

COMBATING INEQUALITIES

**Civilisational challenges and transformation
of globalised capitalism**

Philippe Herzog



**Followed by
The Spirit of Sant'Egidio!**

Penda Mbow

Contribution to the International Meeting of the Community of Sant'Egidio

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& Africains

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Preface

Claude Fischer and Antoine Guggenheim



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Preface

This preface is signed wholeheartedly by both of us... *UP for Humanness* and *Les Entretiens Européens et Eurafricains*... a friendly and fruitful meeting of minds, as we are committed, each in our own way, to a better, more fraternal world.

“Society-building in Europe” lies at the heart of the thoughts and actions of Confrontations Europe, the association founded by Philippe Herzog, who now proposes to “build a new civilisation”. As he superbly demonstrates in this splendid paper, our future needs to be reconsidered on a global scale, and each region will need to contribute in the best way it can. He gives Europe responsibility, redefines its role and issues a call to arms for solidarity and sharing by placing the people at the heart of the project.

The world has indeed changed. It is global. Globalisation has promoted the emergence of peoples on the world market, enabled unprecedented exchange and knowledge of others, but it has also fractured the world, creating new and profound inequalities between nations and within each society. The emotions of the indignant and the actions of “good Samaritans”, lay or religious persons, is not enough to combat inequalities. This combat needs to inspire a “grand transformation” in Philippe Herzog’s words, where the common good reacquires its full meaning.

The rich and the poor... the inequalities between them are obvious, but beware, says Philippe, things are far more complex. This is not about taking from the rich to give to the poor. Redistribution, although necessary, is not the solution. The magnificent word 'sharing' is highly ambivalent: sharing employment or income is not the same as sharing work, creation and culture. Great fortunes have captured innovation and information, excluding the bulk of the population from creativity and activity...

The social protection systems set up by the State have not prevented the rise in inequalities, and in the current debt crisis: these systems are foundering. Insurance-based policies are privatised and protect the well-off, while the fragile and the majority of the world's population are excluded.

Without work and without training, entire populations are deprived of insertion, inclusion, trapped in pervasive precariousness and poverty. The very existence of the "working poor" reveals the perversity of our protection systems.

Yet, poverty does not necessarily imply hopelessness. *"There are more Kenyans, Nepalis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who feel happy than Danes or Italians!"* Philippe Herzog quotes Angus Deaton... Some people even suggest that we might be happier with "negative growth". Who can believe that the ever-growing world population will be able to rise to environmental and demographic challenges without growth and renewed productivity? The Africans are teaching us a lesson: they know it will be hard as long as they are dependent on others, but they believe in themselves and fight for work and growth on their continent, growth that is more respectful of nature and people, less consumerist, and work that is less subordinated, where digital technology is not confiscated but enables populations to access energy, knowledge, health and security... A formidable challenge!

It is our common challenge and to be successful, capitalism will need to transform, Philippe emphasises... Agreed, but transform into what? Socialism has not worked. It also deprives people of creativity, not to

mention individual liberty. In our western countries, liberty has failed to produce equality, because fraternity, solidarity and the capacity of our societies to participate in collective choices do not lie at the heart of our civilisation project.

Excessive concentration of economic and financial power has been accompanied by the withering of public goods: Money, Land and Labour. Philippe Herzog, referring to Karl Polanyi, reminds us how essential they are. Building new public goods on the market with access for all is Philippe Herzog's leitmotiv. The market is not a demon that needs to be expunged: like money, it creates social links, enables exchange, cooperation... but we need to change the model and the State needs to foster the emergence of public goods in partnership with the private sector. The involvement of civil societies, including companies and territories, that are capable of inventing and building new forms of solidarity for co-development projects, is a prerequisite. Ethical commitments need to be achieved in all sectors and on a local, regional and global scale. A new democracy needs to be devised where social links are unimpeded, where dialogue and participation, confrontation of experiences and expertise are tools to combat inequality, and where creativity and progress contribute to changing the type of democracy we are living in.

People are not global! They are national, each striving to develop at home, against the others. Consider China, a country so easily vilified. When it opens and reaches out to develop itself, it contributes to our development. Of course, rules will have to be put into place for the common good to make sure that trade relations are not governed by profit-seeking at all costs, or the domination of the strongest, but by cooperation. Who can deny that the emergence of China is a great opportunity for world peace, for the Chinese and for the peoples of the world?

