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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**Revisiting the National Question and Rethinking
the Political Trajectory of Africa in the 21st Century**

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Abstract

The national question is a central component of what scholars like Yash Tandon termed the 'national project.' It is a core part of the African nationalist struggle whose purpose has been to achieve decolonization, nation-building, state-making, economic development, popular democracy, regional integration and pan-African unity. This multifaceted objective has not yet been achieved. It remains as 'work-in-progress' which albeit has been fraught with trials and tribulations as well as internal contestations and inconsistencies. These problems have opened the African national project to various criticisms including by postcolonial theorists who dismiss it as a problematic process stuck in shibboleths of discredited geographies, primordial pathologies, anachronistic histories and limited agendas that were not in tandem with the dictates of globalization, neo-liberalism and cosmopolitanism. This paper seeks to depart from the common tendency of dismissing the African national project and to re-visit the national question as an ideal entry point to rethink the political trajectory of Africa since the time of decolonization. In other words, the paper provides what I would call a historiography of the national question with the purpose of revealing the trials and tribulations, triumphs and crises as well as mutations and metamorphoses it has undergone since the 1960s. The key hypothesis of the paper is that without this systematic and engaged historical audit and interrogation of the national question, it would be hard to understand the present day political trajectory of the African continent. The paper also examines the current morphology of the African national project including such ticklish questions as the rise of narrow nationalisms that have resulted in the resurgence of autochthonous discourses including nativism and xenophobia as well as new struggles for national self-determination spearheaded by African minorities within postcolonial 'nation-states' at a time when some African leaders were toying with the grand project of creating a United States of Africa to fulfill the noble dreams of the legendary Kwame Nkrumah. The overall premise of the paper is that the resolution of the national questions remains one of continuing African agendas transcending the twentieth century into the twenty-first century as it continues to assume complex dimensions such as indigenization of economies and land restitutions particularly in former settler colonies like South Africa and Zimbabwe.