

**THE INTELLECTUAL AND TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**Haroub Othman  
Institute of Development Studies  
University of Dar es Salaam  
Tanzania**

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## INTELLECTUAL AND THE TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Many definitions have been rendered as to who is an intellectual. Is it somebody who has been to a university or, as Ali Mazrui once put it, "one who is excited by ideas and has acquired the ability to handle some of these ideas effectively"? Is it a professional or one who can stand up and talk on Ummu Kulthum, Picasso and Alicia Alonso? Byron considered an intellectual as not only a person attracted to ideas, but whose purpose in life, thought and action were determined by those ideas [Anyang, 1988]. Issa Shivji thinks that of the important attributes of an intellectual is "the ability to laugh at ourselves" [Shivji, 1986]. I look at an intellectual as not only a person who is able to analyse the present but is also able to articulate ideas that would have lasting impact on those who receive them. But whatever definition one might accept, of importance is the fact that the role of an intellectual in any society is enormous.

Western education in Africa, especially in Southern Africa, is a recent phenomenon. Pre-colonial African societies, with few exceptions, had no formal education system. But if the purpose of any education, as Julius Nyerere put it, "is to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance and development" [Nyerere, 1967], then these societies had a proper system. The aim of western education, which came with colonialism, was to inculcate into the minds of its recipients a feeling of worshipping the superiority of the colonial master. First it was the sons of the chiefs and other traditional leaders that were receiving it; and later on as the demands of the colonial economy were expanding,



more and more people were obtaining it. Budo, Kisubi, Fort Hare, Makerere, etc., were all created for that purpose. The aim was to produce clerks, teachers, priests, agricultural extension workers, hospital assistants, etc., to help in the manning of the colonial machinery.

University education was restricted to only a few. It was only after independence that education became accessible to more people, but none of the African countries has reached the level even of Albania, now said to be the poorest country in Europe. Not all of the few that attained western education acted according to the expectations of the colonial regime. Some turned out to be the most vehement opponents of the colonial system not only in the political and economic spheres, but also in the areas of education, culture, etc. The reasons are obvious.

Colonialism affected both the traditional chief and the dock worker. It did not even allow the emergence of the native capitalist. While in the colonial possessions of Asia and semi-colonial China, a local compradorial class was allowed to exist, in most of Africa this class did not appear. It is no wonder then that in most of the African states the harbingers of the nationalist movements were started by people coming from the colonial bureaucracy.

The countries of Southern Africa are not a homogeneous entity. There are differences in history, culture and experiences. Even those ruled by the same colonial power, like Zimbabwe and Tanzania, or Angola and Mozambique, have differences in their social compositions, levels of economic development, etc. There are amongst them countries that attained independence peacefully, like



Tanzania and Swaziland, and others, like Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, that attained it through the barrel of a gun.

Due to specific conditions of the countries of the region each one traversed to independence in its own way. And each country brought to the fore of the independence movements a group of individuals who by any definition can be called intellectuals. What was common in almost all the countries is the fact that this group consisted of people with high commitment to the ideals of independence and dedication to their achievement.

The backgrounds of this highly politically active intelligentsia vary. In the case of Tanzania Mainland whose economy is basically peasant-based and where education was mostly provided by Christian missionary schools, the products of such a set-up have been people whose vision did not go beyond the peasant collective. This was different from a place where a large section of the community had been uprooted from land, a numerically strong working class had been formed and where an independent political organisation of this class existed. The logical tendency in this kind of situation would be to produce intellectuals who, to quote Amilcar Cabral, would know where the struggle for national independence ends and the struggle for social emancipation begins.

One of the successes of the colonial system was that it was able to produce an academia in the region that was dependent on the western intellectual production. This intelligentsia understood what was taking place in other societies, but lacked adequate knowledge of its own societies. This is what prevailed for a very long time in the African universities. Individuals were found



in the universities who went against the general mould, but the general pattern was that the universities were the replica of their western peers. The University of Dar es Salaam was the first in the region to break away from this situation.

