THE RISE, THE FALL, AND THE INSURRECTION OF NATIONALISM IN AFRICA

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The Argument

We have become so used to the rhetoric of the “global village” that talking about African nationalism sounds anachronistic and outdated. But that is exactly what I wish to address. In this paper, I will explore the “National Question” in Africa and its erstwhile expression, nationalism, in three sections. First, I will discuss the rise of post-Second World War nationalism and its true essence, if you like. Then, I will address the debunking of nationalism in the post-cold war period under the apparent hegemony of neo-liberalism and so-called globalisation. Finally, still holding high the Gramscian adage, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,” I anticipate the insurrection of a second nationalism.

Post-War Nationalism

The Essence of Nationalism

Introducing his book Freedom and After, Tom Mboya remembers what he calls the “proudest day of my life.” That was December 6, 1958, the opening day of the All Africa Peoples Conference in Accra, Ghana. Earlier in the same year, there had been a conference of independent African states, of which only eight existed at the time. “These two conferences,” says Mboya, “marked the rediscovery of Africa by Africans.”

This rediscovery of Africa by Africans was ‘in complete contrast to the discovery of Africa by Europeans in the nineteenth century.’ The Conference of Independent African States had marked the birth of the African personality, and the delegates had all agreed on the need for Africa to rise and be heard at all the councils of the world affairs.¹

The conference was attended by some five hundred delegates from political parties, trade unions, and organisations involved in the great awakening that was African nationalism. Patrice Lumumba and Roberto Holden were there, so was Dr. Kamuzu Banda. The nationalist upsurge in the post-war period in Africa was a great moment for a people that had been denied humanity by centuries of slavery and colonialism. Ideologies centered on

Kwame Nkrumah’s “African Personality” or Leopold Senghor’s “Negritude” or Kenneth Kaunda’s “Humanism” or even Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s Ujamaa expressed one central theme, nationalism.

The quintessence of nationalism was, and is, anti-imperialism. It was a demand and struggle against, rather than for, something. It was an expression of a struggle against denial – denial of humanity, denial of respect and dignity, denial of the Africanness of the African. It was the struggle for the “re-Africanisation of minds” or to “rebecome Africans,” as Amilcar Cabral put it.2 Archie Mafeje sums up the period well:

> It was the historical experience of racial humiliation, economic exploitation, political oppression, and cultural domination under European and American slavery, colonialism, and imperialism that gave rise to theories of ‘African personality’ and ‘Negritude.’ At the centre of these theories was the question of the liberation of the Black man – his identity or the meaning of ‘being-Black-in-the-world.’ It was a philosophical or moral justification for action, for a rebellion which gave rise to African nationalism and to independence. The latter was the greatest political achievement by Africans. It was an unprecedented collective fulfillment.3

Early African nationalism should not be confused with the traditional discourse on the expression and development of nations in the womb of capitalism in nineteenth century Europe. Rather, it was an expression of a people that was an antidote to White supremacist rule. In a sense, it is correct to say that nationalism was the process, a process of struggle, in the formation of nations. In that sense, perhaps, nationalism preceded nations. Militant nationalists grasped this to some extent although they did not express it as consistently nor did they wholly appreciate the defining characteristic of nationalism, that is, anti-imperialism. In explaining the objectives of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) to the UN Trusteeship Council in 1955, Nyerere said:

> Another objective of the Union is to build up a national consciousness among the African peoples in Tanganyika. It has been said – and this is quite right – that Tanganyika is tribal, and we realise that we need to break up this tribal consciousness among the people and to build up a national consciousness. That is one of our main objectives towards self-government.4

This formulation is no doubt problematic. It lends itself to the reactionary side of bourgeois nationalism, or what later came to be called “nation-building theories.”5 Let us

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2 Amilcar Cabral Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings (London: Heinemann, 1980), xxii, xxv.
5 Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba “Discourse on the National Question” State and Constitutionalism: An African
look at another formulation; this time, from a leading member of a national liberation
movement and an avowed Marxist – Marcelino dos Santos, then a leading member of
FRELIMO. In an interview with Joe Slovo of the South African Communist Party, Dos
Santos analyses the tension between tribe and nation:

The main conditions for [the] successful rejection [of
tribalism] are present. On the general point of whether we
have already moulded a nation in the true sense of the word,
I want to say that a nation is based on concrete realities.
And the most important reality in the present stage in
Mocambique is the fight against Portuguese colonialism...It
is our common fight against our common oppressor, which
plays an outstanding role in creating a national bond
between all the diverse groups and cultures...Of course, a
nation is a product of history and its formation goes through
different phases. In this sense, the work for the final
achievement of nationhood will continue even after
independence, although the fundamental elements of
nationhood are already in existence and in the process of
being further developed in Mocambique.6

Dos Santos’ conception of nation formation does not differ fundamentally from Nyerere’s
presentation of “nation-building,” although their points of departure appear different. Dos
Santos, like Slovo, takes as his starting point the Marxist theory of nation (this,
presumably, is “the true sense of the word”), which, in its Stalinist version, emphasises
the European conception of a nation – common territory, language, culture, and economy.
If these ingredients are not present, or not present to a sufficient degree, you have a tribe
at worst or a nation in the process of being formed at best. Implied in the European
conception of nation also is the idea of voluntarism, that is, forming or building a nation
from the top. Perhaps the point to underline in Dos Santos’ exposition is that the anti-
colonial struggle is an important ingredient of nationalism. The problem with Dos
Santos- and Nyerere-type formulations is that the nationalist petty bourgeoisie, when it
rose to power, wavered on anti-imperialism and ended up with top-down statist notions of
“nation-building.”7

I find Amilcar Cabral’s propositions more fruitful. They contain a germ of great potential
in understanding the historicity and specificity of the National Question in Africa. Cabral
suggests that post-war African nationalism was a struggle not only to reclaim history but
also to assert the right of the African people to make history: “The foundation of national
liberation lies in the inalienable right of every people to have their own history.”7 Cabral
also makes the point 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.”8 These are
profound insights. First, nationalism is constituted by the struggle of the people against

6 Quoted in Joe Slovo “The Working Class and Nation-Building” The National Question in South Africa
7 Cabral, 143.
8 Ibid., 116.
imperialism, thus anti-imperialism defines African nationalism. Second, nationalism, as an expression of struggle, continues so long as imperialism exists. Third, the National Question in Africa, whose expression is nationalism, remains unresolved as long as there is imperialist domination.

Archie Mafeje builds on these insights, observing that “all the struggles in Africa and most of the Third World centre on the National Question.” He perceives nationalism as the common denominator underlying the different interpretations and connotations of the National Question. Furthermore, he says, nationalism is always a reaction against something. In African history, nationalism has been a reaction to imperialist domination. As proto-nationalism, the reaction was against the colonial phase of imperialism, or political domination by aliens. Since independence, meta-nationalism has been coping with the changing modalities of imperialist domination.

The dominant discourse on the National Question has run along different lines, however. In both the political right and left, the central debate has been over whether Africa has nations and nationalities or tribes and ethnic groups. In the Eurocentric worldview, nations represent a higher level in the evolution of social and political formations than tribes. Fed on Stalin’s rather schematic formula, and therefore unable to find nations within the territorial units called African countries, even radical Marxists, like Slovo, have found it difficult to theorise adequately about the National Question. In the hands of rightwing pundits, it has been worse. The so-called lack of nations has been used to debunk and delegitimise African nationalist movements and their achievements. With the current hegemony of neo-liberalism and the imperialist comeback, the spokespersons of imperialism have been quick to condemn nationalism as nothing more than an expression of ethnicity and tribalism. Note this typical sample from an editorial in *US News and World Report*:

In the Third World, there had been grand ideas of new states and social contracts among the communities, post-colonial dreams of what men and women could do on their own. There were exalted notions of Indian nationalism, Pan-Arabism, and the like. Ethnicity hid, draped in the colours of modern nationalism, hoping to keep the ancestors – and the troubles – at bay. But the delusions would not last. What was India? The India of its secular founders – or the ‘Hindu Raj’ of the militant fundamentalists? What exactly did the compact communities of Iraq – the Kurds, the Sunnis, and the Shia – have in common? The masks have fallen, the tribes have stepped to the fore.