What about Europe in all this? Philippe proposes to create "a powerful European public authority", together with a European investment system, to put public support to the service of training, labour insertion

and entrepreneurship, and to create what he calls “human and productive solidarity” for a new type of growth. Today, combating climate change and combating inequality go hand in hand, as the inspiring words of Pope Francis reminds us. They will need to be rooted in intercultural and interdenominational dialogue, says Penda Mbow, this great lady and Senegalese historian that you will discover in this book. Present in Assisi, she tells us about the diversity of the Sant’Egidio meeting, a lay organisation committed to the search for peace and justice in the world, that brings together “princes and paupers, the wealthy and the others”. She describes the richness of the exchanges on the need to preserve peace in a world dangerously threatened by exclusion, populism and the development of centrifugal forces. Peace, says Pope Francis, present in Assisi, means “welcome, readiness for dialogue, the overcoming of closure, which are not safety strategies but bridges across the void”.

Claude Fischer,

Director of ASCPE – Les Entretiens Européens et Eurafricains

Antoine Guggenheim,

Co-founder of UP for Humanness

COMBATING INEQUALITIES

Civilisational challenges and transformation of globalised capitalism

Civilisation: this word denotes what societies share over a very long period: beliefs, goods, social and political relations. I emphasise *share*, because it is not a given. The question of inequality, at the heart of our living together in difference, is therefore a civilisational challenge, today more than ever, as our interdependent and multicultural societies experience the formidable mutation of globalisation. It is a shock for each of them and inequality has now become a global issue, a civilisational challenge in its three dimensions: cultural, economic and political.

Our traditions are a font of inspiration

The Greeks assigned politics the purpose of taking care of the soul, and they considered the problem of inequality a challenge to democracy. Aristotle: *«impossible or at the least not easy to do the beautiful things if one does not have the wherewithal, for many actions can only be done with instruments like friends, wealth and political power»*.

In the humanist tradition of the Enlightenment, inequality is the deprivation of liberty. Thus, Angus Deaton compares getting out of poverty to an escape, a metaphor for liberty, in his book *The Great Escape* (2016). The French Revolution enshrined equality as a core value of the rule of law characterising modern democracy. Everyone is a citizen without

exclusion or privilege; liberty is therefore inseparable from equality. But in fact, national citizenship is underpinned by the principle of exclusivity. As the historian and Marxist economist Paul Boccara observes in his book *Pour une nouvelle civilisation*, «*liberalism and its creativity are characterised by contractual relations between free individuals of equal rights, but unequal in their access to material and cultural means*». Important as it is, the answer given by the law to the problem of inequality is inadequate, and today the utter juridification of human relations is symptomatic of a legal crisis. Equality and Liberty are only effective values if the value Fraternity can be given body and spirit.

This always brings me back to Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: *There is neither male nor female neither Jew nor Gentile, nor is there master or slave, for we are all brothers*. This is not only a message of love, but also a call to combat: to refuse any subordination, woman/man, power/submission, master/slave. More than ever, Paul's programme is the order of the day. And I also remember the Greek message: access for all to society's common goods is the concrete political answer to the challenge of inequality.

Forging the ethics and the practice of otherness is always a valuable source of inspiration in a common combat against inequalities rising again in the context of globalised capitalism, and this calls for a rethink of our models and our institutions of progress.

What measuring inequality reveals

The development of statistical information and transparency requirements make inequalities more visible and allow informed debate. Whatever its limits and bias, Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the 21st Century* presents an altogether plausible profile for the western world. Measured in terms of income and capital disparities, inequalities in this area increased in the 19th century; in the 20th century, they started decreasing in the interwar period and after WWII, but have definitely risen since the 1980s (even though the World Bank has observed a recent interruption of the increase). However, measured globally, they appear to have decreased on account of the reduction of poverty and

rise of the middle class in fast-growing emerging countries such as China and India. But when we change focus and look at matters on the ground instead of watching the world from afar, we observe the rise of inequalities within each national society, perhaps even more so in less advanced countries. For Branko Milanovic, global measurements are based on a fallacy: each counts as one.

André Babeau's, Denis Kessler's and Philippe Trainar's contributions to the journal *Commentaire* (Summer 2016) offer a critical analysis of Piketty's book with regard to causes and solutions. The author overemphasises patrimonial transmissions. Actually, out of the world's current top twenty fortunes, three at the most are inherited, the seventeen others belong to business owners often in the digital industry, and many of these fortunes did not exist twenty years ago (source: Forbes). Let's remember this: the harnessing of innovation by capitalist entrepreneurs to accumulate considerable wealth very rapidly is a novelty and a fundamental danger. It jeopardises free enterprise and western civilisation at the same time. The scandalous importance of fortunes and income derived from real estate should also be emphasised. On the other hand, it is not true that the average profitability of invested capital always exceeds the growth rate, as Piketty claims: in crises, there is significant loss of capital. However, the bill is mostly footed by the population.

