

BOOK REVIEW

“REIMAGINING PAN-AFRICANISM: DISTINGUISHED MWALIMU NYERERE LECTURE SERIES 2009-2013”

by Wole Soyinka, Samir Amin¹

Ermelinda Liberato²

Any researches or studies related to the African continent are incomplete if they don't approach the pan-Africanism subject, political, philosophical, and social movement, which advocates for the union and the liberation of all Africans that find themselves both in the continent and in the diaspora, against the foreign domination policy, either in the physical point of view (slavery, forced labour, and exploitation), or in the emotional or intellectual, having constituted, for that reason, the ideological basis for different African nationalist movements. Names as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Haile Sellassie (Ethiopia), Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Marcelino dos Santos (Mozambique) among others, represent some of the most distinguished pan-Africanists of the continent.

Among them, it is important to note Julius Nyerere, the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania, between 1962 (date of its independence from the United Kingdom) and 1985 (date of his retirement), and recognized by his support to various African nationalist movements. “Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan” (172), are some examples of countries whose nationalist movements operated from Tanzania. Nyerere authored

¹ Soyinka, W. & Amin, S. (org.). 2015. *Reimagining Pan-Africanism: distinguished Mwalimu Nyerere lecture series 2009-2013*. Oxford: African Books Collective.

² College of Social Sciences, Agostinho Neto University, Luanda, Angola. E-mail: ermelinda.liberato@gmail.com

the *Arusha Declaration* (1967), document which portrays the *Ujamaa* policy (unity or family), that became known as the african socialism, based upon principles of equality between individuals and the defence of a humane society. He was also one of the founders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established on May 25th of 1963 (dubbed Africa Day) in Adis Abeba, Ethiopia, and SADC (Southern African Development Community), created in 1992, with the main aim of promoting regional integration and poverty eradication at the southern part of the continent through economic development, while ensuring peace and safety.

In honor to one of the most charismatic leaders of "Africa and its diaspora" (170), the Dar es Salaam University created the *Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Research Program in Pan African Studies*, whose interventions on the first discussion cycle are published in this work. Issa Shivji, one of the continent's most respected academics and intellectuals, professor at that institution, as well as a pan-africanist, was indicated as the first chair of the program, position that he has occupied until his retirement, in January 2014, being replaced by his colleague, Penina Mlama. The responsibility of introducing each lecturer before their talk was then Issa Shivji's, reminding the presents not only of their professional trajectory, but, mostly, their role as Africans, citizens, intellectuals, in the production of knowledge in and about the continent.

In the introduction of the book, *Resurrecting Radical Pan-Africanism*, Issa Shivji presents the main objectives of the project, that is, the creation of a discussion space free of political connotation, based on Nyerere's political philosophy ideal of "liberation, African unity, equality between human beings based on equity (socialism)" (XII). Shivji also reminds us that the program is based on self confidence, independence (mainly in the lecturers annual choice) and uses means of its own, that is, no external funding from international donors, conditions that were not always easy to follow, because, as Shivji himself states, all sorts of pressures were present, coming both from the university itself and from donors interested in sponsoring the cause (XII), being the aims only achievable when based on "moderate budgets and voluntary service" (XI).

For five uninterrupted years, five African intellectuals, coming from different parts of the continent (Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi), with distinct professionals trajectories and perspectives, and having Julius Nyerere's character and pan-Africanism as the starting point, reflected on the situation and the position of the continent in relation to the rest of the world. The diversity of the presentations, based on economic, sociological, anthropological, political, philosophical, cultural, historical analysis, among others, allowed the establishment of a multidisciplinary dialogue, proving

the importance of crossing sources in the production of knowledge. The lecturers of this first debate cycle were: Wole Soyinka (2009), Samir Amin (2010), Bereket Habte Selassie (2011), Micere Githae Mugo (2012) and Thandika Mkandawire (2013).

Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian writer and the only African to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, in 1986, was the first lecturer to contribute. This renowned character of the African intellectuality remains faithful to his principles and show his “face in the fight against tyranny” (3), as said by Issa Shivji in his introduction to the writer. Wole Soyinka’s presentation is divided in two moments: the first - Whose empire is it anyway? - defines, using empirical examples, as the Roman Empire and most recently United States, what is understood as imperialism and its characteristics’ evolution through the centuries, in other words, the creation of New Empires. In the second moment - Anything to do with slavery? - he analyzes the colonialist imperial policy, such as submission and slavery, to explain the continuous condition of submission of the continent in relation to the rest of the world.

During his presentation, Soyinka identifies the United States as one of the biggest contemporary imperialists, being Wall Street the modern center of imperialism because “when Wall Street sneezes, the world catches cold” (9). “The evil Empire” (36), as Soyinka calls it, establishes some “imperial relations” (35) based upon a relationship of subordination of the rest of the world face its power, be it economic, military, political, cultural, intellectual. Soyinka goes further in his analysis and identifies globalization, calling it a “borderless empire” (24), as the new and most dreadful mechanism of global imperialism; as is the cultural imperialism, with music being its main instrument for consolidation. The writer finishes his presentation criticizing the main institutional organizations of the continent, namely the African Union and the Arab League, as responsible for the continuity of the subordination relationships between the continent and the rest of the world, as “they have abandoned all protests’ moral bases” (49), as well as the ideals on which its foundational bases lie, namely, pan-Africanism.

