From Neo-liberalism to Pan-Africanism: Towards Reconstructing an Eastern African Discourse[1]**

By

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Introduction

The purpose of this short intervention is to review the state of interaction between our universities in East Africa so far as intellectual debate is concerned. If in the process I refer somewhat passionately to the debates of the 60s and 70s, it is not out of nostalgia but to draw inspiration. And we need this inspiration given the state of intellectual inertia and marketisation of academia that has set in with the invasion of neo-liberal agenda in our universities. At the end I am also making a modest proposal as to how we may use the vantage point of this Workshop to start about reflecting on the mechanisms to kick-start the process of an Eastern African Discourse.

But the academics that we are, I must provide the background and the context, albeit in somewhat disjointed sketches.

The Nationalist Period

Sketches of the political context

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that the immediate post-independence period was one of great expectations and equally great political turmoil. The anti-colonial struggles that picked up after World War II came to fruition in Africa in the sixties. Ghana got its independence in 1957 and Nkrumah picked up the flag of Pan-Africanism in his great passion for African Unity. Born in the midst of cold war, signs of any autonomous nationalism by independent states attracted the wrath of super-powers. Western intervention in the running and changing of regimes in Africa was rampant. The

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assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the open military intervention of the US left an indelible impression on the East African leaders and made them very vulnerable. Radical nationalism had a very hard time keeping afloat.

The Zanzibar revolution of 1964 and the subsequent army mutinies in all the three East African countries threatened to derail nationalism in this part of the world. The extent of the influence and intervention of the former colonial power, Britain, in these events can only be appreciated now when we have the opportunity to peruse diplomatic papers of the sixties and seventies recently opened in the Public Records Office. Relatively more independent nationalists like Nyerere found extremely difficult to keep the former colonial power at bay. Embarrassing though it may have been, Nyerere had to call in British troops to quell his riotous soldiers. But the nationalist in him could not countenance British troops on the Tanganyikan soil. He had the Nigerian troops look after the defense of the country while the new Tanzanian army was being trained.

In what he called an "undiplomatically frank" letter to Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister of Britain, Nyerere narrated his fears and entreated the Prime Minister to understand his position.

> These are only a few of the reasons why we cannot be expected to be so confident of American non-interference in our affairs as British feel in relation to her own country. For the whole of this past year we have been subjected to pressures from the United States – and from Britain too before the change of Government – in relation to events in this country, particularly in relation to the post-revolutionary period in Zanzibar.
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> And finally, I am sure you will realise that there has been a reaction against the complacency with which we viewed our security questions before the mutiny of January this year. It may be that in consequence we see dangers where none exist, but if so this is a fault on the right side under the circumstances. Africa is going through an extremely difficult period of transition, and coup d'etats are not things in which any African Government can afford to take a merely academic interest. (Letter from Nyerere to Wilson, 27/11/64)

Kenyatta had thrown in his lot with the West while Obote was struggling with his kingdoms. Nyerere continued agonizing over where he stood. His anti-colonial nationalism began to draw him to take non-alignment more and more seriously. The liberation wars in southern Africa, which were inevitably, and for obvious reasons, supported by the Soviet bloc and, which found a home and consistent support in Nyerere, no doubt, also had a radical influence on Mwalimu.

There were other events on the continent which also played a role in the political thought and discourse in this region. Nkrumah had moved radically to the left. His Pan-Africanism went hand in hand with anti-imperialism. Unlike Nyerere's anti-colonialism, which was politically and diplomatically much more astute, but lacked a profound understanding and appreciation of imperialism, Nkrumah's anti-imperialism was thoroughly rooted in political economy. His *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) published in October 1965 elicited an immediate protest from the US Government which promptly cancelled a $35 million aid to Ghana. Four months later Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in a CIA-backed military coup (Blum: 1986:223). CIA had been planning the coup with Ghanaian military officers for a year (Blum 2001:141).

Five months later, one of the architects of the coup Colonel A. A. Afrifa wrote a book on the coup (Afrifa 1966) which could have been easily penned by a CIA scribe. In the book, the author vilifies Nkrumah's Pan-African dreams and support for national liberation in the Congo and elsewhere and demonstrates his unreserved flunkeyism towards the West.

> At the attainment of independence, the British handed over to us a decent system of Government in which everyone had a say. …. Organization of African unity or no Organization of African unity, I will claim my citizenship of Ghana and of the Commonwealth in any part of the world. I have been trained in the United Kingdom as a soldier, and I am ever prepared to fight alongside my friends in the United Kingdom in the same way as Canadians and Australians will do. (quoted in the introduction, Afrifa 1966:11)

Reading Afrifa's book may send a chill down our patriotic spines. But I should say only

some spines! In this age of globalization, not very dissimilar things are being said by our own leaders. One East African president is credited with having castigated his own people as ignorant, envious and lazy for not understanding the demands of globalization while another has dramatically disowned his own radical past as he embraces the imperialist US.

