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Panel: Revisiting the 'National Question' as a Continuing African Challenge in the 21st Century

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

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Abstract

The current global economic and ideological crisis coincided with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of decolonization by seventeen African states in 2010, offering a unique opportunity not only to reflect on alternatives to the capitalist system, but also to take stock of the political journey Africa since 1960, with a view to project into the future of continent in the 21st century. While some left-leaning scholars seek to revive socialism as an alternative to capitalism, an emerging concern among some African intellectuals is about how to revive the African national project which was displaced by the introduction of structural adjustment programmes. The African national project deserved to be revived because it encapsulates the totality of African people's desires to complete decolonization process, build postcolonial nations, reconstruct postcolonial states, promote economic development, entrench popular democracy, defend sovereignty, and eventually build regional integration and pan-African unity. This multifaceted agenda has not yet been achieved and cannot be abandoned in the face of the apparent limits of the neo-liberal project and the continuing operations of colonial matrices of power that sustains asymmetrical global power relations. This article builds on the emerging African thinking aimed at reclaiming the nation and resolving the national question at a time of globalisation. It provides a historiography of the African national project dating back to the 1960s and highlights its trials and tribulations, triumphs and crises, mutations and metamorphoses up to the present. This is important because without a clear understanding of the agential and structural factors that plunged the national project into crisis in the past, it would be hard to understand the present day socio-economic and political state of the continent and how to inform and shape the future trajectory of the African people. The premise of the article is that the resolution of the national questions remains on the African agenda as they continues to struggle to claim the 21st century and to grapple with issues of economic justice, social justice, new neo-liberal imperialism, citizenship and belonging.

Introduction

>The fact that the dreams of African nationalism have yet to be achieved is not an
> argument for their irrelevance (Zeleza 2003: vii).

>If the National Question was distorted, truncated, and caricatured during the period of
>meta-nationalism, it completely disappears and is delegitimized in the current
>globalization phase of imperialism (Shivji 2003: 8).

The intellectual and academic drive to revisit the national question in postcolonial Africa does
not arise from a vacuum. It is partly inspired by the recent outburst of popular uprisings that
rocked North Africa and the Middle East with ripple effects on the rest of Africa. These
uprisings dubbed the 'Arab Spring' challenges not only Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history'
thesis which somehow denied people's agency of making history outside the limits of neo-
liberal scheme of politics; but is also an indictment on decolonization project that has been stuck
in juridical freedom that has been open to subversion and abuse by some African elites and their
cronies to become a vehicle for primitive accumulation and could not be easily translatable into
popular sovereignty (Ake 1996; Ake 1997: 2; Ake 2000). Looked at closely, the uprisings that
have rocked North Africa and have inspired demonstrations and riots in countries like
Swaziland, Gabon, Djibouti, Senegal, Kenya Burkina Faso and other countries, cannot be
reduced to mere struggles for democratic rights. They are also movements ranged against
African dictators as well as neo-liberal economic policies that have produced deepening poverty
and unemployment (Moorson 2011).

Revisiting the national question is also partly provoked by what is happening at the global level,
where the seemingly robust and triumphant capitalist system degenerated into what is
popularly described as the 'financial crisis.' At the same time, the neo-liberal project together
with its Washington Consensus and discourses of cosmopolitanism which had temporarily
managed to displace and dismiss the national project as an archaic enterprise whose rightful
place is the museums of human history is also struggling, provoking a new search for
alternative and autonomous development path. Reflecting on the 'extraordinary political
situation' characterised by 'the end of the debt-fuelled boom' and 'the banking crisis of 2007-10,'

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Stuart Hall (2011) explained it in terms of 'another unresolved rupture of that conjuncture which we can define as 'the long march of the Neoliberal Revolution.'

Written in the midst of what Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2011: 3) termed 'the cusp of historical change,' this article deals with the question of the relevance of the African national project beyond the 20th century. It posits that the national project remains an important part of the unfinished agenda of liberation that must be carried over into the 21st century despite the fact that it finds itself threatened from different directions. It is threatened from above by global economic changes and discourses of deterritorialisation, and assaults by postmodern cosmopolitanists who dismiss nationalism as 'shibboleths of discredited geographies and histories;' to borrow Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2003: vi)'s terminology. The leading proponent of postmodern cosmopolitanism in Africa is Achille Mbembe who depicted African nationalist thought as 'nativism' informed by what he termed 'the burden of the metaphysics of difference' and nationalist inspired scholarship which he depicted as emotionally powerful but philosophically false (Mbembe 2002a & 2002b). His ideas are shared by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992), Sarah Nuttall (2009), and others who argue for a post-racial, post-victimhood, and even post-national future where human beings would freely imagine and choose new forms of identities and negotiate new models of belonging; as though it was feasible for human beings to think, imagine, and act outside historically determined circumstances and structures.