This type of denigration strikes at the heart of nationalism, that is, at anti-imperialism. Be that as it may, let us look more closely at the various aspects and expressions of nationalism.

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9 Mafeje, 90.
10 See the debates between the Ethiopian and the South African left in *The National Question in South Africa*.
Three Aspects of African Nationalism

Three elements characterised proto-nationalism and, with various emphases, accents, and formulations, occur in all African nationalist thought and consciousness: Pan-Africanism, Independence or Freedom, and (Racial) Equality. Each is based in opposition – in this case, opposition to imperial domination. This opposition, this basic struggle, is what constitutes nationalism. The object of the struggle differs across historical periods, as Mafeje says, but the struggle is the common principle. The gravamen of the National Question, therefore, is not so much a nation in search of, or struggling for, identity, dignity, and independence, but rather a people imbued with a common experience of domination and exploitation asserting their “claim-in-struggle.”

The three elements of nationalism, which may be summed up as Unity, Independence, and Equality, are interrelated and inseparable. Together, they constitute and express African nationalism. In the hands of Kwame Nkrumah, who studied in the U.S. and was heavily influenced by such African-American theory giants as George Padmore and C.L.R. James, Pan-Africanism expressed the identity or the Africanness of the peoples both on the continent and in the Diaspora. To someone like Nyerere, as he himself later admitted, Pan-Africanism essentially meant African unity. Whatever the scope, African nationalism was – and, I might add, is – incomplete without Pan-Africanism. Nyerere presciently expressed this idea as early as 1963, when he said, “African nationalism is meaningless, is anachronistic, and is dangerous if it is not at the same time Pan-Africanism.”

In the immediate post-independence period, Pan-Africanism resolved itself into two elements: African Unity, as expressed in the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the support of the liberation movements in the remaining colonies, including South Africa. In spite of various problems, Nyerere points out, “we have been reasonably successful in achieving the [end of colonialism], but as far as uniting Africa is concerned, we have not succeeded.”

The nationalism expressed as Freedom or Independence was primarily concerned with anti-colonialism, or the struggle against alien domination. This goal was the best achieved in the independence of African countries. But, Freedom or Independence also had another, deeper significance – the freedom or the right to make one’s own decisions, the right to self-determination. The external aspect of the right of self-determination is expressed in the sovereignty of the state. While independence meant that the African state was formally sovereign in international law, in practice, its independence and sovereignty were heavily circumscribed. The Cold War created even more limitations for African sovereignty. Nationalist leaders who took their independence seriously became the potential target of imperial wrath. Patrice Lumumba was assassinated. Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown. Thomas Sankara was killed. Nyerere survived by making tactical

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12 See Nyerere’s interview with Ikaweba Bunting in the Internationalist (December 1988).
compromises and nipping local opposition in the bud. When he was asked to name his greatest achievement ten years after the Arusha Declaration, he said, perhaps with a deep sigh of relief, “The fact that we have survived.”

The third aspect of nationalism, Equality, has several interrelated levels. It demands the equal treatment of states, big or small, weak or strong, at the international level in world councils. This goal, as every one knows, is spurious – some states are more equal than others. Yet, in solidarity with other Third World countries, militant African nationalists did manage to carve out a respectable place for themselves and their people in the discourse on the inequalities of the imperial world market and those fostered by international financial institutions. Non-alignment, UNCTAD conferences, and several UN conventions and resolutions in their favour were achievements, albeit small ones.

Another element of Equality is internal. Equality and equal rights are the cornerstone of the bourgeois legal system and liberal democracy. In many independent African states, barring military dictatorships and settler colonies, formal equality was installed as colonial racial privileges were dismantled. But that was Equality’s limit. For various reasons, even civilian African states became authoritarian, with leaders adopting rightless law and one-party states.

Bourgeois equality, as everyone knows, has severe limitations. It is always in tension with equity and social justice, which may require the negation of formal equality. In the African condition, the lack of equity underlying enormous economic inequality made nonsense of any formal equality. And the socio-economic conditions that cause inequality and inequity are in no small measure connected with imperial domination in its neo-colonial phase.

