

Pan-Africanism and the Challenge of East African Community Integration

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I. Introductory

The purpose of this short paper is to assess the challenge of regional unity like the East African Community (EAC) from the standpoint of pan-Africanism. We use the term ‘regional unity’, or regionalism, to refer to include both economic integration and political association. As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the second-generation East African Community, it is opportune to stand back from the dominant debates on forms of integration – common market, monetary union, fast-tracking or snail-walking of the East African Federation etc. – and ask certain core questions: What exactly is the vision, the lodestar, so to speak, of the regional project? What is its historical genesis? What are the driving forces of the project, in whose interest and for what purpose? How does the project relate to the larger global forces, and in particular, to the changing world hegemonies? It is only by asking these bigger questions that we can critically assess where we are going and chart the possible way forward.

It is not my intention to enter into a debate on the merits or demerits of the *forms of economic integration* or the *speed of political association*. Rather I wish to pose the question as to whether we are asking the right questions.

In the first section the paper will examine in broad strokes the historical pan-Africanist project as a progenitor of African nationalism leading to the independence movement. The central argument of this section is that the discourse and contentions on the East African Federation (EAF) among the first generation nationalists was located in Pan-Africanism. The second section is broadly divided into two parts. The first part will address the contentions surrounding the first generation regionalism located in the first 25 years of post-colonial, territorial nationalism. The second part will touch on the defeat of the national project, the rise of neo-liberalism and locate the second generation regionalism – or regional integration, as it is called in the dominant EAC-speak- within the neo-liberal project.

The final section suggests that new Pan-Africanism is back on the historical agenda with even greater relevance than it was fifty years ago. I conclude with the question: what are the social and political forces that will drive the new Pan-Africanism.

I. The Pan-Africanist vision

The vision and ideology of Pan-Africanism was the dominant ideology of the African people for almost the whole of 20th century, although somewhat eclipsed by territorial nationalism in the last quarter. It was born of five centuries of oppression, exploitation, domination, and more particularly, humiliation and indignity, visited on the African people by European imperialist powers. Understandably, it was the ‘diaspora’ which first gave birth to the idea of pan-Africanism. The first Pan-African Congress was convened by that great African mind, W. E. B. Du Bois in 1919 on the heel of the first imperialist war. The demand of the first Congress revolved around equality of races, for the black people to be treated like any other human race. It was attended largely by diasporans. The next most historic Congress was the fifth held in 1945 in Manchester on the heel of the second imperialist war. It was attended by some two hundred delegates, majority of whom being from the continent. George Padmore, a great pan-Africanist himself, introduced Du Bois as the “father of Pan-Africanism” and invited him to take the chair as the president of the Congress. Kwame Nkrumah, as the rapporteur of the session, gave a wide-ranging address on the state of colonial Africa. He promised the delegates that they would soon see “strong and vigorous action to eradicate [imperialism]”, which he identified as “one of the major causes of war” (quoted in Lewis 2000: 514). Many more Africans from Africa addressed the Congress. Jomo Kenyatta talked about six East Africa countries ranging from Nyasaland to East Africa. The manifesto titled “Challenge to Colonial Powers” issued at the end took colonialism head-on. It demanded freedom. Its rallying cry was ‘Africa for Africans’. It condemned and discarded imperialism while advocating a kind of social democracy. One of its resolutions said:

We condemn the monopoly of capital and the rule of private wealth and industry for private profit alone. We welcome economic democracy as the only real democracy. (quoted in Shivji 2005 reprinted in Shivji 2009: 198)

Within twenty five years, the Pan-African discourse had evolved from demanding racial and cultural equality, even pleading for assimilation in European society, to an unambiguous anti-imperialism and demand for freedom and independence. Armed with the ideology of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah and Kenyatta and others returned to their respective areas to spearhead the struggle for independence. Thus was born African nationalism. It is Pan-Africanism that gave birth to nationalism and not the other way round. No sooner had Ghana achieved

independence then Nkrumah organised the famous All Africa People's Conferences in the pursuit of his pan-Africanist vision.

We should underline two features of the first generation Pan-Africanism which, as I will argue later, are still relevant. First, Pan-Africanism was a political project. Just as Nkrumah argued in the case of Ghana 'Seek ye the political Kingdom first ... , he similarly advocated political unity of the continent first. Secondly, the Pan-Africanist project was anti-imperialist. True, anti-imperialism was not understood in the same way by all African nationalists but the leading among them, including Nkrumah and Nyerere, already had the notion of neo-colonialism. They constantly argued that without unity independent African countries would become a pawn on the imperialist chessboard.