The African national project is also threatened from below by re-assertions of sub-state identities, autochthonous discourses, emergence of difficult policy issues to do with politics of recognition, respect for difference and new ethical forms of human coexistence, with which it is ill-equipped to deal and as well as by reverberations of politics of irredentism and secessionism. These threats from below have been articulated by Peter Geshiere (2009) as the 'return of the local' that provoked 'perils of belonging.' John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2009) capture this re-assertion of sub-state identities as the return of 'ethno-futures' in Africa whereas Sarah Dorman, Daniel Hammett and Paul Nugent (2007) describe it as 'citizenship and its causalities' located in the complex processes of the making of 'nations' and 'strangers.'

Laterally, the African national project is threatened by the rise of new forms of collective identity informed by the advance of neo-liberal market-oriented initiatives fostering individualized

social relations as well as 'statization' of civil society (Keating 2001: 28). In this neo-liberal discourse civil society is pitched and cast in opposition to the state, the national question is undermined and the 'state is condemned' while 'civil society is acclaimed' (Shivji 2003: 10). These realities led Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2011: vii) to argue that the national question is currently submerged 'under a flood of illusions regarding the ''globalised'' nature of the world economy ''beyond'' states and nations, centres and peripheries.'

Do these threats render the national project obsolete? Do these threats make the national question irrelevant? The answer is no. Rather these assaults and dismissals of the national project provokes the need to investigate what went wrong before one could make a new case for resuscitation of the project. The continuing subaltern and marginal position of Africa in the new global hierarchy of power necessitates the need to relaunch the African national project as part of continuation of the liberation struggle and African transformative agenda. While the global order has since the dawn of modernity remained racially hierarchized, Christian-centric, Euro-American-centric, hetero-normative, it is today undergoing transformation due to the visible rise of alternative powers such as China and other which open up possibilities of new alignments and new opportunities for Africa.

Fantu Cheru (2009: 277) provides two compelling reasons for resuscitation of the African national project namely the demise of the post-1945 economic order and its *laissez-faire* ideology, and the emergence of new powerful countries such as China, India, Brazil, and South Korea on the world stage, challenging the old power architecture. These global developments opened the space for reconstitution of the African national project. Even the pathologies of degeneration of African nationalism into xenophobia and nativism as well as its manifestation of its darker aspects such as violence are a cause for concern that calls for renewal of the inclusive and civic national project whose clarion call had originally been 'diverse people unite' (Nyamnjoh 2006; Neocosmos 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a, 2009b, and 2010).

This article seeks to provide a historiographical analysis of the unfolding of the African national project since the achievement of political kingdom. The year 1960 which witnessed seventeen African states gaining 'political kingdom,' is taken as the starting point to assess the historiography of the African national project up to the present. The first section provides a

comprehensive definition of the African national project and delineates its core projects. The second section deals with how some leading African scholars have made a case for the resuscitation of the African national project in the midst of globalisation discourses that proclaimed the death of the national project and the assaults on the national projects by the 'posts' (postmodernism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism) that associated the national project with provocation of civil wars, genocides, ethnic cleansing, and xenophobia among many other phobias and identity-related pathologies.

The third section analyses how the first-generation of African leaders (founding fathers) understood and articulated the African national project and set about implementing it including how they sought to resolve the national question. The fourth section analyses the crisis of the African national project traceable to the mid-1970s when rehabilitation of imperialism and loss of policy space by African leaders took place, as they embraced structural adjustment programmes and capitulated to neo-liberal interventions and demands of the Washington Consensus. The fifth suggests what is to be done as towards resuscitation of the national project today, and also concludes the article.

Defining the national project and delineating its components

The national project is still relevant as a broad socio-economic and political enterprise that seeks to achieve five core tasks. On the economic front, it seeks to build a competitive national economy. On the social front, it is concerned with promotion of social integration. On the defence front, it seeks to safe guard sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the cultural front, it seeks to construct collective identity. On the political front, it is concerned with achieving legitimacy and sustaining democratic governance and consolidation of state-power (Keating 2001: 65; Hippler 2005).