The petty bourgeoisie in power quickly differentiates socially. Sections of it become compradorised. Other sections are compromised. Thus it fails to address the National Question as a whole because, to use Cabral’s phrase once again, it is not “a liberation movement in power.” The petty bourgeoisie is compradorised, through and through. The damning judgment of the “national bourgeoisie” came from none other than that great paragon of African nationalism, Frantz Fanon.

The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary. Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism...In the colonial countries, the spirit of indulgence is dominant at the core of the bourgeoisie; and this is because the national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the western bourgeoisie, from whom it has learnt its lessons. It follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence

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16 Issa Shivji “State and Constitutionalism: A New Democratic Perspective” in *State and Constitutionalism*, 27-56.
without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention, stages which are an acquisition of that Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances. In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth.17

So the National Question remains unresolved. Nation-building turns into state-building. Nation is substituted by party and party by leader, the father of the nation. As Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba puts it, “The commonality which is viewed as the foundation of ‘national consciousness’ is reduced to its phenomenal expressions: cultural unity, territorial unity, linguistic unity, ‘one classless community,’ ‘one people, one party, one leader, father figure, father of the nation,’ etc.”18

If the National Question was distorted, truncated, and caricatured during the period of meta-nationalism, it completely disappears and is delegitimised in the current globalisation phase of imperialism. The National Question is reduced to a race question or ethnic question or cultural question. In Tanzania, the journalistic discourse has transformed from *utaifa* (nationalism) or *uzalendo* (patriotism) to *uzawa* (indigenity)! Meanwhile, the leader harangues us to change, to move with the times, to embrace globalisation, to be members of the global village, while real villages are privatised and villagers marginalised, and the global pillage goes on unabashed. The African comprador bourgeoisie, as always, is being led by the nose by the imperial bourgeoisie. In the next section, I will discuss how nationalism – in both its proto and meta forms – is being annihilated by the assault of imperialism in the garb of globalisation.

**The Neo-Liberal Assault on Nationalism**

Addressing the parliamentary foreign affairs committee of my country, U.S. ambassador Robert Royall recently commended Tanzania for the change in its foreign policy from one based on principles of “African Freedom and African Unity”19 to one based on “economic diplomacy.”

The liberation diplomacy of the past, when alliances with socialist nations were paramount and so-called Third World Solidarity dominated foreign policy, must give way to a more realistic approach to dealing with your true friends – those who are working to lift you into the twenty-first century, where poverty is not acceptable and disease must

17 Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1963), 122-123.
19 Nyerere, 2.
As a representative of the super-imperial power, the ambassador is, in no uncertain terms, debunking the nationalist planks of the independence era. He assumes that the imperial power has the right to determine friends and enemies for African countries. Through the so-called anti-terrorism laws thrust upon African countries by the U.S. government, it is the U.S. and its cohorts—the so-called international community—that determine who is a terrorist and what is a terrorist organisation.\(^{21}\) This is a far cry from the nationalism of leaders like Nyerere, who could say that we will not allow our friends to choose enemies for us.

As the Berlin Wall fell and imperialism began to take the offensive, Douglas Hurd, then the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, sighed with relief in saying that “we are putting behind us a period of history when the West was unable to express a legitimate interest in the developing world without being accused of ‘neo-colonialism.’”\(^{22}\) One of the most articulate and fervent nationalists who opposed neo-colonialism was, of course, Kwame Nkrumah. His book, \textit{Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism},\(^{23}\) reverberated throughout the continent. The imperial powers never forgave his influence. As is known, a year after the publication of his book, Nkrumah was overthrown in a CIA-organised coup.