The first generation African nationalists, from Hastings Banda to Houphouet-Boigny and from Ben Bella to Babu were all Pan-Africanists. The two paragons of Pan-Africanism were no doubt Nyerere and Nkrumah. Although they differed sharply on the road to Pan-Africanism, they did not differ on the destination. Nkrumah's passionate advocacy for United States of Africa and Nyerere's fervent drive for East African Federation were both cast within the pan-Africanist vision. The majority of the political and educated elite in East Africa in the early 1960s considered themselves pan-Africanists. In a poll of Makerere students in 1962, two-thirds of African students described themselves as pan-Africanists (Nye 1966: 31-2). Most cabinet ministers in all three East African countries thought of themselves as pan-Africanists (*ibid.*). Describing his colleagues, one non-African minister said that "their Pan-Africanism is explicit, not just an unspoken assumption – very explicit." (quoted *ibid.*: 29). The drive for EA Federation was again Pan-Africanism. As one Makerere student put it, "Pan-Africanism will be an important point in the creation of this federation for the simple reason that the prime movers of [the federation] at present are Pan-Africanist to the core." (quoted *ibid.*: 32). Only when the political project for the EA federation failed, for reasons that we need not go into here, that the East African leaders settled for the second best, that is, East African Common Services Organisation (EACSO). It is interesting that the argument *for* common services and *against* a federation were also cast in the pan-Africanist discourse. For example, leading trade unionists in Tanganyika, particularly Kassanga Tumbo, opposed EA High Commission. He was finally persuaded to accept it in terms of Pan-Africanism (*ibid.*: 178 et seq.). At the other end, Ugandans at the last moment withdrew from federation talks, although they had earlier accepted the declaration to form the federation by the end of 1963.

They also used Nkrumah's argument that a regional unity would make African unity more difficult. As two UPC parliament secretaries put it:

We are committed to the idea of Pan-African unity and we are afraid that our economic interest in federation will clash with our ideological interest in African unity.

There will be no federation because it would prevent African unity. We must come together all at once. (quoted ibid: 196).

Nkrumah-Nyerere debate

Unlike the Ugandans, who were opportunistically using the pan-Africanist argument to paper over their opposition to federation for internal political reasons, Nkrumah's opposition to regional blocs was based on his legitimate fear that this would make African unity more difficult. It is in this regard that there was a now well-known debate and difference between Nkrumah and Nyerere. As is known, Nkrumah argued that African union government should be formed immediately after independence before individual countries settled in their sovereignties. He argued that imperial powers would use individual countries to pursue their neo-colonial tactics of divide and rule. Nyerere too was conscious of this possibility, or, what he called the 'second scramble for Africa' (Nyerere 1966: 204-8), but argued on pragmatic grounds that the process of African unity would be prolonged and that it would be based on regional building blocs. Whereas Nyerere's argument was based on logic that it would be easier to unite a dozen or so regional blocs than four dozen individual countries, Nkrumah considered regional unity as 'balkanization on a larger scale'. He severely argued against the East African federation just as he had earlier criticised PAFMECA. Ironically, Nyerere's arguments for an EA federation before or immediately the countries became independent were the same that Nkrumah used to argue his case for immediate African unity. With the hindsight of history, we can now see that both Nkrumah and Nyerere have been proved right. We are still struggling with the idea of EA federation after fifty years just as we are with the idea of United States of Africa. Nonetheless, after fifty years of experience with territorial nationalism and two experiments in the so-called regional economic integration, we should be in a better position to revisit the pan-African vision as well as the quest for an EA federation.

III. Territorial nationalism, regionalism and neo-liberalism

The post-independence period for our purpose may be divided into two: some twenty five years of (territorial) nationalism and another twenty five years of neo-liberalism or globalisation. Both Nkrumah and Nyerere had argued forcefully that on their own African countries would not be able to defend their independence or even bring about meaningful

development for their people. Nonetheless, as heads of states they had to come to terms with consolidating their state power in their own countries. Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 but Nyerere was left to agonise over what he called the ‘dilemma of a Pan-Africanist’. He argued that each independent African country was busy building nation-states and therefore consolidating nationalism which conflicts with Pan-Africanism. Addressing students on the inauguration of Kenneth Kaunda as the Chancellor of the University of Zambia in 1966, he said:

Pan-Africanism demands an African consciousness and an African loyalty; on the other hand is the fact that each Pan-Africanist must also concern himself with the freedom and development of one of the nations of Africa. These things can conflict. Let us be honest and admit that they have already conflicted. (Nyerere 1966 in Nyerere 1968: 208)

Although Nyerere returned to this theme occasionally, it became rarer until after he retired from the presidency. To an extent, during the immediate post-colonial period as nationalism battled against neo-colonialism, with some leaders succumbing, others adopting and still more falling prey to imperial machinations, Pan-Africanism receded to the background. The East African Community formed in 1967, which attempted to address one of the deep-rooted scourges of colonialism, uneven development, also fell victim to the forces of compradorialism and imperialism. It is not necessary to go into details. Suffice it to say that the limited economic unity could not be sustained in absence of a durable political framework. And a durable political framework could not be developed in absence of political unity.