Taking into account different historical context is very important in understanding the character, essence, and relevance of the national project because it does not emerge in a vacuum and is part of African struggles for liberation. Yash Tandon (2008: 66) argues that while the national project is not solely a nationalist strategy, there is no doubt that it was informed and shaped by the struggle against colonialism. But it is not reducible to the colonial question which is just part of it. Those who reduce the national question to the colonial question inadvertently fall into the danger of accepting the achievement of juridical freedom as the only objective of the national

project in Africa (Alexander 1986: 63; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). Tandon provides a comprehensive definition of the national project:

> The national project, however, is not solely a nationalist strategy, but a strategy for local, national, regional and South-South self-determination, independence, dignity and solidarity. It is the essential political basis for any strategies to end aid dependence. The national project is the continuation of the struggle for independence. It is a project that began before countries in the South got their independence, and then, in the era of globalisation, it appeared to have died a sudden death. If it has died, it needs to be revived (Tandon 2008: 66).

The broadness of the scope of the national project as articulated by Tandon explains why the African national project at its birth assumed an omnibus character seeking to achieve many objectives at once. This broadness of the African national project was well captured by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba who argued that it referred to 'how the global form of the social existence, characterizing the internal multiplicity and the relationship of the society to its environments, is historically arrived.' He went further to elaborate on core questions that constituted the national project in these words:

> How is 'the orderly exercise of nationwide, public authority' organized? Who is or is not a member of that society? Who is an outsider? How has the social membership been changing? Does every member enjoy the same rights/obligations as those of every other member? How are these rights recognized and protected? How are competing claims (for self-determination, for example) by diverse groups mediated and made consistent globally? Are there people or groups that are, or feel, collectively oppressed and left out? How inequalities of uneven development are handled; are there groups looked down upon and paternalistically administered? Is there an 'interest' (national, for example) claimed to be common to all? How is this commonality established? How were the country's borders fixed? (Wamba dia Wamba 1991: 57)

It is important to build on Tandon, Wamba dia Wamba and others' work on the national project to clearly delineate its core projects which make it matter in present day conceptions of African

challenges. In first place, it sought to achieve decolonization and the acquisition of political independence. This agenda of the African national project was summarized by Kwame Nkrumah as 'seek ye first the political kingdom, and all things will be added onto it' (Nkrumah 1957: 164; Mazrui, 1999).

In the second place, it was concerned about how to forge common national consciousness out of people of racial, ethnic, class, gender, religious, and generational differences (otherwise known as nation-building). Jochen Hippler (2005) and Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (2009) argue that the concepts of 'nation-building' and 'state-building' have experienced a remarkable renaissance since the 1990s, on the one hand, being used to justify 'great power' military interventions in such places as Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya; and on other hand, being harnessed into externally-oriented peace-building discourses that emphasize the need for stable nations and strong and capable states as guarantors of durable peace and security.

This agenda of building nations is often articulated as the national question though the national question has other wider concerns than this (Alexander 1986; Mkandawire 2009). For instance, Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987: 43) argued that 'any scientific analysis of the national question must begin with a theoretical discussion of the following problematic: What is a nation? Are there nations in Africa? Are African countries nations?' Indeed the question of forging nationhood pre-occupied the founding fathers of African states soon after achieving political independence to the extent that the national question was often understood in terms of challenges of nation-building and state consolidation. But in reality the national question is also about issues of the economy, democracy, social issues, foreign policy as well South-South solidarities.

 No wonder therefore that in the third place, the agenda of the national project has been to construct, entrench, and consolidate African political power in terms of institution making, monopolizing violence, and forging hegemony (otherwise known as state-building) (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1987; Wamba-dia-Wamba 1991; Laakso and Olukoshi 1996; Mkandawire 1997; Zeleza 2003; Mkandawire 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). In the fourth instance, the African national project set as its goal to eradicate colonial autocracy and repression so as to build accountability, legitimacy, transparency and ensure popular participation of ordinary citizens in governance (otherwise known as democratization).

Anyang Nyong'o makes it clear that even those regimes that were openly repressive and authoritarian; attempted to legitimize themselves in democratic terms (Nyong'o 1987). Eradication of poverty, ignorance, disease and promotion of economic growth so as to improve the standard of living of ex-colonised peoples (otherwise known as economic development) was another important burden of the African national project as well as how to reverse colonial dispossession through redistribution of national resources (otherwise known as economic decolonization/indigenization of economy). Thandika Mkandawire (2009: 132) articulated this aspect of the African national project as the 'social question.' The reality is that the national question and the social question cannot be separated; they are intimately and inextricably intertwined.

