Mwalimu's Non-alignment and Pan-Africanism in relation to the tasks of the post-neo-liberal generation*

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Introduction

Mwalimu was a great leader but not an angel. There are his personal qualities like integrity which are inspirational. There are his political practices; some of which need to be assessed and others cannot stand up to criticism. But there are two aspects of his political practice which need to be carefully evaluated and its relevance gauged. This is his, first, foreign policy in relation to super-powers and his association with non-alignment and, second, his fervent, and virtually unconditional support for African unity.

In this short issues paper I want to touch on three elements in Mwalimu's political practice. First, non-alignment in relation to superpowers; secondly, African unity or pan-Africanism and, thirdly, solidarity with the oppressed people and co-operation with the countries of the South. The paper will briefly discuss the background and then raise, somewhat provocatively and tentatively, what this means in identifying the tasks of the post-neo-liberal generation in Africa.

Background

The Bandung conference held in Indonesia in 1955 was a great historical event for the formerly colonised world. 29 Asian and African countries attended, significantly excluding Israel, South Africa, Taiwan and North and South Korea. The Bandung conference eventually led to the formation of the non-aligned movement in 1961.

Many Asian and African countries became independent after the war. They were born as nations in the midst of cold war rivalries between the western and eastern camps respectively led by the then two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. These were not only political and ideological camps. They were also military configurations. The Soviet

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· This paper was presented on the occasion of the 10th Death Anniversary of Mwalimu Nyerere, 30-2nd November, 2009

Union together with its East European allies formed the Warsaw Pact as a counter-point to the military alliance of the Western powers led by the United States, NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The newly independent countries led by such leaders as Nehru of India, Nasser of Egypt, Tito of Yugoslavia and Sukarno of Indonesia were farsighted enough to realise that their independence would mean little if they fell in either of these camps. Later as African countries became independent, several African leaders like Nkrumah and Nyerere joined the non-alignment movement. Originally non-alignment simply meant not aligned with either of the military camps. But as they grappled with their economic problems, non-aligned countries began to explore and try to forge a common stand in economic matters as well. This was not always as successful.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, and the imposition of neo-liberal policies, particularly in Africa, Western imperialism under the US, took the offensive to rehabilitate itself morally and ideologically. The Warsaw pact collapsed but NATO was further strengthened and undertook military adventures in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan with disastrous results in terms of human life.

Neo-liberalism/globalisation was not simply a matter of certain economic policies giving free rein to capitalist vultures and financial speculators, but, much more, an ideological offensive against nationalism and socialism. The second generation of African leaders, or the co-called new breed leaders, as Western media christened their new African allies, fell in line, adopting neo-liberal polices and the ideological package that went with it.

In the case of Tanzania the heydays of neo-liberalism were during the third phase government under President Mkapa. Foreign policy took a radical turn. Instead of liberation, African unity and solidarity with oppressed peoples, which were the cornerstone of Mwalimu's foreign policy, the neo-liberal foreign policy prided itself in what was called 'economic diplomacy'. This was hardly diplomacy and much less economic. In practice, economic diplomacy meant no more than "selling" the country abroad to woo the so-called investors. Worse, in military

and political terms, it meant thoughtlessly toeing the line of the vicious super-power, the US and its handyman, zionist Israel.

Mwalimu used to avoid super-powers like a plague. The third and fourth phase governments embraced the super-power and echoed its multifarious "wars", like the so-called "war on terror." Under a thinly-veiled garb of UN, we sent troops to Lebanon. We were the only African member of the so-called International Contact Group on Somalia formed at the behest of the US. We allied with US policies in Somalia in the process undermining the reconciliation efforts of the regional African grouping IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development: members states – Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda]. Had it not been for the opposition of civil groups, we might have even sent troops to Somalia.

For a few million dollars given apparently for HIV/AIDS, we diverted counter-part funds from other priorities – like malaria – to HIV when malaria kills more people. And for a few million mosquito nets, we feted war-mongers of the world. It was first time ever that a leader of a super-power set his foot on our soil. Mr Bush came with a few hundred million dollars, a couple of million mosquito nets and a military project, US Africa command, or AFRICOM. AFRICOM has been trying hard at getting legitimacy so that it can establish a base somewhere in Africa. A large majority of African countries have rejected it. Strangely we have kept quiet. Worse, we have been warming up to the advances of the super-power.

Recently it was reported that troops from East African countries including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi would be involved in joint military exercises with the US in the north of Uganda. These exercises, involving over 1000 troops, are coordinated by AFRICOM. It does not need much thought to see how the US is increasingly militarising the continent while East African politicians gullibly submit to what could turn out to be the greatest threat to peace and stability in Africa. Yet, this is not the time to align with the most militarist power in world history.