Started in 1961 as a constituent college of the University of East Africa [itself enjoying a cooperative status with the University of London], Dar es Salaam became a full university in 1970 when a decision was taken by the East African states to each form its own national university [Nyerere, 1966, and 1970]. The University of Dar es Salaam in its curricula and research agenda tried to break away from the paradigms set up by others. It aimed at inculcating a sense of commitment to society, and tried to make all who came into contact with it accept values appropriate to the post-colonial society. There was a deliberate attempt to fight intellectual arrogance because it was felt that such arrogance had no place in the society of equal citizens.

The University of Dar es Salaam also played its part in the intellectual development of the region. In the ten-year period [1967-1977] the university was a major cooking pot of ideas, and provided splendid platform for debates and discussions. No African scholar, statesman or freedom fighter could ignore its environs. While the state brought its official guests to see its beautiful Mount Olympius-like picturesque, others came to seek knowledge or refine their ideological positions. Here, the East and West Germans, who officially were not talking to each other; the Chinese and the Americans, who officially could not stand each other; and the white and black South Africans, who at home could not even sit together in the same church, met in the seminar rooms built by Swedes and the British to debate not only about Tanzania's development path but also the



Vietnam war, apartheid, Chinese Cultural Revolution and countless other subjects. Very intense were these debates, and a huge number of discourses and manuscripts were churned out.

That kind of atmosphere existed partly due to conditions created by the Arusha Declaration — the country's policy document on socialism and self-reliance— and partly due to the liberal mindness of former Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere who was the university's first Chancellor. But one must also not underestimate the impact that the presence of the liberation movements had on Tanzania's intellectual development. These movements were not only engaged in struggles in their respective countries, but their leading cadres, as a result of these struggles, were forced to constantly refine their theories and assumptions; and they found the university campus an excellent testing ground. Thus in the course of this the liberation movements not only brought in their towering figures, but also their dissidents and their harbingers of future conflicts. From FRELIMO of Mozambique came people like the religion-tribalist, Rev. Urio Simango, the liberal nationalist, Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, and the Marxist poet Marcelino dos Santos; from the ANC of South Africa, people like Joe Jele and Ambrose Makiwane; PAC brought in Leballo and Gora Ibrahim; and the MPLA, Agostinho Neto and the future Nito Alves elements. The Communist Party of South Africa brought in no less a person than their late Secretary-General Moses Mabhida. Some of the most significant statements of these movements were made at the University Hill, including the famous one by Neto in 1974, before Angola's independence, on 'who is the enemy'. That has remained to this day the MPLA's weightiest document.



The Tanzanian press at the time was also partisan: the then *Nationalist* [the paper of the ruling party], under the editorship of Ben Mkapa [the present Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education], and the *Standard* [the government paper], under the editorship of the ANC cadre, Dr. Frene Ginwala, freely opened their pages to the university students and staff.

People from different parts of the world came to teach at Dar es Salaam. They were brought by different reasons. There were some who simply needed 'an African experience', but in a surrounding appealing to their consciences; there were others who were moved by the country's revolutionary potential and, being internationalists, felt that they needed to contribute; and still others, taking pauses from their own struggles, needed breathing space and periods of reflection. It was definitely the most international university one could ever find in the Third World. Some of these people were directly from schools themselves and therefore Dar es Salaam was their 'baptism'; others were accomplished academics with international reknown. Names of the Southern Africans that easily come to mind are those of the late Ruth First, (See appendix 'A'), Dennis Brutus, Harold Wolpe, Willi Kogkositle, Archie Mafeje, Sixghashe, Dan O'Meara and Linzi Mnicom [South Africa]; Nathan Shamuyarira [present Zimbabwe Minister of Foreign Affairs], Ibbo Mandaza, Mutiti and Frank Mbengo [Zimbabwe]; Vera and Orton Chirwa [now both serving life imprisonments in Malawi]; and Tunguru Huaraka, the present Namibian Representative at the United Nations. Others from outside the region included the late Guyanese historian and political activist Walter Rodney, the Hungarian economist Tamas Szentes, and the Ugandans, Dan Nabudere, Mahmoud Mamdani and Yash Tandon. Many people, like Boutros Ghali, the present UN Secretary-General, and



Adebai Adedeji, the former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, included a stop-over at the University Hill whenever they happened to be in Dar es Salaam. Yoweri Museveni, few months before he marched into Kampala, went to the campus to see his old friends; and on his first state visit to Tanzania, he went to the university to deliver a public lecture.