How to secure political independence from external threats (otherwise known as protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity) became a core component of the African national project (Lumumba-Kasongo 1994; Hippler 2005; Tandon 2008). There were three core issues that pre-occupied African leaders at the level of engagement with the international community. Tandon (2008: 67) identified these as the question of African states' relationship with former imperial powers; the question of their relations with each other; and the question of how to position themselves within a world that was dominated by the East-West ideological rivalry. This constituted the 'international dimensions of the national project' (Tandon 2008: 67). Its complexity changed according to the changing internal, regional, continental and international direction of politics. Constant adaptation was therefore consistently needed on the side of African leaders.

Frantz Fanon identified the other core purpose of the African national project as that of producing a new humanism superior to that created by European modernity and colonialism which authorized domination and exploitation of black people by white races. Despite his severe criticism of bourgeois nationalism, Fanon still believed in an alternative redemptive nationalism capable of producing new and liberated beings out of ex-colonial subjects. What Fanon was worried about was the propensity of the African national project falling into the hands of lazy 'native bourgeois' who were manifesting 'pitfalls of national consciousness' and had a strong proclivity towards 'repetition within change' (Fanon 1968). As noted by Mkandawire (2009: 134), what distinguished Fanon's critical interventions from those of present

day Afro-pessimists, is that he 'never degenerated into the kind of ontological despair akin to the Afro-pessimism of the 1990s.'

African nationalists were very clear that these multiple agendas of the national project could not be achieved simultaneously and had to be sequenced accordingly. Seeking the political kingdom as articulated by Nkrumah became the first agenda to be realized and even the Organization of African Unity (OAU) made achievement of political decolonization its major goal. This goal was 'captured in the slogan of the time—self-determination' (Tandon 2008: 76).

 Another factor that makes nationalism and decolonization occupy a place of pride in African history and to provoke strong emotions is that it involved a lot of sacrifices with some nationalists like Amilcar Cabral, Chris Hani, Herbert Chitepo, and Patrice Lumumba to mention just a few, paying the ultimate prize while others like Nelson Mandela enduring three decades of imprisonment. Many ordinary supporters of African nationalism and those who physically carried the gun to confront the colonial edifice also paid with their lives before the collapse of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 which marked the fulfillment of the African desire to achieve the political kingdom.

The case for resuscitation of the African national project

A number of compelling reasons have been given in support for resuscitation of the African national project by such prominent African scholars as Claude Ake whose intellectual and academic intervention was broad but consistently focus on core aspects of the national project. If it can be summarized, Ake's work dealt with theoretical interrogation of the postcolonial state; historiography of the state in Africa; the nature and character of the state; the complex relationship between the state and African social classes; the nexus of state-development-underdevelopment triad; the state and democratization; the operations and impact of dependent capitalism on Africa as well as epistemological questions (Afemini 2000; Arowosegbe 2008; Arowosegbe 2011: 8). In short, Ake's work addressed the national project from the perspective of the nature of the postcolonial state. To Ake, the postcolonial state had to play a central role in politics and in determining the direction of core societal processes if it was thoroughly decolonized, fully autonomous from the political legacy of colonialism and deeply indigenized (Ake 1981; Ake 1985a; Ake 1996; Ake 2000).

Ake made a strong and comprehensive case for resuscitation of the African national project long before other scholars realized that the project was plunging into crisis. He began to deal with question of political integration as far back as 1967 and the necessity to deal with sources of political instability (Ake 1967a; Ake 1967b; Ake 1973). Ake strongly argued for 'endogenous initiatives of rebuilding the state from below' if it is to be acceptable to African people and if it is to serve and fulfill popular demands of the ex-colonised people rather than the interests of the erstwhile colonial masters and metropolitan imperialist states. Ake can be correctly described as one of the earliest advocates of an endogenously situated and reconstituted state informed by popular aspirations of the ex-colonised peoples. Ake (1985b: 5) made these propositions for radical transformation of the postcolonial after understanding that the postcolonial state was 'burdened with onerous responsibilities which it is hardly in a position to fulfill.'

Ake saw the agenda of resuscitation of the African national project as predicated on epistemological paradigm shift from using borrowed Euro-American knowledge systems to mobilization of indigenous and context-friendly African knowledges as an anchor for the indigenized, Africanized, decolonized, democratic, developmental, and people-friendly state. To Ake the Euro-American models of empire, state, nation, and citizenship contributed to the alien-ness of the postcolonial state and he made a strong case for radical restructuring of the postcolonial state based on endogenous knowledge-systems and taking into account African historical and cultural circumstances (Ake 1979).