If we had some understanding of the shifting world hegemonies, we would refurbish Mwalimu's non-alignment and use it as our polar star in our international relations. Non-

alignment is more relevant today than it was ever before. World hegemonies are shifting. Analysts are talking about the 21st century as Pacific as opposed to the Atlanticist 20th century. US hegemony is declining, albeit it remains the strongest military power. Its traditional backyard, Latin America, is fast slipping through US fingers. Rising China and India sit at the G20 table while the East Asian tigers, although somewhat tamed after the 1997 financial disaster, may be recouping. It is only Africa, which, in the eyes of US-led Western imperialism, remains virgin land to be raped at ease.

The new forms of exploitation and capital accumulation by world capitalism centres on unrestrained plunder of over- and underground natural resources, including minerals, oil, land, forests, bio-resources and even water and clean environment. Africa is poised to become one of the major suppliers of oil to the US as well as providing land mass for agro-fuels. In the impending rivalries between the old powers in the West and the rising powers in Asia, the 'battle-zone' is likely to shift from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

US military bases in Djibouti and the island of Deo Garcia, deployment of the massive navy ostensibly to defeat a few hundred Somali pirates, militarisation of Ethiopia, the Africom itself, and the wooing of Tanzania are all part of this newly developing geo-political strategy. To be drawn into this power-game would indeed be disastrous for any African country, as history of imperialism teaches us.

On the other hand, new rivalries and the development of multi-polar worlds, gives Africa an opportunity and some space to carve out its own niche provided it has its own agenda. How can we in Africa have an agenda of our own, for our people and against imperialist domination unless we have a foreign policy akin to non-alignment?

Formally, Africa is not colonised but national liberation, in the sense of being masters of our destiny, has been aborted. If neo-liberalism has proved anything, it is that our territorial independence was a shell without substance. Our very sovereignty was assaulted by neo-liberals, as foreign powers through their consultants made policies for us and sat in the decision-making processes of all strategic ministries from planning, through finance to central

banks. A new realisation is dawning upon many conscious Africans – the need for African unity, for new pan-Africanism.

Developments in Latin America and the Middle-East should make us re-think our impending opening up to states like Israel and reactionary Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia at the expense of liberation movements like that of Palestine or left-leaning nationalist regimes like those of Bolivia, Venezuela and Iran. The recent conference of Africans and Asians in Caracas may be the beginning of a second Bandung. It is beyond comprehension that we sent a low profile representation to that historic meeting while our media fell over each other over describing the attention that Mr. Obama was showering on our president.

The least that can be said, therefore, is that the post-neo-liberal world is likely to be very different, not only in economic, but also in geo-political terms. In setting the tasks of the current generation, we need, therefore, to revisit the three pillars of Mwalimu's non-alignment – (1) national liberation through (2) pan-Africanist unity (3) in solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Latin America and Asia, in particular the Middle East.

The tasks of the post-neo-liberal generation

National liberation: For Mwalimu and Nkrumah during their time national liberation essentially meant independence. It was strictly anti-colonial. It was in fact Nkrumah who famously declared that Ghana's independence was incomplete until the whole of Africa had attained its independence. This is what led to the setting up of the Liberation Committee under the OAU which was based in Dar es Salaam. Mwalimu never wavered in his support for liberation movements.

But both Nkrumah and Nyerere saw even during their time that the independence of individual African countries could not stand against outside imperial powers without Africa standing together. African unity was therefore another great passion for them. They differed on the means to attain a united Africa. Elsewhere I have discussed that debate. Suffice to mention here that I believe the root of their difference lay in their understanding of the *political economy of imperialism*. No doubt their personal intellectual upbringing did play a role as Mwalimu himself was to admit in an interview with Ikaweba Bunting. How should we

understand national liberation today after the experience of 50 years of independence from colonialism? I would like to submit that national liberation continues to be on the historical agenda but it has to be developed in two directions on the basis of two fundamental premises. The first premise is that liberation in 'national liberation' still means liberation from imperialism, whatever new forms imperialism may have taken over the last half a century. In this regard, I suggest, that the great insight of Amilcar Cabral forms a good point of departure. Cabral said that 'so long as imperialism is in existence, an independent African state must be a liberation movement in power, or it will not be independent.' This succinctly sums up three important elements of national liberation: (a) that the national liberation project is not complete on attainment of independence, that is, on the attainment of state sovereignty; (b) that 'the state must be a liberation movement in power' means that it is a different type of state that is being envisaged/conceptualised and (c) imperialism remains the enemy of liberation.

Cabral did not live to see his profound point being actually borne out in practice. I will return to this point in a moment.

The second premise I suggest is that we have to reconceptualise the meaning of 'nation' in national liberation. The 'nation' in national liberation is not the territorial nation but the African nation, in the meaning of the pan-African nation. This point was made again and again both by Nyerere and Nkrumah although not in a very explicit manner nor in terms of reconceptualising the very concept of 'nation'. Earlier debates on the concept of nation remained imprisoned in the European history of conflating nation with state. So, for example, even where Mwalimu and other African leaders realised that the so-called African countries did not constitute a nation, they sought to address this issue through various theories of nation-building. Mwalimu in fact argued that the task of the independent African state was two-fold – (i) to build a nation and (ii) to spearhead economic development.