The political assault on nationalism in what Frank Furedi calls the “moral rehabilitation of imperialism” is accompanied and rationalised by the “organic” intellectuals and paid journalists of imperial powers. The basic claim is that Third World nationalism, particularly African nationalism, was spurious, and the pundits point to its collapse as proof. They say that an upsurge of “ethnic nationalism” and primordial tribal wars tore African nations apart and resulted in failed states, collapsed states, or, in more sophisticated language, the crisis of the nation-state. As astute and sympathetic an observer of Africa as Basil Davidson sees the nation-state as the “Black Man’s Burden.”\(^{24}\) So, because the nation-state has become a curse, presumably the African should return to the blessing of his (it certainly is not “her”) idyllic past.

Central to the early African nationalist project, as we have seen, was the right of the people to self-determination—the assertion of the people’s collective right to assert their identity and determine their own destiny. Opposed to the paradigm of the self-determination of the collective are the various forms of postmodernism premised on the self-determination of the individual. The universal individual stands in opposition to the African individual, never mind that in reality the universal individual is in fact the Western individual. Africanity and Africanness are demeaned, if not demonised, as the so-called “victimhood” mentality of the African. The parochial and self-fulfilling discourse of the African intellectual, based in myth rather than in reality, is roundly condemned. The ultimate vision of this free-floating, self-determining individual is


\(^{21}\) See the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002) of Tanzania.

\(^{22}\) Quoted in Furedi, 99.


Achille Mbembe’s frivolous narrative, in which, “in the future, everyone can imagine and choose what makes him or her an African.” But I need say no more on this apparently self-denying and yet utterly narcissistic vituperation. Mafeje has given the post-modern formulation a simple but fitting reply: “The ‘free-floating signifier’ is an illusion in a double sense. First, nobody can think and act outside historically determined circumstances and still hope to be a social signifier of any kind. [Secondly,] it is the historical juncture which defines us socially and intellectually.” For Mafeje, as for a number of others, the historical juncture remains that of the unresolved National Question.

But I am running ahead of my story. Let me return to the more mainstream and prevalent discourse of the universal being in the universal condition of the neo-liberal’s globalisation. In the flattened imagery of the global village, we have the good forces of globalisation poised to rescue the African villager from the mismanagement and bad governance of the corrupt, patrimonial state ruled by avaricious politicians who know no politics except those of the belly. The state, the nation, the people, and their historical national and contemporary social struggles are dismissed from the paradigm or rhetorically condemned as misguided projects. Sophisticated discourses are constructed to vindicate the debunking of the nationalist project and its social and political bases.

In a series of paradigmatic shifts, the meta-narrative, political discourse, and social science analysis of the National Question are systematically undermined. Civil society is opposed to the state, and both are presented as institutional formations rather than an ensemble of social and power relations. The state is condemned, civil society is acclaimed. National liberation movements and class-based organisations like trade unions and peasant associations are considered outdated, while NGOs, run by free-floating “activists,” are privileged. The human rights discourse is presented as a neutral, universal, apolitical, and ahistorical “revelation,” while a discourse on the oppression of peoples and nations is ridiculed as rhetorical and unworthy of science.

The so-called “new breed” leaders, from Meles Zedawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea through Museveni, Mbeki, and Mkapa, are a caricatured local representation of the neo-liberal hegemony. The “African Renaissance” is worse than a pale copy of Nkrumah’s “African Personality” and utterly uninspiring. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) comes nowhere close to the Lagos Plan of Action. It uses the same failed rhetoric of further integration into the so-called globalised world and derives its legitimacy from IFIs rather than from the African people. NEPAD has attracted opposition from “civil society” organisations whose main thrust is to highlight anti-globalisation. There is very little nationalist content to NEPAD.

Ironically, the equality of all countries and states in the OAU and its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs and sentiments of Pan-Africanism maintained a relative

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peace among them. Since the rise of new breed globalised leaders, however, we have had African wars and invasions, as in the Congo, between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and in West Africa. Today, under the guise of UN-U.S. peacekeeping, we are witnessing the rise of regional “superpowers” sponsored, armed, and financed by imperialist powers. The Pan-African ideal does not even get lip service from these proponents of the “African Renaissance.”