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2003) has also defended the African national project from assaults and dismissals by postcolonialists, postmodernists and poststructuralists of the 1990s. He argued that the 'wholesale repudiation of nationalism, and its proudest moment, decolonization—whether in the name of the juggernaut of globalisation or the anti-foundationalism of the 'posts'—is ultimately a disavowal of history, an act of willful amnesia against the past and the future.' Zeleza went further to argue that discourses of globalisation and the 'posts' are mistaken in denying the efficacy of the nation-state as a meaningful space and dismissing nationalism as an expression of the national project and as a material agency in shaping contemporary culture and politics in various parts of the world (Zeleza 2003: vi).

To Zeleza, the opponents of nationalism and the national project have made no attempt to distinguish clearly the 'problematics and projects of nationalism, between the repressive nationalism of imperialism and the progressive nationalism of anti-colonial resistance, between the nationalisms that led to colonial conquest and genocide and those that have sought decolonization and emancipation for oppressed nations and communities, between struggles for domination and struggles for liberation, between the reactionary, reformist, or revolutionary goals of different nationalisms' (Zeleza 2003: vi). Zeleza elaborated that a wholesale repudiation of nationalism and the African national project is an act of amnesia against the past because it 'forgets, in the case of Africa, that the progressive nationalist project, which is far from realization, has always had many dimensions in terms of its social and spatial referents' and concluded that nationalism 'is not simply a representational discourse, it involves concrete struggles about material resources and moral possibilities' (Zeleza 2003: vi-vii).

Zeleza is not alone in this defence for the African national project as a progressive enterprise with redemptive potential. Thandika Mkandawire (1997) argued that despite internal inconsistencies, contestations and even contradictions, the African national project sought to achieve decolonization, nation-building, development, democracy, and regional integration. In October 2007 Mkandawire clearly identified the central arguments of those who considered the national question as old-fashioned and the national project as an antiquated enterprise that belonged to the museums. Their concerns were that the national question and the national project have been overtaken by such important and contemporary issues as transnationalism, internationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism.

Mkandawire's take was that 'much of this scholarship, with both its feet firmly off the ground' is 'aloof, cynical and patronizing' (Mkandawire 2009: 130-131). He added that in much of the critiques of the national project 'nationalist movements are discussed in terms of not what they were or said, but in terms of what they were not and did not say' (Mkandawire 2009: 132). He added that 'transcending nationalism does not necessarily always promise better things' as 'the many alternatives to nationalism have been disastrous—whether these take the form of ethnic sub-nationalism, idiosyncratic socialism or mimetic internationalism, religious particularism or neo-liberal globalism' (Mkandawire 2009: 133).

Issa G. Shivji is another able articulator of the African national project and a confident believer in redemptive nationalism. He identified nationalism as 'a process of struggle, in the formation of nations' which might not have been fully understood even by some of the militant nationalists who failed to express it as consistently as was expected (Shivji 2003: 3; Shivji 2009). What is often lost in analysis of the African national project is that it was ontologically 'work-in-progress' and a terrain of struggles that consistently underwent definition and redefinition from different ideological persuasions even by those who were actively involved in the struggles such as Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah and many others. Some activists and nationalists had a minimalist and reformist conception while others had a maximalist and revolutionary understanding of the project of liberation. For example, Cabral had a maximalist and revolutionary conception whereby he articulated the foundation of the liberation struggle as lying 'in the inalienable right of every people to have their own history,' adding that as long as imperialism existed 'an independent African state must be a liberation movement in power, or it will not be independent' (Cabral 1980: 116-117).

Building on the Cabralian revolutionary and intellectual interventions, Shivji (2003: 5) argued that 'nationalism, as an expression of struggle, continues so long as imperialism exists' and that the 'National Question in Africa, whose expression is nationalism, remains unresolved as long as there is imperialist domination.' Shivji identified unity, independence and equality as three core aspects of the African national project. He draws insights on these three issues from the work of Nyerere (1966) that emphasised unity, freedom and self-reliance. In his call for resuscitation of the national project Shivji (2003: 13) has motivated for what he terms 'a new national democratic consensus in Africa that would be thoroughly popular, thoroughly anti-imperialist, and thoroughly anti-comprador.' This resuscitated national project must be constituted by three interrelated questions—the national question, the democracy question and the social question, which Shivji elaborated in terms of popular livelihoods, popular participation and popular power' (Shivji 2003: 13; Shivji 2009).