Many academics have achieved fame from works produced while in Dar es Salaam. Rodney's legendary book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, that of Clive Thomas, *On Problems of Transition*, and Tamas Szentes' classic, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, were all written in Dar es Salaam. The University was not only a haven for radical scholars and activists; the students who were there also found it an exciting experience. Issa Shivji, in his student days, had already produced *Tanzania: The Silent Class Struggle*; and Yoweri Mseveni, the present Ugandan President, Kapote Mwakasungura from Malawi, Andrew Shija and Salim Msoma, left their class rooms and joined FRELIMO cadres in the liberated areas of Portuguese ruled Mozambique. The students' journal, *Cheche* [The spark], and then *Maji Maji*, was much sought after, and the teaching staff vied with each other to have their articles published in it.

At present the Southern African sub-continent is facing a deep crisis: legacies of colonialism, underdevelopment and destabilisation, debt problem and natural and unnatural calamities. A generation exists in Mozambique and Angola which knows no peace. South Africa is the only state in the world today where the majority who live in it enjoy no rights. (See appendix 'B'). All these pose serious challenges to the intelligentsia of the region. The intellectuals of the colonial past could have been lured to the colonial trappings but decided to join the



independence movement. The present intelligentsia has nothing to lure him/her into the post-colonial state. The option is so obvious: live that in dying he/she might say — I gave all my strength for the liberation of mankind.

## NOTES

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## Appendix A

### RUTH FIRST - SOUTHER AFRICA's FINEST SCHOLAR AND AN EXEMPLARY POLITICAL ACTIVIST

#### OBITUARY

I want to join hands with those in this country and outside who have expressed their shock at the death of Comrade Ruth First, and condemned the perpetrators of this heinous crime. It is obvious who has masterminded this crime and what their intention is. The South African racist regime cannot convince the world public opinion that it did not have a full hand in this.

I have known Ruth for many years and am conversant with most of her writings. Both her life and her works have shown serious commitment to human liberation. Coming from a white family and married to a prominent lawyer, she could have led a quiet comfortable middle class life in her home country South Africa. But both Ruth and her husband - Joe Slovo - foresook that kind of life and decided to commit themselves to the national liberation struggle.

Ruth was involved in this struggle from her student days in the forties. Both as a journalist with *The Clarion*, *the Guardian* and *Fighting Talk*, and as an activist in the Congress Alliance, Ruth showed high qualities of leadership and dedication resulting in her detention, house-arrest and harassment by the South African authorities. She was also one of those 156 South African patriots of all



colours who were prosecuted in the Treason Trial. After spending some months in detention, she was forced to go into exile in 1964.

Eventhough she enjoyed a comfortable life in England as a writer and academician, she still continued to be involved in the struggle, In her numerous books and teaching assignments, including a brief spell at the University of Dar e Salaam, she showed high quality of committed scholarship. Her decision to come to Mozambique, at the invitation of the FRELIMO Government, was not only an internationalist gesture to come and help with the reconstruction of a new society, but she also saw it as an opportunity to be nearer her own country South Africa.

According to the Mozambique New Agency, the bomb that killed Ruth last Tuesday was intended for the UNESCO-sponsored "Experts' Meeting on Problems and Priorities in Social Science Training in Southern Africa" that was held in Maputo from the 9th to the 14th August. Dr. Joseph Mbwiliza of the University of Dar es Salaam History Department and myself were present at that meeting, also attended by a number of colleagues from the region. Ruth First was one of the brains behind the meeting.

The significance of that meeting was that it brought together a number of intellectuals and activists committed to socialist scholarship in the region. One can see why the agents of imperialism would have wanted to eliminate such a group.



Although the death of Ruth First is a great loss to the South African liberation movement, to the Marxist intelligentsia in Africa and to those fighting for justice, dignity and democracy, there is no doubt that these crimes of the white South African racists would not retard the march of history.