In sum, neo-liberal discourse and political rhetoric has served to debunk African nationalism on the one hand and to rehabilitate imperialism on the other. The majority of African intellectuals have pretty well accommodated mainstream thought. This includes former militant nationalists and radical socialist intellectuals. The metamorphosis of the African intellectual from a revolutionary to an activist, from a critical political economist to a postmodernist, from a social analyst to a constitutionalist liberal, from an anti-imperialist to a cultural atavist, from a radical economics professor to a neo-liberal World Bank spokesperson, from an intellectual to a consultant is blatant, unrepentant, and mercenary. Yet it is ephemeral. The stream of more radical, more committed, and more militant and insurrectionary thought continues to flow. It is to this thought that I turn in an effort to see how the National Question can be reconfigured and rearticulated in terms of today’s democratic and social questions.

The National, the Democracy, and the Social Question

The State of the Discourse

The conclusion of a symposium on Marxism held in Dar es Salaam in 1983 to celebrate the centenary of Marx’s death was that “the central question of the African revolution today is democracy.” The rise of the African authoritarian state and the statisation of civil society in the post-colonial period elicited a discourse on democracy in the ‘80s and ‘90s. This development dovetailed with the collapse of the Soviet empire, the end of the Cold War, and the comeback of Western imperialism led by the U.S. As neo-liberal discourse in economics was generalised to politics, the dominant democracy debate began to center on liberal paradigms – constitutionalism, human rights, and the restructuring of the African state in the image of liberal states.29

In the first phase of the democracy debate, leftist intellectuals began to revisit the existing experience of the struggle of African peoples. Fine theory emerged, such as Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa,30 edited by Anyang’ Nyongo, and African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy, edited by Mahmood Mamdani and Ernest Wamba dia-Wamba.31 These works were rooted in the methodology of radical political economics, yet they critically interrogated them and, in the process, deepened our

31 Mahmood Mamdani & Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, eds., African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995). A number of country-specific studies in the same vein were produced by CODESRIA’s National Working Groups. I had the privilege of editing one on Tanzania called The State and the Working People in Tanzania (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1986). It is heartening to note that these works were sponsored and published by our leading Pan-African and Third World organisations, CODESRIA, and the Third World Forum, with which many African scholars have been proud to work.
understanding of African societies. The democracy question was not abstracted from history and social character. What is more, then-prevalent notions of abstract civil society, class-less community, and apolitical NGOs were convincingly debunked. Instead, social movements were firmly presented as social struggles, nay, class struggles.  

The African scholar’s activity in the 1990s was not as impressive, including that of leftist intellectuals. If the African ruling class has been even more denationalised and compradorised by globalisation, the African left has been liberalised, and perhaps even compromised. The neo-liberal discourse on constitutionalism, human rights, and democracy has proved overwhelming. The human rights discourse has been so hegemonised that when I produced a slim volume in the late ‘80s arguing that the rights discourse was an ideological discourse constructed historically within the dominant imperialist context, my left comrades roundly condemned me as demagogic! As fine a leftist scholar as Mamdani declared that “wherever there was (and is) oppression, there must come into being a conception of rights.” Now it may be true that wherever there is oppression, there is bound to be resistance, à la Mao, but it is simply not true that resistance necessarily takes the form of a human rights struggle, meaning equal rights, as in the bourgeois construct. Be that as it may, the point I am making is simply that the ahistorical and asocial human rights and democracy discourse has taken its toll on leftist scholarship. One consequence has been the increasing lack of discussion of the National Question in our democracy discourse.

There is no doubt that democracy is the central question of the African revolution today, but the question is how it is related to, or configured with, the national and social questions. Neither the National Question nor the Democracy Question can be addressed or interrogated outside of its social character, nor can it be resolved outside the frame of class struggle, the locomotive of history.

“Come Back, Africa”

While I may have talked bitterly about the conversion of African intellectuals to neo-liberalism, the picture is no doubt overdrawn to make the point. One is allowed to exaggerate the truth, so long as one is not telling lies! The truth is that in the people’s own struggle, the National Question and nationalism in the sense of anti-imperialism and anti-compradorism are being brought back onto the historical agenda. These struggles may be local and disparate, they may be issue-oriented and articulated in ways and ideologies that are sometimes parochial or even religious, but a resistance to the new and the old compradors is in the making. It is this resistance that African intellectuals need to research, expose, systematise, and theorise about.