Let me add that insurance-based policies protect the well-off, while the fragile and even the majority of the world population is excluded. I have heard the heads of the insurance companies AXA and Allianz and the head of the World Bank say that 95% of the world population is not insured against the effects and risks of climate change. And what is the protection of refugees locked up in camps for many years? Beyond Ulrich Beck's work on *risk society*, Denis Kessler emphasises the novelty of the problem of inequality in the face of risk. What is Europe doing when confronted with natural disasters? Confronted with refugees or dependency?

After WWII, the powerful intervention of the State in western countries

managed to reduce inequalities: the levying of large amounts of tax mobilised resources for social security and employment. Today, these expenses still act as a social shock absorber in countries like France. However, public spending, to put it mildly, is not always efficient and the public sector also creates inequalities. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu stigmatised *State nobility* and their heirs in his time. National Education trains an elite while at the same time the number of school dropouts is massive and rising. The State proclaims equal opportunities yet produces inequality. Here and elsewhere in Europe, the ageing demography does not only accentuate the problems of financing social security. If tackled without considering changing cycles and the resulting changing lifestyles, nor the concern for intergenerational equity, it will contribute to an increasingly precarious situation for young people.

I would emphasise that wealth disparities are much more closely correlated to human capital inequalities than to income inequalities and that labour market design is the cause. The deficiencies of vocational and continuous training make job transitions insecure and create long-term unemployment traps. Generally, redistribution policies between the rich and the poor have not prevented the rise of inequalities: the problem cannot be reduced to available income alone.

André Babeau makes me think that the distinction between measured inequality and perceived inequality must be investigated. A small farmer does not care about the problems of the richest 1%, but much more so about the precariousness of his farm, which points to the need to consider it a good that society should preserve and modernise.

This is not unrelated to Angus Deaton's recommendation to ask people to evaluate their own life themselves. Available analyses confirm that dissatisfaction is perceived strongly in poor countries, but as much about access to common goods as about the low living standards. However, when asked about perceived happiness, a weak correlation with income is observed. Therefore, *"there are more Kenyans, Nepalis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who feel happy than Danes or*

Italians!” Perceived *happiness* differs depending on the relationship with life and the world, which is a particular problem in the West, but it should not be mistaken for *well-being* evaluated by people themselves.

**Over the past 250 years,
the tale of progress has rhymed with the tale of inequality**

The champions of capitalism have always considered that growth was the essential answer to the social question. It has indeed managed to raise the standard of living, an unquestionable source of progress. It has also resulted in inequality, which has a positive face, writes Deaton, when it enables certain persons to clear the path of liberty for others. This is the case when creating a business or innovation responds to societal needs. It is negative when it consists of rent-seeking and privileges, depriving others from access to progress. However, he adds that this is only one aspect. Escaping poverty may have to do with money, but other elements count as much if not more: better health, the possibility to participate in active life.

Today, the dark face is blatant. The economic and financial machine produces so many inequalities and its “innovations” are sometimes or even often so factitious or unsuitable that even in the United States there is concern about their negative effects on growth. Today, inequalities smother and drain the human resource pool that capitalism draws from. The number of people excluded from the labour market and/or in a precarious situation keeps rising and the productivity of those in employment is stagnating or declining. The system is on fire. Adam Smith’s message is forgotten: labour is the wealth of nations. Enlightened economists emphasise the probability of secular stagnation.

It also appears that *insecurity* is a major source of inequality. Populations exhausted by war, terrorism, those with no access to energy, drinking water, small farmers who can no longer achieve food security, are miserable or weakened. Their resilience to shocks becomes a matter of survival.

Human development and material growth must go hand in hand

Some environmentalists have advocated *negative growth*. Yet, less growth will not help reduce inequalities or increase well-being. Obviously, in each recession, unemployment rises and so does impoverishment. The masses of the world's poor populations need work and growth most. As Pope Francis emphasised, this must imperatively be taken into account in mitigating climate change and its effects. There was a lot of hope in poor countries when growth was facilitated by world trade, but this was linked to rising commodity prices, which is no longer the case. How will Africa manage, threatened by major environmental impacts as early as the current decade, sorely tried by the rise of radical Islamism, while its population is growing rapidly and huge inequalities prevail? It imperatively needs strong growth.

