

Julius Malema, Nathalie Yamb and the new African radicality

by Guy Mettan,* Geneva



Guy Mettan
(Picture ma)

A blind angle in the global media for decades, the African continent has become fascinating to observe since the Covid crisis because mind-blowing events are constantly happening there and there is a kind of confusing excitement that is difficult to decipher, but very exhilarating.

We will remember, for example, that Africa, despite its stunted GDP, was the region of the world which suffered the least from the pandemic and that its population emerged practically unscathed from the health crisis, escaping the hysteria of the outbreaks, lockdowns, legal restrictions of all kinds and the morbid fascination with vaccines that are as ineffective as overpriced. Certainly, a lesson in common sense and pragmatism.

Successful democratic elections

On the institutional side, the continent has just experienced two successful democratic elections. In October, one of the smallest countries, Liberia, previously ravaged by a horrific civil war, elected a new president, and ousted the old one, footballer *Georges Weah*, despite a perfectly run campaign.

Even more surprising, the giant of the continent, the improbable Democratic Republic of Congo, although plagued by all kinds of inter-ethnic tensions and an endless civil war fuelled by its pernicious Rwandan neighbour, has just re-elected its president without a hitch. No one would have bet a cent on such outcomes.

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(Picture Swiss Standpoint)

A bold act of sovereignty

For their part, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger announced at the end of January their immediate withdrawal from ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States secretly led by France, shortly after having kicked the French army and UN soldiers out their territory.

A bold and completely unprecedented act of sovereignty in the history of the continent and which preludes, perhaps, the upcoming abandonment of the CFA franc, this other relic of French colonial domination, a condemnation which, in 2011, earned *Gaddafi* a Western armed intervention which proved fatal.

On the economic front, the Forbes 2024 ranking confirmed that Africa had twenty billionaires and that the richest of them, the Nigerian cement king *Alike Dangote*, had a fortune of 14 billion dollars. This very bling bling indicator is quite anecdotal, but it has the merit of showing that the continent is not excluded from the rankings of the richest and that the African champion made his fortune in the productive economy and not in the mining revenue of diamonds, gold, or oil.

New ideas and influences

However, it is undoubtedly at the level of ideas that Africa stands out, with the appearance of opinion leaders and "neuron shakers" who exert

a great influence on the continent's youth. In French-speaking countries, the three new leaders of the military juntas that took power in Mali, Burkina, and Niger, *Assimi Goita*, *Ibrahim Traoré* and *Abdourahamane Tiani*, and the fourth musketeer, Colonel *Mamadi Doumbouya* of Guinea, quickly imposed their own ideas and their trenchant style towards the old potentates of African politics.

Among influencers, we will note the growing impact of the Swiss-Cameroonian *Nathalie Yamb*, originally from La Chaux-de-Fonds, banned from staying in France and French-speaking countries. She publishes incendiary videos every week to her 384,000 *Twitter* subscribers and the 317,000 listeners of her *YouTube* channel. Now based in Zug, the ex-partner of Ghanaian President *Jerry Rawlings*, nicknamed "the Lady of Sochi" because of her pro-Russian inclinations, ignites the web by decreeing that "each French soldier who falls in Africa, it is an enemy who falls."

Some sort of contemporary Steve Biko

In English-speaking Africa, the prize for radicalism undoubtedly goes to *Julius Malema*, who is some sort of contemporary *Steve Biko*, adored

by the youth of the townships and by all that Africa has of Pan-Africanist activists. Born in 1981, a member of the pioneers of the ANC [African National Congress], he was expelled from the party because of the extremism in his speeches against white South Africans.

Founder of the *Economic Freedom Fighters* movement, Malema positions himself as far-left, anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, pan-Africanist, black nationalist, anti-white, anti-Zionist, and anti-Western. He became an icon of the anti-colonial struggle with his song "Kill the Boers", a cover of an old anti-apartheid song, which is not really a pacifist anthem.

With such a pedigree, it is not surprising that he is ignored by the European media but revered across the English-speaking world from Johannesburg to Monrovia and from Harare to Kampala.¹

Never has the call of "Africa to Africans" been so vocal. It now remains to be seen when and how it will resound.

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ Johannesburg (South Africa), Monrovia (Liberia), Harare (Zimbabwe), Kampala (Uganda)