

Life or Debt! Our first Pan-Africa Newsletter (2023)



Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental Pan-Africa**.

This is the first in a monthly newsletter series where we will share recent activities from our Pan-African institute based in Johannesburg, South Africa. As one of **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research's** institutes, we elaborate on and amplify the theories of leading social and political movements while bridging the gap between movement-based intellectuals and academic thinkers. To learn more about the institute and get involved in our activities, reach out to mikaela@thetricontinental.org.

This month, we are spotlighting our dossier ***Life or Debt: The Stranglehold of Neocolonialism and Africa's Search for Alternatives***. It addresses the current debt crisis that is confronting many African countries and forcing them to seek assistance once again from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For example, **Ghana** and **Zambia**, two countries reeling under a mountain load of debt, have recently signed onto new IMF programmes that require crushing austerity as preconditions for debt resolution.

As we argue in the dossier, IMF austerity has never resolved debt. If anything, IMF austerity only ever consigns poorer countries to a perpetual state of indebtedness and thus creates the perfect conditions for neocolonialism to thrive. The dossier concludes by putting forward a set of alternative policy solutions that can establish the economic sovereignty of the African continent and break the cycle of debt.

Within ***Life or Debt*** is a statement from the Collective on African Political Economy (CAPE). CAPE is a new grouping of Africans from different walks of life who are committed to the economic, and thus total,

emancipation of the African continent and the Third World, more broadly. CAPE hopes to recapture the emancipatory scholarship and politics of a previous generation of intellectuals that emerged from the post-independence movement in the 1960s and reformulate it to respond to the needs of today's world. CAPE's statement rejects the IMF as the solution and instead calls for a new set of transcontinental and global institutions that will uphold the sovereignty and dignity of humanity. CAPE membership is open to all who believe in its values and mission. If you are interested, please contact grieve@thetricontinental.org.

The dossier was launched on 18 May with an online webinar panel discussion featuring Crystal Simeoni (the director of **Nawi**), Brian Kamanzi (from **Trade Unions for Energy Democracy**), and me, Grieve Chelwa, (from Tricontinental Pan-Africa), who are all CAPE members. The webinar was moderated by, me, Mikaela Nhondo Erskog, a researcher at Tricontinental and co-host of *The Crane: An Africa-China Podcast*. We introduced the dossier's core ideas but, more importantly, discussed strategies for implementation of the suggested policy alternatives. A video recording of the proceedings can be watched [here](#).

After tracing the origins of debt in colonialism and outlining its role in subordinating African sovereignty and the dignity of the masses, Burkinabé President Thomas Sankara made a striking **declaration** to the leaders gathered at the 1987 Organisation of African Unity conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We leave you with his words, as we need more and more to join in contemporary efforts that echo his salient call:

Now we are asked to be accomplices in a balancing – a balancing favouring those with the financial power; a balancing against the popular masses.

No! We cannot be accomplices. No! We cannot go with those who suck our people's blood and live on our people's sweat.

Warmly,

Grieve & Mika



Dr Grieve Chelwa is a Zambian economist whose research focuses on African economic development. He currently serves as the Director of Research at the Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy at the New School, and as coordinator of the Collective on African Political Economy (CAPE).



Mikaela Nhondo Erskog is an educator and researcher. She is part of the Pan Africanism Today Secretariat, which coordinates the regional articulation of the International People's Assembly, and is also part of the No Cold War coordination committee, a peace platform promoting multilateralism and maximum global cooperation. She is also part of the Dongsheng collective, an international group of researchers interested in Chinese politics and society, and hosts *The Crane: An Africa-China Podcast*.