Development and growth should not be considered opposites, but need to be combined, which implies major changes in the way growth is achieved. It needs to become more endogenous, more inclusive, more sustainable. This is a huge challenge. The prevailing productivity mode has focused on substituting machines for people. Another productivity mode would require massive investment in human development, including cultural development, to achieve better use of machines, economy and regeneration of natural resources. As a corollary, lifestyles must change: the excesses of western consumerism are blatant, while there is a dearth of long-term investments in sustainable development and growth to boost global demand.

Some marvel at the magnificent effects of the digital and technological revolution in productivity and growth. This presumes that the problem is solved. Yet, statistics do not show this trend. Let me emphasise the link between inequality and excessive concentration of economic and financial power. The capture of revolutionary instruments and infrastructures by a small minority of enterprises and investors makes it possible to set up private global monopolies, particularly today with the digital revolution. They often offer useful services, but do not allow the vast majority

of the population to acquire the cognitive and material capacities needed for their use and for the collective good. Today, the breeding grounds for creativity in the United States are shrinking, with a decline in the number of start-ups and a decline in productivity. Similarly, the attractiveness of science is waning in our educational systems and offers of life-long learning are far too inadequate. The gap between research and training is becoming very wide.

The use of IT tools by multinational companies is geared towards the goals of popular consumerism. They consider them innovative whatever their real qualities. Investors have achieved huge profitability through the financial markets' dictatorship over the valuation of projects, enterprises and financing models. Public monetary policy remains subservient to these interests. It currently prevents a depression, which is good, but by preserving the value of the capital invested, it also preserves the fortunes and losses the over-accumulation of capital would require.

All of this has been accompanied by the withering of public goods in rural areas and their deficiencies in frenzied urbanisation; impoverishment is now starting to affect the middle class itself. The shrinking reservoir of human creativity and productiveness cannot be dissociated from social exclusion. There is no way we can continue growing like this.

A deep transformation of the capitalist system is needed, all the more complex as it is globalised. The market is global, but this globalisation is neither civilised nor is it viable in its current state.

Investment through common goods: an imperative to reduce inequalities

In the interwar period, one of the greatest economists and anthropologists of the century, the Marxist Karl Polanyi, described the grand transformation achieved by the creation of public goods. He wrote that Money, Land and Labour were exempt from commoditisation and the requirement of maximum profitability when public intervention turns them into common goods. Let's recall that in the jargon of economists, a pure public good is a good that is accessible to all without rivalry or exclusion.

This is not about demonising the market, which is a fundamental forum for human exchange, and man does not live on spirituality alone, but all depends on the market model. Public intervention was necessary to create non-market forms of exchange requiring a socialisation of resources, and the State also plays a major role as a long-term investor in a whole range of infrastructures necessary to life in society (energy, transport, water, education, research, health), accessible to all as much as possible.

In the current globalised capitalism, the situation has changed significantly. In China, the State still invests massively in social and industrial infrastructure; but in the West, long-term investments in public infrastructure are in the doldrums, although they are crucial to face environmental challenges and to respond to future social needs in the spirit of intergenerational equity. Private investors consider them too risky or not profitable enough. Financial markets dictate their standards and conventions and public authorities have difficulties in promoting and financing projects of general interest. Vertical public procurement is not conducive to co-creation and cooperation among multiple stakeholders and multiple potential uses of new infrastructure. Nevertheless, they are indispensable.

We therefore need to imagine a new great transformation *à la Polanyi* and integrate the fact that information has also become a prime common good. Knowing that the private sector has huge human and financial resources and the intelligence needed for innovation, it should henceforth play a major role as an investor in all types of common goods. Public authorities need to keep their role as guarantor and incentiviser and should be capable of taking back their role of defining and valuating collective choices. For these reasons, we need to imagine a redefinition of the public and private sectors, with unprecedented partnerships between them, in order to pool resources and reduce risks.

Today, the challenge of public investment has taken on an international dimension, where societal and commercial geopolitical challenges around energy, water, information etc. are intermingled. Nation states,

which used to provide the solution, have also become obstacles. As guarantors of solidarity on “their” territory, they confine this solidarity to their national citizens and alongside their private champions, deliberately act as rivals in exacerbated global competition. The problem is therefore much more complex than in Polanyi’s time, when a way out of the 1930s crisis needed to be found.