While one mourns for the loss of a friend and comrade, one hopes that the ideals she stood for will be achieved. the seeds of committed, radical scholarship that Ruth helped plant in this continent, and that she defended so fervently at the recent Maputo meeting, will continue to grow. In the present phase of the struggle in Africa more and more intellectuals, to quote Amilcar Gabral, will "commit suicide" and be reborn to join the ranks of workers and peasants fighting for true independence, democracy and genuine socialism.

Haroub Othman

IDS, UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM  
20<sup>th</sup> August 1982



## Appendix B

### WELCOME ADDRESS TO THE ANC DELEGATION'S VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM Friday 26 January 1990

By Professor Haroub Othman

Comrade Walter Sisulu  
Distinguished Leaders of the ANC  
Ndugu Vice-Chancellor  
Comrades and Friends

In welcoming you, Comrade Walter Sisulu, and members of your delegation, to this University, we want to pay tribute to the political organisation you belong to, namely the ANC. When the ANC was banned in 1960, this country was not yet independent and when you and your comrades were sent to the Robben Island in 1963, Tanzania had not yet come into existence. But I can assure you that long before the attainment of our independence we had followed with keen interest and militant sympathy the struggle of the South African people for liberation. We have always considered that struggle as our own. We know that our own independence struggle drew inspiration from your struggle and our own nationalist movement was traversing the road blazed by the ANC since its inception in 1912.

In welcoming you here this afternoon, we want to pay tribute to hundreds of South African patriots and freedom fighters who have laid down their lives or



went to prison for the cause of liberation. We want particularly to pay tribute to Comrade Nelson Mandela who today not only personifies south African people's desire for freedom and independence and their great resolve to attain them, but also the lofty ideals of democracy, freedom and social progress.

We regard your presence at this University here today not only as a further indication of the unity of the intelligentsia with the popular forces in our societies, but also as a challenge to us all to continue to be inseparable from those popular forces.

This University from the time of its inception has been in the forefront of the intellectual debates in the Southern African region. We have had on this campus several South African comrades, who came here to discuss, elaborate or test their ideas and theories, or to explain to us their experiences. We have had the privilege, either in the seminar rooms or in our own homes, of having long discussions with the late Duma Nokwe who succeeded you as the ANC Secretary-General after you went to prison, the late Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, and numerous others. A number of the comrades who are today in the ANC's National Executive Committee had also been here engaging with us in discussions and informing us of the tasks, challenges and successes of your great struggle for liberation. Apart from that, this University has also had a number of South African patriots on its staff, including the late Ruth First. For years now, the University has had the tradition of holding an annual Liberation Week, and there exists on campus a very active Southern African Liberation Support Committee.



Several of us, here and in the country, owe our political education to the statements and writings of some of you comrades with us today. I remember how as a young college student in the 1950s I used to read fervently the pages of the *"New Age"*, *"Fighting Talk"* and the *"Guardian"*. I remember also how later on in the University we read very keenly the transcripts of the Rivonia Trial. Your principled position in that Trial has remained in all these years the shining example of heroism. No wonder progressive humanity has characterised the Rivonia Trial in the same way as the Reichstag Trial in Germany during Hitler's period, and the Moncada Trial during Batista's dictatorship in Cuba. The speech of Comrade Nelson Mandela during the Rivonia Trial cannot be compared with anything else in similar circumstances in this century, except perhaps those of Georgi Dimitrov and Fedel Castro.

In welcoming you to this University, we want to extend to you, comrade Sisulu and to comrades accompanying you, and through you to the fighting people of south Africa, our deep sentiments of solidarity and a commitment that we will continue to march with you until the walls of racism and apartheid are demolished, and in their place a new democratic, united and non-racial South Africa is born, and the goals set in 1955 in the *"Freedom Charter"* are attained.

Let me now request the vice-chancellor, Professor Geoffrey Mmari, to welcome you all here, and to ask Comrade Walter Sisulu to address us. After comrade Sisulu's address, members of the audience may ask few questions, but these must be submitted to the chair in writing.

Thank you.