Following Wole Soyinka reflections, Samir Amin brings to discussion one of the hardest fights that the continent has been facing, its *long road to socialism*. For this Egyptian who became “socialist when he was six years old” (58) and whose dream was to change society, the analysis of the African situation must be even deeper. Samir Amin begins his lecture with a brief historical presentation on the emergence, evolution and different crisis capitalism has faced from its genesis until that moment. The author claims that “historically, the ‘real’ capitalism is associated with a sequence of ways of accumulation and expropriation” (60) and that, contemporary

capitalism is above all an 'oligopolist' capitalism (65), leading to the decline of democracy (65), the "destruction of the planet's environment and life" (95), the expropriation and the subordination of those called "people of the south", encouraging conflicts between north and south, which can be understood as a conflict between capitalism and socialism. The decline of democracy means, after all, the decline of socialism because, according to Samir Amin "there can be no socialism without democracy in the same manner as there can be no democratic progress outside of the socialist point of view" (87), which is why the author prefers to use the word "democratization" (92), as it is a process in constant formation and update.

In regards to Africa, the author defends that the continent is not "marginalized" (97) from the process as it has been claimed. According to him, "Africa dove into the colonization darkness" (108), from which it has to break free, and this liberation process must also be seen and analysed in light of the processes of democratization and building of socialism. Like Soyinka, Amin too points to globalization, led by the United States as the main contemporary imperialist, responsible for the implantation of an "Apartheid in global scale" (66) and, consequently, for the chaos found throughout the globe. He also criticizes the African intellectuals, who allow themselves to be influenced by foreign ideas and that present the great project of African renaissance as "grandiloquent, nacionalist and unrealistic" (108), and defends that the continent needs an "authentic renaissance of its thinking, in an audacious, independent way, being up to the challenges" (108).

Bekeret Habte Selassie, the third guest to the "Julius Nyerere's intellectual festival" (115), focuses his presentation on the historical origins of pan-Africanism, *from the colonial borders to African unity*. Selassie goes back in time and remembers the role and work carried out by the "fathers" of pan-Africanism: DuBois, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Leon Damas. The last ones, later in time, started the negritude movement, seen as a "weapon of resistance" (124) in the defense black culture. This point is used by Selassie to get to Frantz Fanon (Aimé Césaire's student) and his role in the fight for the rights of black peoples. His presentation would have been incomplete if he failed to mention the creation of *Presence Africaine - Ruve Culturel du monde noir* (African Presence - The Black World Cultural Magazine) in 1941, by the Senegalese Alioune Diop, which, as represented by its subtitle, aimed above all the conscience and affirmation of the black peoples, giving their political and cultural fight a voice, already expressed in the pan-Africanism and the negritude movements.

Selassie stresses the role of African pan-Africanists who, inspired and influenced by those movements, continued the fight for equality in

the continent, highlighting the figure of Kwame Nkrumah, “a prophet of African liberation and unity” (135), who saw socialism as “the system that would best serve the African needs in accommodating the changes brought by capitalism” (130) and led Ghana to its independence, the first country in the continent to do so. The author dedicates the last part of its lecture to African women, remembering their contributions to “the African fight for unity and progress” (134). Although he did not mention names, he stressed the creation of the “Pan-African women’s liberation organization (PAWLO)” (134), which aims to give voice and recognition to women that fight for the rights of African women.

He finished his lecture by pointing the fragility of African institutions as the primary cause of democratic deficit and constraints faced by the continent, which is the reason why he tells all Africans “we need a new generation with more Wole Soyinkas and Samir Amins to help in breaking the intellectual barrier which is blocking our way to the so needed unity” (153). Selassie recognizes that “pan-Africanism still is a distant objective, but the founding principles have been established and instilled in the African mind” (135), needing only be allowed to grow and the reflections be made beyond the appearances.

Micere Githae Mugo, the only female guest in the first cycle, brings a reflection on the role of *art, artists and the blooming of pan-africanism in the liberated zones*, meeting her characteristics as a professor, artist, activist and pan-Africanist. Her presentation distinguishes itself from the previous ones by the use of the word “orature” as the main instrument, defined by her as “the art of the spoken word” (167), “*engaging the audience as active participants, inviting their response and soliciting their affirmation*” (167).

The author, then, payed tribute to the figure of Julius Nyerere, to his project of union and African unity, and support to nationalists movements, and his interventions in the liberation fight, highlighting his role in promoting education and African culture, because to him “culture is the nation’s soul” (174). She then talks about its importance in the liberation fight, above all in the creation of liberated zones. Among the examples offered by her, she highlights the role of culture in the liberation of the mind, “the first zone to be freed” (187), and the importance of memory, because “if we ignore the roles of culture and arts, my friends, we will have lost an important weapon to complete this obligatory mission” (194).