Most States have opened the floodgates to hyper-liberalism on the markets and all want to attract private investors. In the European Union, a competition policy solely geared towards the opening of national markets is an obstacle to the pooling of resources for the common good. I have experienced this in the European Parliament, where my attempts to found effective solidarity for the joint construction of European public goods were rejected. More recently, in cooperation with economists such as Michel Aglietta, we have been able to open a breach. The Union has created a system of common guarantees to help make desired investments deemed too risky more profitable. Yet, States generally want to keep control on the origin of projects. The Union does not know how to finance investments aimed at developing human capacities, such as vocational training. And the countries of the “periphery” in the East and South have huge difficulties in setting up projects, as cross-border investments are lacking. The Commission also wants to redirect its project. More than an adjustment, a powerful European public authority needs to be envisaged. A European investment system needs to be built.

More generally, the international public space that we started building after WWII has aged. It needs to be regenerated and legitimated. For instance, the agenda presented to the WTO at the Doha meeting in 2001 to reform world trade wanted to introduce social standards, competition rules and investment in the field of multilateral negotiations. The failure is obvious and Europe has no strategy left. National collective choices do not agree. Neither the dominant powers nor less advanced states – who do not accept to submit to rules designed by these powers – have wanted to get involved in the definition of rules for the common good.

Huge investment needs cannot materialise on the African continent and elsewhere, because they would require massive transfers of financial and technological resources. Yet, if we want to prevent major disasters and conflicts resulting from the impact of climate change and population growth in these countries, international investment systems of mutual interest need to be invented to respond first and foremost to the needs of project promoters, to support their development and finance them. In this respect, the role of public development banks and investors managing the savings of the public such as insurers or private equity managers is very important.

In her network, Claude Fischer brings together European and African stakeholders to rise to the challenge. Africa needs to be industrialised and endowed with the public infrastructure, goods and services necessary for inclusive and sustainable growth. One of the major priorities is training and entrepreneurship. Foreign investors need to commit themselves to partnerships with a low and deferred profitability. Costs and risks need to be pooled and the value created shared. This means moving from aid to incentives and co-investment while combating corruption and rent-seeking. To break the rivalries opposing States, regional institutions need to be built to offer an appropriate framework for the market and financing. Common tax and monetary policies are particularly necessary to stimulate strong cooperation on the African continent. Several regional institutions already exist, but they have not yet acquired the strength of a genuine shared public power.

The sharing of projects and risks questions geopolitical strategies. In the energy sector, multiple rival projects are being prepared between Europe, Russia, Turkey, the southern and eastern Mediterranean, where all these countries are fundamentally interdependent. The Europe-Asia relationship and the Chinese Silk Road project also need to be considered. How can these choices be rationalised aiming at a common good? Geopolitical dialogue needs to reinvent peaceful coexistence and open the way to co-development agreements on markets where competition would no longer rule unilaterally. In this spirit, together with Claude Fischer, we are striving to decipher the challenges of European energy security.

Beyond public aid, regeneration of values and solidarity

In the western world, transfer policies for national citizens of the Welfare State are reaching their limits. Public aid still alleviates suffering, but redistribution can no longer obey merely assistive principles. It must serve the insertion of the excluded in training and employment, the resilience of the fragile, the development of human capacities. In countries lagging behind in their development, internal resources fall short of the needs, and although public aid coming from western countries is not insignificant, it is inherently inefficient. The economist François Bourguignon asks a good question: when the share of external public aid benefiting the local population only amounts to 15% of the transfer (which is quite frequent), because 85% is diverted by State corruption and wasted on cronies, should it be stopped? And should we forget that arms exports to these countries contribute to the self-destruction of States in the making, cancelling most of the effects of this external aid? These problems need to be tackled and other forms of aid must be found. The aid provided by western states is particular in that they do not assume their responsibility locally. Civil societies, western companies need to undertake deep and durable commitments in the countries concerned within partnerships availing themselves of pooled resources. Today the long-term risk aversion of international investors is blatant in less advanced countries, while politicians talk about Marshall plans, but they are nowhere in sight and it is an old concept.

Transnational investment dynamics for common goods need to be based on the creation of human and productive solidarities transcending major cultural and organisational discrepancies between States. British utilities, French *services publics*, German *Daseinsvorsorge*, State services in former communist countries are the result of long histories and will remain divisive as long as the will to transcend them in common cross-border projects is lacking. Transcending means thorough work on the values in question, political dialogue in a macroeconomic setting, cooperation between economic stakeholders on common projects, financing pools involving development banks, interconnection of

infrastructures, and incentivising market frameworks. Mobilising populations is decisive for them to take ownership of challenges and develop their commitments. The current governance of the Union is not up to these requirements, as it standardises competition-oriented market rules and coordinates between Union and States on numerical objectives.