The East African Academic Discourse

Nyerere's radical nationalism eventually led him to 'socialism and self-reliance' while at the same time he continued to nurture a pretty consistent aversion to both the, then, super-powers. Only a few months before the Arusha Declaration, the University students had demonstrated against the introduction of compulsory national service and mandatory contributions from their salary. One of the placards read; 'Colonialism was better'. Nyerere could not stomach it. He dismissed the students, some three hundred of them, and used the occasion to lambaste the accumulative tendencies of his own coterie of leaders. He slashed their salaries by twenty per cent. That became a precursor to the leadership code of the Arusha Declaration.

'Every TANU and Government leader must be either a peasant or a worker, and should in no way be associated with the practices of capitalism or feudalism. No TANU or Government leader should hold shares in any company .. or hold directorships in any privately owned enterprise … or receive two or more salaries … or own houses which he rents to others.' (Nyerere 191968:249), thundered the Arusha Declaration.

University students thus became the historical harbinger of the Leadership Code, if not the Arusha Declaration, albeit unintentionally.

The Arusha Declaration heralded an unprecedented intellectual activity on the Campus of the University College at Dar es Salaam. But this activity was not only a Tanzanian one. It involved East Africans. It will be remembered that this was the time of the University of East Africa. Makerere sent out doctors, Nairobi engineers and architects and Dar es Salaam, lawyers. My own class of 1967-70 boasted almost half non-Tanzanians among whom were the leading lights of, what later became, Museveni's guerrilla force and first

cabinet. Student leaders, Faculty members and administrators, came from the three East African countries. The subject-matter of study was East African. In the Law Faculty, for example, we studied and taught the laws of all the three East African countries. The first interdisciplinary course introduced in the Faculty of Law in the wake of the Arusha Declaration, and with the intention of breaking down compartmentalization of knowledge, was called 'Social and Economic Problems of East Africa.' Later on, the Faculty of Arts and Social Science introduced a similar course called 'East African Society and Environment' known by its acronym EASE. Student struggles, protests, debates and intellectual discourse in and outside the classroom was East African. In their Second Memorandum, the Vigilance Committee which spearheaded and led the student protest against a new curriculum clearly used the East African vantage point: As it was stated in our first memorandum, the real issue at stake is a fundamental one concerning the ownership of this University College: whether the College will ultimately belong to the people of Tanzania and East Africa or to imperialism. (Quoted in Shivji 1993:40)East African students were also very prominent in the militant student organisation like the University Students' African Revolutionary Front (USARF). Its chair was a gentleman called Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Among its members and activists were many East Africans who later on became prominent in various fields of life in the countries concerned. East Africans prominently participated in what we used to call then ideological struggles or debates. Prominent East Africans, including academics, were invited to exchange views with the students and the Faculty of the University College. No East African, or African, event passed without there being a discussion and a "surgical" analysis of whether it was in the interest of the people or the petty bourgeoisie and/or imperialism. Although this was a period of intense debates and radical discourse on the Dar Campus it had its reverberation on the other two Campuses as well. When Obote declared his 'Move to the Left', among the first places outside Uganda that his intellectual supporters visited was the Dar Campus. I remember Professor Yash Tandon fervently defending Obote's 'Move to the Left' before a very cynical, but well-grounded and articulate, USARF militants. The then chairman of USARF, Museveni, sardonically

snubbed Tandon arguing that the 'Move to the Left' was not a traffic question! I frequently joke that in the Left we had a neat division of labour between the three East African countries. Dar excelled in ideologising but it only ideologised. As Mao said of Trostky: He, Trostsky, took a correct stand but he only stood. Nairobi organised, took to the streets and philosophized later, while Kampala took to the 'bush', gun in hand and power in head. No doubt, the prominent discourse was radical. Although garbed in the language of Marxism, I think, it was grounded much more in 'radical nationalism' than 'Marxism-Leninism'. The mainstream academic discourse too was nationalist, albeit inconsistent and wavering, but the point is that there was a discourse, a debate, a critical examination of our history and politics, culture and economy, past and present. It was a vibrant intellectual community with a home-grown debate, concerned about not only seeking the truth – the traditional vocation of a university – but also asking, 'truth for what and in whose interest'. Interestingly, with the benefit of hindsight I might even venture to say that although at the time the gap between the mainstream nationalism and radical nationalism appeared wide and unbridgeable in the then young militant minds, they had a common point of departure and, perhaps, even a common vision. The nationalist mainstream too contributed in a "strange" way to the East African discourse, whether it was in the form of nationalist histories narrated by Temu and Kimambo or anti-colonial art embedded in the poems of Okot p'Bitek or the early novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Ebrahim Hussein's plays. I say, in a strange way, because at the time we saw mainstream nationalists as essentially reactionary yet we engaged with them and that is precisely the basis of a critical discourse. With relish, we cited p'Bitek's anti-European poems and his biting caricature of the Europeanized African elites. Listen to this which first appeared in 1967 in the Transition coming out of Kampala and was later reproduced in the volume Socialism in Tanzania edited by Lionel Cliffe and John Saul:The students in our University are not revolutionary. They are committed and conservative. They have vested interests. They look forward to graduation, the circumcision ceremony before joining the "big car" tribesmen. Our university and schools are nests in which black exploiters are hatched and bred, at the expense of the tax payers, or perhaps