Shivji answers Fantu Cheru (2009: 2770's fundamental questions of 'who should resuscitate and drive the national project? What are the social forces capable of contributing to the construction of new emancipatory national project?' Shivji does this through unpacking the concept of 'popular' at three levels. In the first place, he uses popular to mean anti-imperialism as this force

continues to be a negation of the national and democratic questions. He deploys the concept of 'popular' to also mean translation of state sovereignty to people's sovereignty. In the second place, the term popular is used to address the social basis of the new national democratic consensus that must be driven by land-based producer classes (peasants) and urban working people in alliance with lower middle classes. Thirdly, the concept of popular is used to capture the 'groundedness' of the resuscitated national project in African history and culture as the living terrain of struggles in the Cabralian sense (Shivji 2003: 13; Shivji 2009).

Shivji also argued that 'the continent is in crisis as is the capitalist-imperialist system constructed by the West over the last five centuries,' noting that in the midst of the crisis, there is a strong case to 'revisit and re-construct the Pan-African project to address the unfinished task of national liberation from imperialism and takes us beyond to the emancipation of the working people of Africa from the hegemony of capitalism' (Shivji 2011:5). Fantu Cheru is another vocal proponent of the resuscitation of the African national project. His entry point is that what is often critiqued as a failed African national project was in reality an imperial project disguised as an African project (Cheru 2009: 275).

This disguised imperial project unfolded as an imposition on African societies from outside and from above to the extent that it stifled peasant autonomy and production; constrained African people's creative energies for self-improvement; denied space for African participation in governance and operated as a purely elitist project that was far removed from the African ordinary people's lives. Eventually it provoked a cry from the poor which said 'Please don't develop us!' (Cheru 2009: 275). Having rejected the imperial project that masqueraded as an African project; Cheru made a case for resuscitating the national project as a way forward for Africa. This resuscitation of the African national project should involve adoption of key radical reforms at the national and regional levels informed by imperative of 'strategic integration' of national economies into the international economy on the basis of African interests (Cheru 2009: 277).

Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros have also been vocal in defence of redemptive nationalism and the African national project. Their entry point into the debate on the national question is via the case study of Zimbabwe and the interrogation of the agrarian question. They situate the Zimbabwe

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crisis within the context of manifestations of imperialism and peripheral capitalism which has prevented African states to resolve the national and agrarian questions (Moyo and Yeros 2007a: 103). Depicting themselves as left-nationalists, Moyo and Yeros (2007b) recognized the necessity of nationalism but not as a sufficient ideological force equal to the challenges of delinking African states from the clutches of peripheral capitalism.

Two of Moyo and Yeros' seminal edited works, *Reclaiming the Land* (2005) and *Reclaiming the Nation* (2011) have succeeded in resuscitating the national project through systematic interrogation of the agrarian question together with politics of resurgence of rural movements and revived nationalisms in Africa, Asia and Latin America on the one hand, and on the other, they have contributed to the revival of the national question specifically visibilising its economic aspects and shedding light on the impact of peripheral capitalism on the state and the national project. They meticulously mapped out in broad strokes the historical trajectories of the national project across the mercantile capitalist period (1500-1800) which is remembered in Africa for the slave trade; the industrial and monopoly capitalist phase (1800-1945) that was accompanied by direct colonialism; the age of ideological rivalry between the East and the West (1945-1990) that witnessed African struggles for decolonization; and the current age of globalisation characterised by crisis of sovereignty on the one hand and the capitalist crisis on the other (Moyo and Paris 2011: 6-12).

At the same time African leaders like Thabo Mbeki and others have also been vocal in defence of the African national project for various reasons. Mbeki's African Renaissance which Shivji (2003: 10) caricatured as 'worse than a pale copy of Nkrumah's 'African Personality' and 'as utterly uninspiring,' was an attempt to resuscitate the African national project at a time of neo-liberal triumphalism with a view to enabling Africans to claim the 21st century through engagement rather than de-linking from globalization.

Founding fathers and the implementation of African national project

But the case for resuscitation of the African national project cannot be sensible without a clear understanding of what went wrong with the project that was introduced by the founding fathers of the postcolonial African states from the 1960s onwards. Tandon sets the tone for the challenges that were faced by the African founding fathers of the postcolonial state. He noted

that soon after the achievement of political kingdom, ordinary African people began to ask political leaders and intellectuals new critical questions about the trajectory of the African national project. He summarized the questions in this way:

> Where do we go from here? What now? What do we do with this hard won independence? […] Who are we as a 'nation'? How do we forge nationhood out of disparate ethnic, racial, linguistic, regional and sub-regional groups? (Tandon 2008: 67).