CODESRIA intellectuals, although they are few, have been agonising over the present state of affairs. Numbers do not matter – “better fewer but better.” Samir Amin and Archie Mafeje have consistently argued their positions from the vantage point of political

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32 See Mamdani’s Introduction in *African Studies in Social Movements.*
33 *The Concept of Human Rights in Africa.*
34 Mahmood Mamdani “Social Movements and Constitutionalism in the African Context” in *State and Constitutionalism,* 237.
economy, posing a new alliance of popular classes and forces that may foster the anti-imperialist and anti-comprador national project. Mafeje has continued to underscore the importance of the National Question and has insightfully joined it with the Democracy Question and the Social Question. He has insisted on a concrete identification of social forces in concrete African conditions so as to determine what kind of democracy is at issue on the continent.

Let me offer a few thoughts that I presented in an article at an international conference in Dar es Salaam marking the 75th birthday of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. I argued for a new national democratic consensus in Africa that would be thoroughly popular, thoroughly anti-imperialist, and thoroughly anti-comprador. I suggested that three cornerstones are crucial in constructing a new consensus: popular livelihoods, popular participation, and popular power.

I use the term popular to signify three things. First, popular in the sense of being anti-imperialist. Imperialism is the negation of the idea of both national and democratic, but I use the term popular to transcend the limits of the term national, which implies anti-colonialism. Independence or first liberation led to state sovereignty. The core of the second liberation lies in resolving the issue of the people’s sovereignty.

The second meaning of popular refers to the social basis of the new consensus or nationalism. The social core of the new consensus has to be popular classes or a popular bloc of classes. The exact composition of the popular bloc would vary, of course, but in many African countries, the land-based producer classes and the urban working people together with the lower middle classes constitute “the masses.” This is where, to use Lenin’s phrase, “serious politics begin” – “not where there are thousands, but where there are millions.”

The third meaning of popular refers to popular perceptions, custom, culture, and consciousness. I use the terms custom and culture not in the vulgar sense of atrophied and unchanging tradition, but in the sense of a living terrain of struggles where the old and the new, the progressive and the reactionary, jostle to attain hegemony. This is the sense brought out in Cabral’s great premise that “national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.”

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35 It is unfortunate that in his magnum opus, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (New Jersey: Princeton, 1996), Mahmood Mamdani abandons political economy too radically and falls into an institutional analysis of the colonial state. He finds that the colonial state was bifurcated, when an examination of its social character reveals the unity of state power. While his conclusions on the tasks of democratic struggle are unassailable, his institutional analysis results in a “recommendation” that state structures be reformed rather than a call for a new form of nationalist struggle. Throughout his analysis, Mamdani concentrates on the “native question,” the preoccupation of the colonial power, but has little to say about the National Question, the preoccupation of the resistance.


39 Cabral, 143.
I shall not go on. These are only tentative pointers. I simply argue for, even anticipate, the insurrection of a new African nationalism that counters imperialism in its globalisation phase – a deeply anti-compradorial nationalism that could resolve the National Question and, hopefully, pave the way for social emancipation. I will end with the poem “Come Back, Africa,” written by Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1955, which heralded the coming of the first African nationalism. May it also herald the second nationalism.

_Come, your drum-beats echo in my soul,_
_The rhythm of my blood rings, Come Back, Africa!_
_FROM dust of humiliation have I raised my head,_
_Wiped sorrow-crust off my eyes,_
_Liberated my arms from pain,_
_And torn the net of helplessness, Come, Africa!_
_Each crooked ring of fetters which bound me_
_is now an armoury in firm grip,_
_I have broken the halter round my neck and_
_moulded it into a shield._
_My spear-heads like the eyes of wild deers,_
_Surround him in all our dens,_
_And the dark of night is red with enemy blood,_
_The very heart of earth beats with my heart, Africa!_
_Rivers thrill, and forests tremble,_
_I am Africa now, I incarnate you, Africa,_
_Like your lions walk,_
_Come Africa, Come with the stride of a lion,_
_Come Back, Africa!_40

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