heartpayers.And when they have fallen into thingsThey eat the meat from the chest of bullsAnd their wives grow larger buttocksAnd their skins shine with health,They throw themselves into soft bedsBut the hip bones of the votersGrow painful sleeping on the same earthThey slept before Uhuru.(Saul and Cliffe 1973, vol.2:293)No doubt there is some truth about what Okot p'Bitek is saying about the students then, but today, it is the whole truth about our neo-liberalized universities; yet we do not have p'Biteks to agonize over it. There was another, more formal, interaction and academic input into the East African discourse. Under the aegis of the Inter-University Council (IUC), there used to be annual East African Social Science Conference whose venue rotated between the three Campuses. These conferences were great events. Faculty were accommodated in student dormitories. Research papers and field reports were presented. Current events were discussed. Some of the conferences became big occasions provoking intense dialogue. I remember that when my Silent Class Struggles was 'published' in the then USARF's journal, Cheche, (September 1970) it was presented at a subsequent Conference by a comrade since I was away in London doing my LL.M. I am told there was very interesting discussion. On another occasion, I think it was in mid-seventies, there was a very heated debate on Angola. This must have been sometime in mid-70s, just about the time that the tradition somehow fizzled out, like many other East African forums. Two things happened in 1971, which directly or indirectly, were responsible for heralding the disintegration of the East African discourse, at least its formal organizational forms. One was the overthrow of Obote and the other was the dissolution of the East African University. While playing a delicate political game, Nyerere, unlike his friend Obote, managed to avoid Nkrumah's fate. After his palace coups in which he got rid of his kings, Obote took the road to the Left. But his move to the left in a highly differentiated Ugandan society not only attracted opposition within but also the imperial wrath without. In a coup by Iddi Amin Dada, backed by the Israelis and the British, Obote was overthrown in 1971 heralding in a new phase in the disintegration of whatever was left of East Africanness in the region. The Amin coup drove out many Ugandan intellectuals to various countries abroad. A good number ended up in Dar es Salaam where they became

part of the academic and intellectual discourse. Some Ugandans became members of the Faculty while others found jobs in the city. All of them were invariably involved, openly at the University, or more privately in town, in study groups, contributing to the ongoing discourse. But otherwise, each of the three East African countries went its own way, politically, economically and intellectually. The University of East Africa which had incorporated the three Campuses of Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Makerere became separate universities. Although the three national universities did not have formal links, it is interesting that they informally knew and took interest in each other's debates and discourses during much of the '70s and eighties. For instance, Dar es Salaam was very aware of the 'agrarian debate' among Kenyans carried in the Review of African Political Economy (originally abbreviated to RAPE and later changed to ROAPE) published in England. Its editors were the former lecturers from the North who had participated in East Africa. To an extent, therefore, ROAPE illustrates the spill over of the East African discourse. Interestingly, there were other spill overs. For example, those who had taught law in Dar played a prominent role in directing the Department of Law at the newly established University of Warwick in England where law was taught from an interdisciplinary approach or 'law in context'. Courses like Law in Development carried on the tradition established at Dar. Just as the Ugandan exiles physically participated in Dar debates and organised from there to liberate their country from the clutches of Iddi Amin, Kenyan militants drew inspiration from Dar. Although numbers began to dwindle, a significant number of Kenyan students managed to find their way to the Hill. But they faced increasing obstacles. For example, the then Attorney General, Mr. Njonjo, who put on airs of an English gentleman, would not accept Dar law graduates unless they had done another year in the Kenya Law School, presumably to debrief them of Dar es Salaam 'school'. Formal links between the three campuses suffered even more. Although we continued to visit each other's Campuses as external examiners, this was not conducive to developing a coherent discourse. But even separately, as we approached the eighties, intellectual and academic climate on the three campuses began to decline as the socio-political context entered the period of SAPs and increasingly aggressive imperial

