressured to unify with one economic union and one currency. The alternative is for all external forces to descend on Africa like vultures. It is for this reason that in this period the peoples of Africa and Vietnam must work for the demilitarization of the planet and for world peace. Research into new technologies and human embrace of space technologies must be reoriented for repairing the planet and not for full spectrum dominance as is promised by the US militarists. In the short run the peoples of Vietnam must oppose the remilitarization of Africa and the US Africa Command. Peace is a necessary component of prosperity as the Vietnamese have shown since 1975.

In the second quadrant (2025-2050) humanity will be witnessing that era of robotization that has been called singularity. The bioethical questions about who will have control over life after 2050 brings back the debates on post human scenarios when concerned citizens would remain opposed to those scientists who believed that they could play God. African peoples throughout the world have genuine reasons for following these scientific breakthroughs and the future of the last 50 years of the 21st century. In the era of intelligent robots, bio-political questions will become central to democratic questions. This is where the concerns for democracy in the 21st century rise above the liberal conception of democracy that is based on free markets. Long term relations

²⁹ Ashlee Vance, “Merely Human? That’s So Yesterday, New York Times, June 11, 2010. In this article the writer defined Singularity as “a time, possibly just a couple decades from now, when a superior intelligence will dominate and life will take on an altered form that we can’t predict or comprehend in our current, limited state. At that point, the Singularity holds, human beings and machines will so effortlessly and elegantly merge that poor health, the ravages of old age and even death itself will all be things of the past.” For an elaboration see Raymond Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Viking, New York 2005.

between Vietnam and Africa have to plan the transformation of society to assert human dignity beyond the limitations of liberal democracy.

Would there be free market for commercialization of life forms? What would be the risks for humans if the powerful advances in biotechnology are guided by eugenic thinking about the hierarchy of humans? Ho Chi Minh came face to face with the Pan African struggles against eugenics in the 20th century when he was in the USA. In the third quadrant of this century, the realities of where we are as a human species will be so challenging that there will not be a question if humans have to cooperate but there will be sharp reasons for the end of the folly of the idea of the domination over nature.

Drawing from climate scientists this paper pointed to the need for a drastic break from the current modes of capitalist organization if humans are to survive the dangers of global warming. We drew from the climate scientists who have argued persuasively that humans have already passed the ‘tipping point’ and that the repair of the planet earth must be a priority for transformation. Africans are most aware that a 2 per cent rise in climate will be the basis for major increases in temperature and the possible “incineration” of Africans.

In this paper, I argued for an even higher level of cooperation between Vietnam and Africa in the 21st century. Successful transformation cannot come about without the political mobilization of the poor and the empowerment of the most oppressed. The record of Vietnam proves that a society can reorganize and transform itself after external aggressions. In this paper, we weaved an analysis to show how transformation has been translated from abstract ideas to concrete realities in relation to health, education, agriculture and aquaculture, democratization of water resources, electrification and energy, infrastructure, housing, and information and computer technology (ICT). Additionally we pointed to the possibilities of solar democracy and alternative agricultural paths for Africa based on the ideas of a *green collar economy*.³⁰

Healing, repair and renewal are now concepts that are emerging from the environmental justice movement with the legal challenges for reparations being superseded by the urgent tasks of repairing the planet. From the spirit of forgiveness exhibited by the Vietnamese one can see how the ideals of Ubuntu are alive in both Africa and Vietnam. Ubuntu provides a basic revolutionary philosophy in a period when many in former socialist societies are examining the pitfalls of vanguardism and leaderism. The peoples of Africa at the grassroots are searching for allies in what some analysts refer to as a new scramble for Africa, when the emerging countries of the BRIC economies are competing with Western powers as they seek markets and resources in Africa. Africans can see that even if South Africa is added to the BRIC economies, this itself will not change the wretched conditions millions of South Africans.

³⁰ Van Jones, *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*, Harper Collins, New York,, 2010.

Recent social struggles in Ireland have shown that even when countries prompt sufficient domestic transformation processes which attract the attention of global capital, (if controlled) the processes of transformation can be continued. However, the flip side is also true when such countries successfully implement processes of structural development and attract the attention of global capital, if uncontrolled and if it is in the form of finance capital, the processes of domestic transformation can be halted. The failure of Ireland's society to learn the lessons which Asia learned from their 1997 crisis, will be very costly for the people of Ireland. It is for these reasons that the Vietnamese should not welcome being termed an Asian Tiger.