These critical questions set the stage for the terrain within which the founding fathers of the postcolonial African 'nation-states' had to implement the African national project. There was also the external terrain that had to be taken into account as the African leaders begun to unroll the national project. Nzongola-Ntalaja (1978: 48) argued that from the beginning the national question was very complex to resolve because the would-be founders of the postcolonial nations and states had to grapple with the problem of determining the most relevant socio-historical entity to develop as a nation. They had three options. The first was to fall back to the pre-colonial templates which Nzongola-Ntalaja (1978: 48) described as 'the ethnic nation of ancient glory whose construction was arrested by colonialism.' The second option was to embrace 'the colonially-created territorial nation' born out of a combination of the Berlin consensus and colonial military conquest with all its contradictions and ambiguities. The third option needed creativity to construct postcolonial Africa into a pan-African nation that included continental and Diaspora Africans (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1987: 48).

It became difficult for African founding fathers to pull back the wheel of history and recreate the postcolonial nation and states on the basis of pre-colonial templates that had been overtaken by events. The pan-African nation was attractive but as put by Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987: 49), its possible adoption as template for postcolonial Africa 'was in flagrant contradiction with both the neo-colonialist strategy of imperialism and the class interests of the African petit-bourgeoisie, the class leading the nationalist struggle.' Eventually what won the day was embracement of the colonially-created territorial nation. Imperialists supported this option because it did not disturb the global imperial designs. The African petit-bourgeoisie accepted this option because it was an easy option that enabled even 'mediocre leaders the chance to become heads of state or cabinet ministers at the national level, something that might have escaped them altogether within larger and more complex units' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1987: 49). In short, the adoption of the colonially-created territorial nation was the first step towards embracing neo-colonialism by the founding fathers of the postcolonial states and was the

beginning of the betrayal of the African national project. On this crisis, Nzongola-Ntalaja concluded that:

> On the whole, the political map of Africa represents a double failure: the failure of the pan-African ideal of a single nation under one continental state or under several regional federations; and that of reactionary nationalism, which had sought to recreate or revive pre-colonial nations. Both the pan-African nation and the pre-colonial nation did not have well-organised class forces capable of realizing them as political projects (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1987: 50).

The African national project germinated from a very poor social base of the petit-bourgeoisie that Fanon (1968) criticised for manifesting pitfalls of national consciousness and very few were prepared to commit class Cabralian suicide and carry the cross of the national project to its logical conclusion. Those who tried to do so such as Nkrumah, Cabral, Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara among other few became targets of agents of imperialism and were eliminated. As noted by Cheru (2009) the founding fathers of postcolonial states implemented an imperial project that was disguised as the African national project. This is why Julius Ihonvbere has no kind words for the African founding fathers, blaming them for numerous betrayals of the African national project including failure to restructure the African national formation; to empower the peoples of Africa; to challenge foreign domination and exploitation of Africa; to challenge the cultural bastardization in the continent; and to reconstitute the neo-colonial state. He blamed them for confusing militarism with strengthening of the state and for 'foolishly confused the harassment of opposition elements, the asphyxiation of civil society, and criminal looting of the treasury with power' (Ihonvbere 1994: 5).

While accepting the enormity of the problems (both internal and external) confronting African founding fathers it is clear that in their attempts to implement the national project they followed a flawed logic that did not take into account the historical, cultural and economic realities of the societies they were expected to lead and govern. For instance, they blindly accepted the flawed template of 'a tight correspondence between the nation and the state whereby each sovereign state was seen as a nation-state of people who shared a common language or culture' (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996: 11-12). They ignored realties of postcolonial societies being mostly multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious. Liisa Laakso and Adebayo Olukoshi (1996: 13) correctly noted that the 'key element of nation-building project was the assumption that the diversity of ethnic identities was inherently negative and obstructive and

that it was a requirement of successful nation-building that the different identities be eradicated, submerged under or subordinated to the identity of group (s) that dominated state power.'

Founding fathers further undermined the African national project by personalizing it. This took the form of African leaders coming up with various personal ideologies which they expected the ordinary people to embrace such Mobutu Sese Seko's *authenticite*, Nyerere's *Ujamaa*, Kenyatta's *Harambee*, and Robert Mugabe's *Chimurenga,* to name a few that were imposed on society from above (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996: 14). Nationalism lost its redemptive aspects and assumed the form of presidential pedagogical and performative forms meant to blind the ordinary people of the excesses of the state and divert their attention from the crucial social and democracy questions. The way the founding fathers messed up the national project from the beginning, it was not surprising that by the 1970s it fell into paralysis opening the gates for rehabilitation of imperialism and termination of the national project.