Similarly, Europe's relations with developing countries are crippled by asymmetric trade and unproductive aid. The involvement of populations and actors of civil society is indispensable. Beyond "fair trade" or a "level playing field", room needs to be made for long-term partnerships, a prerequisite for durable solidarity. The internationalisation of research and education structures, joint ventures, must multiply experience and technology transfers to enable the least developed or more fragile countries to partake durably in the world economy.

Beyond the stale argument between capitalism and socialism, all of this would stimulate debate and action and open a perspective of broad transformation of capitalism.

These new solidarities imply thorough work to transform and share values. Let us return to Polanyi's triptych:

Money first. It will not do to stigmatise the growing dark side, the greed, envy and social decay; the positive historic side must also be acknowledged, the multiplication of human capacities for projects and exchange. Societies need to regain power over money in order to choose, value and finance the projects of common interest they need. A lot of exploratory practical work is going in this direction, and I had the pleasure of participating in it in Brussels in the years following the 2008 crisis. This forum of common institutions is too often treated as a scapegoat both by national leaders trying to conceal their own failures and by "indignant" people who are blind to the achievements and the complexity of the challenges.

Land: faced with environmental concerns, awareness and mobilisation are rising, but it is pointless to stress that we still have a long way to go. The ideology of the Enlightenment, according to which "man is the

master and possessor of nature” is still with us. The anthropocene is not yet established. Concentration of power in the hands of companies and States does not allow us to aim for growth based on the diversity of territories and the industrial diversification of economies. The bulk of the global population needs to produce much more and better, which is impossible without transfers and cross-border solidarity.

Labour, finally. Most of all, let’s not forget labour, now that the end of work is foolishly being announced. The worst inequality is to be excluded from activity (and from the “labour market”). It is linked to a degeneration of the value of labour in the West, and, as a corollary, to the ignorance of the crucial challenge of productivity. The excluded, the fragile also exist because of a lack of investment in human capacities (education, training, health) and accessible infrastructure (energy, water...). I have already denounced the elitist and discriminatory character of our current economic and political structures. I want qualifications for all and not a society split into the skilled and the non-skilled, particularly when work is increasingly becoming a matter of creativity and quality. We need to overcome the traditional subordination of labour particular to capitalism. Tomorrow’s workers will be entrepreneurs and creators at the same time; see how in Africa the women and the populations are becoming aware of this. These mutations in training and employment require mobility of thought and action. I observe that the Europeans claim to defend free movement; while in the current circumstances it is inherently unequal. Not to reform labour markets means trapping the poor in precariousness. Not to welcome refugees means trapping them in distress. Of course, mobility needs to be managed, provided it is valued and not stigmatised.

Of participation in democracy

With the association Confrontations Europe that I have founded and run with Claude Fischer for 25 years and which is moving on, we strive to bring together Europeans in all their diversity so that they may recognise each other and the unity of Europe may again make sense. With the association Entretiens Eurafricains led by Claude, we bring together Europeans and Africans to share their cultural and economic

challenges in solidarity. With the association *United Persons for Humanness* co-founded by Antoine Guggenheim and Diane d'Audiffret, we wish to reconnect persons so that they experience together the challenges of a reconciled humanity. I find that these contributions to a new culture of dialogue converge with the culture practised by the Sant'Egidio Community for thirty years. Dialogue and participation are vital in winning the battle against inequality, and they contribute to changing the type of democracy we are living in.

In a country like France, society no longer heeds the mantra of restoring national unity around the values of the Republic. Rousseau's social contract is breaking up; equality is formal. The values of otherness and interiority are obviously lacking. Enlightenment is short of breath, examples of national withdrawal abound. The age-old principle of Sovereignty itself is affected. Don't get me wrong, sovereignty has been the political face of the ideal of self-determination of peoples, and it still characterises our will to take the collective choices that unite us into our own hands. However, it has been conferred to the nation state. It remains a fundamental cohesion factor, but the hyper-delegation of popular power to ruling elites and the corporatisation of intermediary bodies must be called into question, as well as any call for protection when it is based on the refusal to open up to others.