Like Ireland Vietnam has also faced similar challenges of finance capital in recent years as it has "gradually" opened itself to global financial capital in ways which its institutions were not sufficiently developed to manage. Luckily, Vietnam has had the support of her neighbors and thus far has "minimized" the disruptive forces (property bubbles, inflation, financial speculation by government linked companies, shortages of hard currency, etc) of global finance capital on the domestic society. Vietnam has struggled to maintain some degrees of "policy space" and the use of government directed industrial policies, even as it joined the WTO and subscribed to rules which favor the rights of global capital above all else. It is this balance, which may be one of the strongest lessons for African societies to understand and struggle to create.

From these contexts, one can ask and answer the question about what forms of Vietnam-Africa cooperation can be created which would help societies to navigate global capital forces in ways which would enable processes of domestic structural transformation to be sustained. Some answers can be generated in response to the question: What should be done? Other answers can be generated in response to: What should not be done? If we were to answer our own question we would say remember the tenacity and clarity of Ho Chi Minh.

The traditions of Ho Chi Minh run deep and at present it will require a major political upheaval to overthrow the ideas of Ho Chi Minh and capitulate to the ideas of Walt Rostow. In this paper we drew attention to how the development discourse was one weapon of the Cold War to depoliticize the oppressed in Asia. This depoliticization has failed in Africa and hence there is the collective effort of all the international forces of humanitarian imperialism to dominate Africa and Africans.

African feminists have drawn attention to the genocidal economic relations that reproduce violence, masculinity, militarism and warfare in Africa. Many of the crimes committed in this era of counter revolution are hidden behind lofty goals of 'fighting terrorism' and 'eliminating poverty' in Africa. So clear is the gap between the rhetoric of "development" and the reality of exploitation that from time to time there are initiatives to "eliminate poverty" as manifest in the declarations of the Western summits or the ideals of the international 'donor agencies.' Fifty years after independence, the statistics from the Human Development Index on the deterioration of the quality of the lives of the poor is even grimmer.

Development decades of yesterday have been overtaken by the activities of donor agencies. Yet, the more these campaigns are activated the more money is looted from Africa. Both Patrick Bond and Yash Tandon have been tracking this drain of resources out of Africa with Tandon identifying fifteen different forms of the drain of capital as a result of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In seeking to cut through the orthodoxy of neo-liberal economics Tandon argued that Foreign Direct Investment is neither good nor bad in Africa, it depends on how it is used. Tandon further argued that foreign aid created debt and that this debt is then the basis for a further drain of capital from Africa.³¹ The leadership of Vietnam needs to be familiar with these critiques from progressive African scholars.

The socialist party of Vietnam has been able to show that revolutionary traditions must be made manifest in what is done for the ordinary people, and in the public spaces. The philosophical traditions that are taught to young people come up against the ideological onslaught from McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, the US oil corporations, banks and the military that backs them up. Younger Vietnamese who were born after 1975 are ensnared by the glitz and fashion of an Anglo-American lifestyle without understanding the deep sacrifices that were made by the Vietnamese people to maintain their independence. So just as Vietnamese teach their children about the sacrifice of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese children need to know about Patrice Lumumba, Queen Nzinga, Mbuya Nehanda, Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Samora Machel. The younger generation should be made to understand that Vietnamese–African cooperation for transformation in the 21st century is very different from “Vietnam–Africa cooperation for sustainable development.” The younger generation will also have to learn about Africa from Africans, not Americans or Europeans. They need to understand elements of the African philosophy of linked humanity or Ubuntu so that we can collectively move beyond the limits of the Western models that threaten to increasingly commodify life in the 21st century. This will be one concrete contribution to the global anti-racist struggles and the campaign to create another world.

Finally, the present generation of Vietnamese enjoys the sacrifices paid by Ho Chi Minh and their ancestors up to the third quadrant of the 20th century. It is my firm conviction that if Africans can mobilize and pay some sacrifice to reorganize African societies in this first quadrant of the 21st century through 2050, from 2051 through 2100, we will realized a period of consolidated transformation in Africa. This is the much anticipated period otherwise known as the era of the African Renaissance.

³¹ See Patrick Bond's book, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation*. London: Zed Books, 2006. See also, Yash Tandon's article written in 2002, with the title, "Foreign Direct Investment is Impoverishing the South." http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000163/P153_Yash_Tandon.pdf