The limits of territorial nationalism which both Nyerere and Nkrumah had predicted and feared were unambiguously driven home by the neo-liberal onslaught beginning in the eighties with the “Washington consensus”. Neo-liberalism proved to be the worst form of neo-colonialism and utterly subversive of African unity. The three generations of conditionalities dictated by the unholy trio of IMF-World Bank-WTO backed by imperialist powers was a direct and blatant attack on both the political and economic sovereignty of African states. Beginning with the first generation of economic conditionalities in the so-called structural adjustment programmes, followed by the ruthless privatisation and dictates on financial and fiscal policies to political conditionalities thinly veiled in the so-called ‘good governance, human rights and accountability’ were nothing less than an open attack on the very notion of independence. Independence was constituted by reclaiming state sovereignty which is precisely what was undermined by these conditionalities. Even African parliaments were given set timetables within which to enact laws desired by the IFIs regardless of what

parliamentarians thought as ‘representatives’ of the people. During the heyday of neo-liberalism in Tanzania, our third phase president, Mkapa, often retorted to internal critiques by saying that even the World Bank praised his policies. Thus African governments sought political legitimacy outside rather than with their people. Nkrumah could not have dreamt in his wildest dream that African states would be reduced to such spinelessness.

Imperialism which had been defensive during the nationalist period tried to rehabilitate itself morally and ideologically. One after another, African leaders fell in line while others even enthusiastically offered themselves to be what Nabudere calls *Sherpas* of imperialism (Nabudere in Nyong'o et al 2002: 61). To the credit of African scholars, a critical mass of them in such organisations as CODESRIA, consistently criticised this “new” imperialism in its new incarnation called globalization. Nonetheless, the new breed of leaders, as they were christened by the Blairs and the Clintons of this world, uncritically embraced neo-liberal policies of marketisation, commodification and privatisation. It is in this context that the continental ‘integration’ project NEPAD was born.

It is within the same context that at the regional level was born the second generation EA cooperation (EAC). I dare say that what NEPAD is to AU (African Union), EAC is to EAF. Both are predicated on an “integrationist” economicistic approach, integration here meaning integration in the global capitalist circuits as subordinates. Unlike the first generation EAF or OAU, for that matter, which were cast within the pan-African project, the EAC/EAF (fast-track or otherwise) does not have a pan-African vision. The author of NEPAD, president Mbeki, had to borrow ‘African renaissance’ from European history, with little relevance to Africa, to ideologies NEPAD. Unlike Pan-Africanism, the so-called African renaissance has little resonance in African history. Similarly, EAF lacks a truly Pan-Africanist vision. It is cast in integrationist and developmentalist mode. “The visionary purpose for the establishment of an East African Federation”, says the Wako report on fast tracking EAF, “is the accelerated economic development for all, to enable the region to move away from a Least Developed Region to a Developed Region, in the shortest possible time.” (Wako Report 2004: 9). This is not to say that “accelerated development” is not important. The point is that development cannot be understood outside the history of five centuries of underdevelopment in which imperialism has played a central role. History teaches us that deepening of integration in the global imperialist dominated economy only results in further deepening of underdevelopment.

Fortunately, but unfortunately with devastating results, the collapse of neo-liberalism last year has once again shown that it is futile to expect that Africa can develop politically in alliance

with imperialism and economically by integrating in global capitalism. Africa has to develop its own alternative agenda and path of development. And of necessity this will be in opposition to imperialism as Nkrumah argued.

One of the central elements in Nkrumah's seminal work *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* is the concept of an integrated African economy. He argued that there could be no sustainable development in Africa in the interest of the African people unless there was a continent-wide integration of the production system as a whole, in particular the use of resources – oil, forest products, minerals etc. – to build an ‘integrated industrial complex’ [Nkrumah 1965: 234]. In the same vein, he emphasised that the initial capital for constructing such a complex was being lost through siphoning off of surplus from Africa by the multinationals [ibid. 238]. He further underlined the importance of common markets within and of Africa.

Nkrumah was a great believer in economic synergies and economies of scale on the African level. Two decades later Nkrumah’s vision was concretised in the Lagos Plan of Action, 1980, drawn up by the Economic Commission for Africa. But as Adebayo Adedeji puts it ‘these [plans] were opposed, undermined and jettisoned by the Bretton Woods institutions and Africans were thus impeded from exercising the basic and fundamental right to make decisions about their future.’ [Adedeji 2002: 35-36]

In sum, our argument is that both regional and continental unity – whether economic or political – has to be cast in a Pan-African vision which by definition is anti-imperialist.