policies orchestrated through the IFIs. To the academic doldrums of neo-liberalism, we now turn. The Neo-liberal InterventionNeo-liberalism made its entry into our countries through various Structural Adjustment Progarmmes (SAPs) of the early eighties. These programmes were nothing more than the further integration of our economies and resources into the world market circuits (liberalisation of trade); withdraw budget allocations from social services to repay loans (cost-sharing and balancing of the budget); deliver natural resources to multinational capital, but, more important, to take away sovereign decision-making right of the African nations. Cost-sharing and user fees destroyed whatever little "welfare" state established in the wake of independence. Universities came under severe attack. The World Bank suggested that Africa had no need for universities, Universities were 'white elephants' which devoured more than what they produced (Zeleza & Olukoshi eds. 2004, 2). The content of what the Universities taught was not suitable for the market. It would be cheaper to train our kids in Northern universities. Our politicians and university administrators slavishly bought into these. We embarked on the so-called transformations of our universities from sites of generating knowledge to kiosks for selling "education wares". Our courses these days are modularized and semesterized. In effect it simply means cutting up courses into bits and pieces, regardless of whether it makes pedagogical sense, to enable fee-paying students to collect necessary units to pass. It is not good business to fail students; that would draw out university business from the market. What our colleague, Professor Chachage, said in an external examiner's report sums up the tragedy of the commodification and marketisation of higher education. The number of unit courses, as it is clear from many of the papers I went through, is a result of the way semesterization has been undertaken, whereby whole years courses from the previously three-term system have been simply broken into two separate courses to satisfy the requirement of the process. This has been done without any regard to the coherence of the programmes, and how the process of building blocks of knowledge through thorough exploration of themes is affected. The end result is what is important for a student is to simply collect enough units to get a diploma or a degree. In this regard, what has been created is a situation whereby a student

looks for an easy way to obtain a degree and not knowledge. The debates and intellectual discourse which is the life-line of any vibrant university community has virtually disappeared. There is no time as time is a commodity subject to 'opportunity cost'. In a competition between consultancy and panel discussion, the rational economic choice is of course consultancy, particularly when panel discussions and intellectual debates have virtually no value and are actively discouraged by our new-university mandarins. A couple of years, ago one of our lecturers received a letter of reprimand for organizing a panel discussion on the Afghanistan war during "office hours"! (For that can only be the appropriate word these days for teaching time).The public intellectual, whose vocation is to comment, protest, caricaturize, satirize, analyse, and publicize the life around him or her is rapidly becoming history, which history, by the way, has no historian to record. (The historian is busy taking American tourists on a tour of the Bagamoyo slave market.)I am of course exaggerating, but I am exaggerating the truth. Many of us, who may nod our heads in the Senate and laugh at silly jokes cracked by the university mandarins, agonize in corridors and in private. The committed intellectual in us refuses to go away, if not in all, at least in some. And I believe, or want to believe, that those few constitute a critical mass which we need to nurture and revitalize consciously, deliberately, and patiently.Dying craftsmen broke the machines in protest. That cannot be expected of petty bourgeois intellectuals. We cannot perhaps stop the commercialization of our universities, but we can at least think of university co-operatives. We must be able to revive our craft in new conditions. We cannot and need not repeat the discourses of the nationalist decades but we need to reinvent an Eastern African discourse, maybe, this time around, rooted in genuine Pan-Africanism. We have to engage and take issue with the Pan-Africanism of the States, the NEPAD-ist one rooted in globalization ad domination, and pose an alternative Pan-Africanism of the People, rooted in anti-imperialism and liberation. In other words, the nationalism of the twenty-first century is Pan-Africanism rooted in anti-imperialism (for the development of some of these ideas see Shivji 2005) . This is not a proposal. It is only an illustration of reconstructing an Easter African, not only East African, discourse. By Eastern African, I

mean the inclusion of Rwanda, Burundi, DRC besides Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Needless to say no discourse is uncontentious. The essence of any serious discourse is precisely contention of ideas. Pan-Africanism and anti-imperialism are very contentious issues depending on the social stand-point one takes. I am not taking a position. I am only arguing for a discourse in which we can, and should take positions. At this workshop, my proposal is a modest one. We need a forum, a mechanism, which will bring us together at an Eastern African level where we can dialogue. There was the East African Social Science Conference, more or less officially supported. Perhaps we could revive this, but this time under the aegis, and at the initiative of our staff associations. Our staff associations are not simply trade unions. They are also organisations of socially responsible intellectuals. Both the Dar es Salaam Declaration and the Kampala Declaration oblige us to shoulder our social responsibility. Our major social responsibility is to discourse and expose the ills of society, to hold up the mirror, so to speak.

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