The Dawn of Pan-Africanism

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Celebrating Pambazooka's 400th issue is celebrating pan-africanism. Through its half a million readership and over a thousand contributors, from all over Afrika, Pambazooka has truly set ablaze an intellectual pan-African trail. 'Insurrection of ideas precedes insurrection of arms' some militant is quoted to have said. Pambazooka is certainly not a call to (physical) arms; but it is definitely a call to intellectual/ideological arms. We need it if the Pan-African vision – not a dream – is to survive and continue to guide our thoughts and actions as Africans. As Souleymane Bachir Diagne says, we should make pan-africanism a category of intellectual thought.

I have asserted many times in the pages of Pambazooka and elsewhere that 'new pan-africanism', rooted in social-(popular) democracy, is African nationalism of the era of the so-called globalized phase of imperialism. African nationalism was born of pan-africanism, not the other way round. Its genesis was rooted in democracy – self-determination and anti-imperialism. Self-determination and anti-imperialism are two sides of the same coin; none of which could be successfully achieved on the level of colonially carved territories. The first generation of African nationalists were deeply conscious of the dangers of territorial nationalisms based on geographical spaces designed as countries by colonialists. Nyerere derogatively characterised African countries as *vinchi* or statelets! African nationalism outside pan-africanism is tribalism on the international level, he boldly asserted in the early '60s. Both Nyerere and Nkrumah believed that without a continental unity, individual African countries would become pawns on the imperialist chessboard or degenerate into narrow cultural/racial/ethnic nationalisms, or both. In this, unfortunately, they were prophetic as half a century of African independence has amply demonstrated.

On the morrow of receiving the insignia of sovereign states, a few of the "founding fathers' genuinely set out to *build* nations within the colonially defined borders, which all of them, as heads of states, unanimously agreed were sacred, although unviable. Others set to build their power-bases on the colonially invented or re-invented ethnic "identities". Still others did not survive long enough to do either, or something else, because they were overthrown (Nkrumah) or assassinated (Lumumba) by imperialist machinations. Whatever the case, they all failed to build viable, legitimate states and nations.

Kenyatta's Kenya and Nyerere's Tanganyika are illustrative examples. Anchored in ethnic power-bases, which also and obviously determined resource allocations, the darling of Western imperialism in this part of the world exploded following the 2008 general elections. The so-called government of "national unity" which is anything, but 'national', was cobbled together by American pressure while pretending that it was a miracle performed by the chairman of African Union, Jakaya Kikwete, the President of Tanzania. Tanganyika has not so far exploded, thanks to the legacy of Nyerere's far-sighted policies, preaching and personal integrity helped by relatively undeveloped class divisions. That is proving to be fragile, thanks to extreme social and economic polarisation wrought by Mkapa's neo-liberal polices, taken over by Kikwete, over the last 15 or so years. The 2000, but much more the 2005, elections were marked by racial and religious animosity and ethnic based alliances and campaigning. Under the veneer of peace, unity, and stability, Tanzanian political and even intellectual elites

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are covertly and overtly involved in religion- ethnic-based politicking. This came out openly in the last session of the parliament where honourable members were unashamedly polarised along religious lines on the issues of the possible membership of OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) and the proposal to introduce Kadhi's courts for the Muslim community.

Even more problematic is the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar which this year celebrated its 44th anniversary. While the Cold War was the context and Western pressure to meet what they considered a communist threat undoubtedly played a role, Nyerere was driven, at least partly, by his pan-african convictions. He would have preferred Zanzibar to be part of a greater East African federation but his colleagues in Kenya and Uganda were too enamoured with new power and state positions to relinquish it in the interest of a larger association. The failure to form the EA federation bore out Nyerere's fears. He had argued repeatedly that once African countries went into independence alone, it would be too difficult to dislodge vested interests thus created.

> Once you multiply national anthems, national flags and national passports, seats at the United Nations, and individuals entitled to 21 guns salute, not to speak of a host of ministers, Prime Ministers, and envoys, you would have a whole army of powerful people with vested interests in keeping Africa balkanised.[2]

While the political union of East Africa is still marking time forty years later, even the economic integration has been in the doldrums. In fact, the East African Community collapsed in the late 1970s and was not revived until only ten years ago. Ironically, therefore, the union with Zanzibar, whose future is being seriously threatened, and the fragility of EA economic integration, are proving Nyerere's position in his debate with Nkrumah questionable. It will be recalled that Nkrumah stood for immediate political union of African states while Nyerere argued in favour of a gradualist approach against Nkrumah's immediate political unification. Nkrumah dubbed Nyerere's efforts at EA federation 'balkanisaiton on a larger scale' while 'Regional economic groupings,' he said, 'retard rather than promote the unification process.'

While logic was on Nyerere's side, history has vindicated Nkrumah. All experiments at regional political unions did not survive. Senegambia, formed in 1982, was dissolved in 1989 because the Gambia refused closer union with Senegal. Mali federation formed much earlier collapsed within two years. The only union which did survive long was the unity of former British Somaliland and the Italian Somalia which was formed in 1960 voluntarily by the people of British Somaliland voting in a referendum to join the former Italian Somalia to form Somali Republic. With the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and the whole country breaking up into warlords' fiefdoms, Somaliland withdrew to form the Republic of Somaliland, which to this date remains unrecognised. That makes the Tanganyika-Zanzibar the longest surviving union between two African countries but it remains shaky. The morale is that regional unities, of whatever kind, particularly political, have failed to make it.

Nkrumah's vision of continental political unity thus remains a beacon of hope. More recently, Mummar Gaddafi has tried to wear Nkrumah's mantle. But Gaddafi is no Nkrumah. The call

[2] Quotes are from and arguments are fleshed out in greater detail in my *Pan-Africanism or Imperialism?* 2nd Bill Dudley Memorial Lecture, Nsuka, Nigeria, 2005 (Nigerian Political Science Association) and *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism? Lessons from Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union* (Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam 2008).

for political unification from Gaddafi has found little support. The classical debate between Nyerere and Nkrumah has resurrected but it is a pale shadow of the former. There is no Nyerere to argue for gradualism with any legitimacy while Gaddafi is a wrong man to argue a right cause. His maverick tactics and twisting of arms has only resulted in rekindling the Arab-African cultural divide. That brings me to the cultural argument often deployed even by otherwise progressive intellectuals against continental unity.

Pan-Africanism was rooted in anti-imperialist politics. It was a political and not an economic or a cultural/racial project. At a public rally called by PAFMECA (Pan-African Movement of Eastern and Central Africa) in Zanzibar in April 1959, Nyerere said that he did not believe that an African was defined by the colour of his skin. An African, he asserted, is any one who has made Africa his home and is struggling for the rights of his country. This is a political definition of an African, not racial or cultural. Both Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral saw culture as a form and expression of national struggle rather than ossified custom or tradition. As Archie Mafeje argues it is one thing to invoke culture – even invent it –as a counterpoint to the assertion and domination by European imperialist culture; it is quite another to make culture a reference point of (political) division.

In conclusion, I return to the point that Pan-Africanism was a political project for the first generation of African nationalists and it still is. Africa is at crossroads. We either rise to the progressive, anti-imperialist Pan-Africanism as a continental political project of national liberation and social emancipation, or descend into narrow chauvinist nationalisms – racial, cultural, or ethnic. I believe we are at the dawn of Pan-Africanism. We have to re-appropriate the Pan-Africanist vision, make it a category of intellectual thought and a guiding post of political struggles.