Western democracy is based on the model of national representative government. In the West, its limits are visible: our governments are not representative of the diversity and potential of our societies. Choosing their leaders is a charade, when these leaders come from a "political profession" captured by an oligarchy of parties and submitted to mimetic mediatic rivalries. These political inequalities are not unrelated to social and economic inequalities. Outside, after colonisation, the intervention and military interference of western states on behalf of human rights and democracy have often been counterproductive. These issues need to be debated in the public sphere and other options need to be found. The internal and external dilemmas are linked. Only the participation of peoples, the constitution of new civil societies and their transnational associations will solve them. They oblige us to re-think democracy.

To conclude, let us return to Paul: to transcend segregation and domination, let us invent leadership rotation, worker participation in management, the sharing of information and decentralisation of responsibilities in enterprises and states. Beyond the nation state, let us breathe new life into the regional and global institutions created after WWII. They need to be boosted to share common goods on a completely different scale by shedding the fetters applied by dominant powers and their governance trapped in intergovernmental relations. This is about reforming thought and ethics because the cultural challenge encapsulates all others. Intercultural and ecumenical dialogue is particularly crucial, provided it dares to take on taboos. Conflicts should not be denied but settled and made constructive, and emulation must be achieved in intercultural diversity to take up the challenges of this great economic and political transformation.

Virtues can only be proven by acts. For me, working on the re-founding of the European Union is a work of civilisation, challenged by otherness, in the perspective of a reconciled and therefore peaceful humanity.

Penda Mbow
*Historian, former Minister of Culture,
Representative of the Head of State of Senegal to La Francophonie*

The Spirit of Sant'Egidio!

From 18 to 20 September 2016, we attended the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Assisi, where it was founded under the stewardship of Pope John Paul II in 1986. Assisi is the town of Saint Francis (1181-2 - 1226), the inspirer of interreligious dialogue and of the Order of Friars Minor, or Franciscans.

This high-level meeting in the context of localised world war (Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Libya...) and terrorist attacks always involving a religious dimension, was attended by clerics of the various monotheistic faiths but also by Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, etc.

Christianity was represented by its different branches: Catholic and Protestant, Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian, etc. Islam was present in all its dimensions with imams and theologians from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Palestine and Nigeria. Panels enabled dialogue to take place between the various religions and branches from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Palestine. Finally, Judaism was also represented at this meeting. Rabbi David Brodman from Israel and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, his holiness Bartolomew I, enhanced the meeting with their age and wisdom. The latter was awarded the degree of Doctor honoris causa of the University Stranieri di Perugia at the conference.

In addition to the prelates of the Roman Curia, imams, rabbis, patriarchs and other religious dignitaries, the meeting was also attended by academics, journalists, UN officials, political leaders and Nobel Prize winners.

Thirst of peace. Religions and cultures in dialogue.

The main theme of the Assisi conference was “Thirst for Peace. Religions and cultures in dialogue”. In addition to religious aspects, a variety of issues were addressed: migration, the situation of refugees and human rights, and how to make prisons more humane, democratic experiments such as Tunisia, poverty in the world, the future of our planet ... there were 29 panels!

At the opening ceremony, honoured by the presence of Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, two accounts from Africa made an impression on the audience. On the one hand, the address of the President of the Central African Republic expressing hope for the situation in his country and the account of the President of the South African National Assembly, Ms Baléka Mbete, about her country’s experience in the field of justice and reconciliation.

Muhammad Sammak, political advisor to the Grand Mufti of Lebanon, broadly recounted the encounter between Saint Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt during the crusades in the 12th century.

The toll paid by Africa to the world economy

Our panel dealing with “The challenges of a globalised Africa” was chaired by Mario Giro, the Italian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The panel was composed of Bishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama of Nigeria, Bishop Evariste Ngoyagoye of Burundi, the President of the South African National Assembly, his Eminence Muhammadu Sanusi II, Emir of Kano, and journalist Venance Konan, writer and director of *Fraternité Matin* in Cote d’Ivoire.

In our contribution, we endeavoured to draw the audience’s attention to the tribute paid by Africa over a very long period to what Braudel calls the economy-world. In the Middle Ages, Black Africa, namely Sudan’s gold, enabled the (Umayyad and Abassid) Muslim empires and the Levantines to establish their supremacy over the Mediterranean. The founding of European trading posts along the African coast in the 15th century and the development of mercantilism eventually led to the massive and on-going exploitation of the continent’s resources. One tends to forget Africa’s

contribution to the triumph of capitalism, which at the same time is the root of most of its current handicaps. While combating victimisation, the involvement of all those who have taken advantage of the continent's resources and populations is necessary. It remains imperative to scrutinise the impact of the Saharan and Atlantic slave trade, the damage caused by balkanisation (e.g. Gambia and the discontinuity of the Senegalese territory with the Casamance crisis as a corollary), the deterioration of trade terms, etc. Obviously, the continent holds real reasons for hope, such as the youthfulness of its population, its huge resources, its agricultural development potential, but it is also awaiting its Marshall plan, the definition of a new balance.