The author also praises the initiative of the Der es Salaam University in creating the Pan-African Studies program, seen by her as the continuation of the tradition of opening of new spaces to the intellectual evolution of the liberated African zones. However, joining Samir Amin, she

criticizes African intellectuals and researchers affirming that they are "too busy perfecting, in a modernist jargon, outdated and worn out, occidental theories, instead of becoming inventors" (187), as in creating their own theories, adapted to their reality.

As a conclusion of sorts, Thandika Mkandawie analyses what were the *50 years of independency* of most African countries. Although the author has as subtitle "personal reflexions", these gather a deeper reflexion on the previously discussed themes, and get Africans in general to think about them, getting him to tread among different fields of knowledge, from politics, economics, development issues, and others.

In a simple and structured way, Thandika presents us events that made took the post-independence project towards results different than those expected. The elusive development in the post-independence period, the debt crisis that began in Mexico, but rapidly spread throughout the world, hitting above all the African continent, the general decline of African quality of life during the 80's, also known as the continent's lost decade, characterized by the application of structural adjustment programs, the rise of poverty, hunger and armed conflicts. The 90's began to offer hope due to the economic growth registered from 1995, allowing for a resurgence of nationalist feelings. The optimism, however, was short lived, because the curse of the resources, the lack of transparency in privatization processes, the fragility of the continent in terms of trading, rapidly gave place to disappointment, for as the author himself states, "you can't eat democracy" (224).

Thandika seizes the opportunity to show his disappointment and frustration with the ignorance among younger generations about the colonial past and liberation fight, for "a people who forgets its past is condemned to repeat it" (249). On the other hand, he admits that up until then not only did the "pan-Africanism project did not go very well" (249) but also, quoting Nyerere, "OAU had been transformed into a committee of dictators" (249). However, he presents himself as an optimist in relation to the future, placing his "hope in the next generation" (251). But, for the situation to change and be successful, it is necessary that "pan-Africanism goes back to being the ideology of a social movement, more compromised with the democratic process and based upon collective solidarity and self sufficiency notions this time" (249). To accomplish it, we must continue this "sublime fight" (252) of union and audacity.

In general, the work shows us that we still have a lot to explore about pan-Africanism, therefore there's a necessity of a continued debate on the subject. It also proves that the movement's ideology and essence remain

alive, adapting to the dynamics and changes societies undergo, hence we subscribe to Samir Amin's position when he defends that the continent is not marginalized in relation to the rest of the world, just creating its own path. We agree that the current scenario is different from the one in which the pan-Africanism ideal was created, but the concerns that first plagued its founders are still present: the exploitation, predation, dependence, psychic and intellectual subordination, to mention just a few, which has been leading, in a micro perspective, to the continuous degradation of the life conditions of the African peoples and, in a meso and macro perspectives, to the peripheralization of the continent and its people.

It is obviously a book destined to the general public, but especially to the academics dedicated to the study of the continent, given the maturity with which the subjects were approached. It is clear that this work enriches the research about Africa. Yet, there are some aspects that can and should be improved in the future. In the first place, translating the work to other official languages of the continent, so that non-English speakers can access it, once pan-Africanism is meant for all Africans, not only those that master the English language. If we defend African union and unity, and above all, that Africa speaks through a single voice, it is necessary to be informed and updated on the facts. On the other hand, although we consider that the choice of lecturers was right, we would like to see a more balanced gender representation, with more women participating in this kind of initiative, given that, of the five lecturers, only one was female. This does not represent the African reality because, as Selassie recognized, women also played an important role in the defence of pan-Africanism and in the fight for independence and african unity, as well as in the production of knowledge.

Initiatives as this one are, obviously, applause and praise worthy. First, to the Dar es Salam University for the creation of program with the previously mentioned characteristics, in a scenario in which the financial element is more and more determinant to the development of any activity, above all intellectual and cultural ones, affirming Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's legacy. The lecturer's availability is also praiseworthy, for them, despite having their own professional obligations, didn't fail to answer to the call and gave their contribution to the initiative, thus enriching the debate.

We should also applaud the initiative of the MUSE Project to make the work freely available on their platform, so that all users from associated institutions can have access and download it freely. We hope that this network can be expanded, especially with African institutions, so that all Africans can enjoy the diversity of the published material.

Finally, but not less important, the highlight goes to the Professor

Book Review: "Reimagining Pan-Africanism: distinguished Mwalimu Nyerere lecture series 2009-2013"

by Wole Soyinka, Samir Amin

Issa Shivji for, as himself states, "initiatives like this one are, thus, hard to maintain and may not be maintained. However, they must be taken - to sustain the hope and offer a glimpse of what can be done, even if it is not being done" (Shivji: XIV).

Received on February 4, 2017.

Approved on May 4, 2017.

Translated by Gabriela Ribeiro