IV. Resurrecting Pan-Africanism

The defeat of the (territorial) national project at the hands of neo-liberalism on the one hand, and the collapse of neo-liberalism, which was predicated on extreme financialization, on the other, has squarely placed Pan-Africanism on the historical agenda. In broad terms, Pan-Africanist agenda entails continental political unity and economic integration. Does this mean that regional unity like the one implied in EAC/EAF is worthless and should not be pursued? With Mwalimu Nyerere, my answer would be that it should be pursued provided it is guided by a Pan-Africanist vision. What does this mean in practice if these are not only to be words or, as Mwalimu said, ‘matters of form – motions which have to be gone through while the serious business of building up states is continued.’ (Nyerere 1966 op. cit. 215).

Let me illustrate concretely the implication of saying that our regional unity should be guided by a pan-Africanist vision. When EA cooperation was being considered anew, there was a suggestion that in the new circumstances, the EA cooperation should include Rwanda, Burundi and DRC, besides the three traditional EA countries. Fortunately, Rwanda and Burundi were considered but no thought was given to the inclusion of DRC. No doubt many practical obstacles and hurdles would be posed to show that the suggestion is not feasible, or, even absurd. But the point is that it was not even raised for debate in which case the hurdles would be raised and a debate generated as to how these could be addressed in a Pan-African context. The other suggestion that was made was that the question of Zanzibar within the Tanzanian union and its place within a larger unity ought to be discussed and a suitable resolution made. Yet, as has continued to be the political praxis in this regard, it was thought best to shove it under the carpet. Yet the issue has refused to go away and being constantly raised by the Zanzibaris. If this matter were seen from a pan-African perspective, new initiatives would be taken – such as exploring different levels of association within the larger framework of federation, say, for example, Zanzibar having the status of an autonomous region. It will be recalled that within the former Soviet Union/federation different states had different status, including two states which even had seats in the United Nations, and some smaller states being given the status of autonomous regions.

Both these issues can make sense only if the regional unity is contextualised, situated and led by Pan-Africanism. (In fact, the first generation of EAF seriously considered the possibility of including Ethiopia and Somalia in the federation. In November 1962, Ethiopia, Somalia and Zanzibar sent observers to the East African Central Legislative Assembly in Kampala and expressed interest in joining the federation. But given its own problems, this initiative did not go further.) In the current context in which world hegemonies are shifting and there is a distinct trend on the part of the United States to militarise its relation with Africa to protect its sources of natural resources, energy, and minerals, Pan-Africanist anti-imperialism and non-alignment would dictate that neither Zanzibar at one end and DRC at the other would be left at the mercy of US penetration. Tanzania provides the most important geo-strategic land mass linking the Indian Ocean with resource rich Central Africa while Zanzibar is a strategic island on the Western Indian Ocean rim. With the rise of China/India, the perceived threat of Iran and instability in the Gulf, Indian Ocean becomes an important field of interest to the US/Israel military strategy. AFRICOM and its thrust into Africa is likely to be focused on the weak link in the Indian Ocean rim which is the Eastern seaboard of Africa from Djibouti to

Durban. Instead of such considerations, we find that in fact the EA states involved in the prospective EAF, actually cooperate with the US militarily, as recent exercises in the north of Uganda show.

But the other question is: what will be the driving forces of new anti-imperialist Pan-Africanism? This is a difficult question to answer in the abstract beyond generalities such as civil society or working people. It is posed here only for debate and thought. However, the immediate question at this stage is ‘where to begin’ rather than ‘what is to be done’. It is suggested that the place to begin is to resurrect a pan-Africanist discourse, to turn Pan-Africanism into a category of intellectual thought. I can best conclude by once again quoting Mwalimu’s speech on ‘the dilemma of a Pan-Africanist’. After arguing that political leaders at the helm of the state would not have the time to think seriously about the way forward for Pan-Africanism, opines:

Who is to keep us active in the struggle to convert nationalism to Pan-Africanism if it is not the staffs and students of our universities? Who is it who will have the time and ability to think out the practical problems of achieving this goal of unification if it is not those who have an opportunity to think and learn without direct responsibility for day-to-day affairs?

And cannot the universities themselves move in this direction? Each of them has to serve the needs of its own nation, its own area. But has it not also to serve Africa? Why cannot we exchange students – have Tanzanians getting their degrees in Zambia and Zambians get theirs in Tanzania? Why cannot we do other things which link our intellectual life together indissolubly? [Nyerere 1966, reprinted in 1968: 216-7]

Linking our intellectual life together indissolubly to generate a pan-Africanist discourse is the task of the post neo-liberal generation of African intellectuals.

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