A symbol of ecumenism

The closing ceremony presided by Pope Francis at the Basilica of Saint Francis was characterised by an original feature: after lunch, the various religious groups gathered for prayer; Sunni and Shiite Muslims and the Druze prayed together for peace. The Christians (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox) attended the mass held by the Pope; this was a symbol of ecumenism. The same holds for the Jews who organised their prayers.

All of the closing ceremony's speeches stressed the need to preserve Peace in the world which is dangerously threatened by exclusion, populism and the development of centrifugal forces. This thirst for Peace was expressed by Pope Francis in the following words: "Peace, like a thread of hope linking heaven and earth, a word so simple and yet so difficult at the same time. Peace means Pardon, the fruit of conversion and prayer; it arises inside and, in the name of God, makes it possible to heal the wounds of the past. Peace means welcome, readiness for dialogue, the overcoming of closure, which are not safety strategies but bridges across the void". He also insisted heavily upon the importance of education.

The ceremony ended with a minute of silence for the victims of wars and terrorist acts, the reading of the 2016 Appeal for Peace, the handing over of the appeal by children to the representatives of nations, the lighting of candles while the appeal was sung, and finally the exchanging of signs of peace between the participants.

What lessons should be drawn?

During the reading of the Appeal, Casamance was mentioned among the regions of the world which were the objects of prayers for lasting peace. There was a reminder that the Community of Sant'Egidio is involved in finding peace for this region of Senegal.

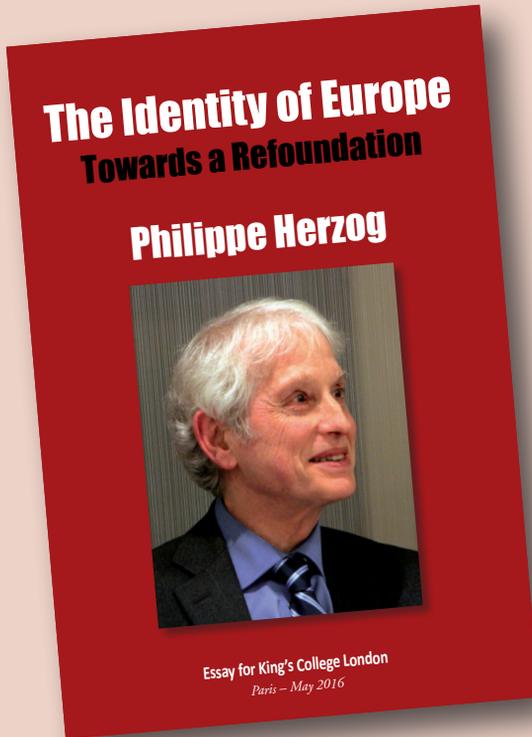
At a personal level, in all the time we have been interested in religions, and even though we have had exceptional experiences (prayers before the Saints of Timbuktu together with the Imam of the Sankoré Mosque, the visit of the holy city of Qom in Iran or the experience of Aurangabad, a concentration of religions and mystics in India, or the visit of the Buddhist Temple of Kyoto in Japan, etc.), this was the first time we had been among such an impressive number of religious authorities brought together around a single goal: the search for peace and a better future for the world.

On this occasion, we were able to experience the extent of Pope Francis' humility. In talking to him, we understood that he holds Senegal and its people in high esteem. We would like to share this moment of joy with our fellow Christians. The Senegalese model still remains a reference in the world.

We cannot conclude without paying tribute to the Community of Sant'Egidio. Despite being founded by Pope John Paul II, it remains a lay organisation committed to the search for peace and justice across the world. It reaches out to princes and paupers alike, some are rich and others less so. It supports emigrants. We met a fellow countryman who works as a trader in Rome and does not miss a single Sant'Egidio meeting. He was pleased to see Senegal participating in the debate for the first time.

After this meeting, we are even more deeply convinced that nobody has the right to fight on behalf of beliefs, faith or religion. Real faith rhymes with peace, serenity or Rahma, compassion!

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