The crisis of the national project and the rehabilitation of imperialism

Shivji (2003: 8) characterised the crisis of the national project in these words: 'Nation-building turns into state-building. Nation is substituted by party and party by leader, the father of the nation.' He added that: 'The National Question is reduced to a race question or ethnic question or cultural question' (Shivji 2003: 8). All this dismantling and betrayal of the national project took place at a time of rule of one-party-state regimes and military juntas.

When the national project became completely paralyzed, the founding fathers as typical petit-bourgeoisie always comfortable with playing the role of intermediaries of global capital, openly invited imperialists as saviours and surrendered the little policy space that they had enjoyed in the 1960s. They performed this grand betrayal when they found themselves besieged by economic crises, when the little remaining legitimacy of the postcolonial state evaporated, when the top-down imperial styled nation-building strategies were increasingly being resisted and when the ordinary people increasingly agitated for second liberation from postcolonial authoritarianism.

The open capitulation of the founding fathers to imperialism one after another coincided with the changing of the international context opening the way for neo-liberalism in the 1970s that was accompanied by anti-statist philosophies and discourses that privileged the free operation of market forces in Africa. David Harvey (2007: 2) defined neo-liberalism as 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best be advanced by liberating

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individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.' African founding fathers' capitulation took the visible form of accepting structural adjustment programmes whose debilitating impact on postcolonial Africa is well documented by various scholars (Onimode 1989; Bangura and Beckman 1991).

Suffice to say the age of structural adjustment programmes was also the time of destruction of the African national project in line with dictates of the anti-statist philosophies of neo-liberalism. This situation was well captured by Shivji (2003: 8)'s argument that 'if the national question was distorted, truncated, and caricatured during the period of meta-nationalism, it completely disappears and is delegitimized in the current globalization phase of imperialism.' Indeed the little that was left of the national project was completely erased from the political space leading to complete loss of policy space. Cheru (2009: 277) captured it this way: 'So, policy making, an important aspect of sovereignty, has been wrenched out of the hands of the African state. This is recolonization, not development.' Rita Abrahamsen (2001) also captured the double-bind that befell African leaders whereby they had to be answerable to two constituencies—the African people at home and at the same time being accountable to external agencies and donors.

The future trajectory of Africa in the 21st century

The historiography and trajectory of the African national project has run a long course from post-World War II modernization paradigm that installed the imperial project which masqueraded as an African project right through to the direct rehabilitation of imperialism via adoption of structural adjustment programmes into the current emerging consensus on reconstitution of the postcolonial state (Lumumba-Kasongo 1994; Agbese and Kieh, Jr 2007; Mueni wa Muiu and Martin 2009). In- between there has been such initiatives as the Lagos Plan of Action which the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) dubbed the Lagos Plan of Action as 'Africa's economic Magna Carta' aimed at laying a solid basis for economic decolonization of the continent (Adedeji 1999: 423). But due to a combination of lack of political will on the part of African leaders, lack of resources and continuing forces of neo-liberalism that reinforced colonial matrices of power and sustained global imperial designs, the Lagos Plan Action was never implemented.

The future of Africa lies in resuscitation of the African national project not as an elite initiative but as a popular enterprise involving the cross section of African people. What failed was not the African national project itself, but the people who implemented it wrongly and eventually betrayed it. The first step is to understand the African historical context while at the same time appreciating the global forces that have a potential to obstruct once more the trajectories of the African national project. This is what Cheru (2009: 278) termed the critical and retrospective analysis of the aborted national project of the 1960s as the best starting point on the journey towards resuscitation of the African national project. Taking full account of the nuances of specificities of African localities including gaining a deeper knowledge of dynamics African identities and religions is as important as understanding the invisible and visible operations globalizing colonial matrices of power (Schmidt and Mittelman 2009: 273). The next step is for Africans deepen pan-African unity as a bargaining platform from which to fight to recapture the lost policy space and this can only be done if the African state is reconstituted and made capable to champion the African cause unencumbered by colonial matrices of power.

Mittelman (2009: 280-282) and many African scholars others are motivating for African home-grown solutions informed by locally-produced knowledge and lessons from African experiences and beyond to inform the resuscitation of the national project process. This resuscitation of the national project calls for thrusting out regionally and continentally; rejecting external dependence; and creating local institutions of democracy facilitative of Africans' release of their creativity and genius. All this must take place within a framework informed by consistent transformation of nationalism into pan-Africanism taking the form of strengthening and empowering of the African Union and its agencies to project African demands at the global level while at the same time building South-South cooperation.

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