We needed the rude shock of neo-liberalism to demonstrate in a dramatic fashion the limits of *territorial nationalism*. Neo-liberalism was a direct attack on the national project and to an extent it successfully defeated the national project conceived in the narrow territorial sense. One thing that neo-liberalism brought home is that even the limited form of 'national'

independence in the sense of state sovereignty was flawed as the so-called independent African states had to carry out obediently the policy prescriptions of imperial institutions and powers.

In short, I am saying that the national liberation project is on the historical agenda, and, secondly, I am calling for the reconceptualisation of the nation to mean and convey the idea of the pan-African nation. Thus the task of national liberation is directly connected with the task of pan-African unity.

Pan-African unity: The first generation of African nationalists were pan-Africanists. African nationalism in the sense of territorial nationalism and the fight for independence was born of pan-Africanism and not the other way round. I have discussed this point in my other writings and need not belabour it. Mwalimu was undoubtedly a leading and a very articulate pan-Africanist. In the early 1960s, he was again one of the few who were also acutely aware of the tension between building (territorial) nationalism and the ideal of pan-Africanism. As a politician at the head of an African state, he had to consolidate the state in one country. Although he continued to be passionate about liberation and pursued that task single-mindedly, not the same can be said of the pan-African front.

After relinquishing power in Tanzania, he returned to the question of African unity. He even reappraised the debate between himself and Nkrumah and came very close to admitting that Nkrumah was right in his advocacy of African union government 'now'.[*] The experience of 50 years independence generally, and, in particular the last two or so decades of neo-liberal onslaught, proves beyond doubt not only the desirability but the necessity of pan-African unity. The question that the present generation faces is both one of the road to pan-Africanism – that is whether through regional unities or continental unity – and the social agency for bringing it about. These are issues which have no ready answers. They need to be debated and we need to examine the political histories and practices of African states over the last half a century in the context of changing world hegemonies. However, I would like to indicate some pointers and directions to provoke a debate.

[*] See his speech on the occasion of Ghana's 40th independence celebrations. Ghanaians present on that occasion confirmed to me recently that Nyerere did expressly admit that he was wrong in his position on African union government in his debate with Nkrumah.

First, African societies are much more differentiated then they were at the time of independence. This means that we have to look at the agency in a much more differentiated way. Can the African state, with its compradorial ruling classes, really be the agency to lead the process of pan-African unity? I have my doubts. If left to the state, I submit, at best we will get NEPADs, still under imperialist hegemony, or regional economic integration, once again at the service of dominant imperial interests, or, experiments at some political unities (Senegambia, Tanganyika-Zanzibar etc.) whose durability is dubious.

Second, this is not to say, therefore, that the African state can or should be dismissed or ignored. It is part of the unity equation but we must be able to assess its role. It is significant, for example, that the formal forms of African unity have held and some steps have been taken even to move to forms of political union, like the African union and the pan-African parliament. This is in spite of, rather than because of, the position of African compradorial classes. The popular sentiment for African unity is too strong to be ignored by African regimes. And the necessity of some African co-operation to have a voice at all at international level imposes itself in the world of vicious hegemonies.

Third, I suggest that objectively the historical agency for a pan-African revolution is the working people of Africa. I am using the term 'working people' in Rodney's sense. Working people is a configuration of social class which finds its roots in the political economy of accumulation by dispossession based on old and new forms of plunder, expropriation and financial circuits. (I cannot go into details.) The working people are still the agency-in-itself; for it to become agency-for-itself, we need an insurrection of pan-African political ideas in all its dimensions and comprehensiveness. In other words, we have to make pan-Africanism a category of intellectual thought, on the one hand, and work towards creating a pan-African civil society, as a political arena outside the state but in engagement with it, on the other.

Fourth, therefore, the question is where to begin? I want to suggest that the place to begin is in the realm of ideas, at the site of the generation of ideas – schools and universities – and dissemination of ideas – media.

That brings me to Mwalimu's third element - solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. At the time of Mwalimu, non-aligned or developing or third world countries, were considered the "natural" ally of Africa in the context of the bi-polar world. The configuration of the non-aligned or third world has undoubtedly changed. The third world is much more differentiated. Some of them have risen to the position of contest for hegemonies with big powers, albeit, a low-intensity contest. The world seems to be moving in the direction of a multi-polar world; if so, Africa needs to define its solidarity with the oppressed people against both established and developing imperial hegemonies. Initiatives in Latin America to create alternative political alliances and even economic co-operation – like ALBA, Banco del Sur or alternative financial and currency arrangements of the South to by-pass the World Bank and IMF or recent Africa-South America Summit (ASA) – are extremely important. Africa should be taking this more seriously then joint military exercises with the US or EPA or AGOA. We thus have to give a new meaning to Mwalimu's very clear stand on 'third world solidarity'.

I have only sketched how and what direction we can develop the ideas, positions and political practices of Mwalimu, and his generation, to lead the way for the present generation of African radicals from the standpoint of pan-Africanism and the working people.

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