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**DECOLONIAL
MARXISM**



**ESSAYS FROM THE
PAN-AFRICAN REVOLUTION**

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Decolonization

When dealing with such a broad topic in a short time, one automatically runs the risk of being extremely superficial. Consequently, I will concentrate my attention on one particular hypothesis, attempting to draw certain correlations between colonialism and neo-colonialism, and will illustrate the hypothesis with reference primarily to Southern Africa.

If we look at the UN Committee on Decolonization, we find that the committee is concerned at the present time with countries such as the Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, the French and the Cameroon Islands and the French territories of the Afars and the Issas of Africa.¹ They are concerned, in other words, with the remnants of formal colonialism. That is what decolonization means in that particular context, to terminate the formal, colonial rule of Africa.

Many Africans and non-Africans would perhaps say that the subject is passé, for certainly that subject is less important and less pressing than the question of what one does with those states that are nominally independent on the African continent. In other words, for many people living in the African continent, the issue is not nearly or perhaps not principally freedom from formal colonial rule, but the enlargement of freedom within the states which are juridically independent. And that means, of course, confronting the neo-colonial providence that has been established in the wake of colonialism.

My proposition is that those African states which are yet to win their independence – which are yet to be decolonized in the manner in which the UN Committee on Decolonization approaches the subject – are carrying through their struggle for independence at a time when other Africans and other peoples elsewhere are carrying through a struggle against neo-

colonialism. And this overlap, this interpenetration of the existence of colonialism with the existence of neo-colonialism clearly affects the character of decolonization in a number of ways.

It affects the character of the decolonization of those states which are still formally non-independent, which are still formally colonies, and it affects the character of decolonization in those areas which are normally colonies. It is this particular interrelationship of contemporary Africa that I would like to examine briefly.

My starting point would be the so-called territories of Portuguese Africa in the 1960s, now the independent countries of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. But in the late 1960s and the early 1970s the independence movements were developing in all three of these territories one of the characteristics discernable in the writings of leaders such as Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau before his assassination, Samora Machel in Mozambique and Agostinho Neto in Angola. One of the characteristics was a concern with looking at those states in Africa which were already nominally independent. But the programme for decolonization or liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, respectively, was, in part, dependent upon a pattern already set by independent African countries. There was a yardstick. Angola could look to Zaire, Mozambique could look to Zambia, Guinea-Bissau could look to Guinea and it could look to Senegal and ask itself what was happening in these supposedly independent African countries and whether the pattern of change represented the type of goals, the type of society that they in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique should be struggling for. There was a pattern; there was a blueprint. There was an actual objective, historical situation with which they could compare, which did not exist, of course, in the earlier period of decolonization.

Then, my argument is that what was programmed in Angola and in Guinea-Bissau was, in fact, determined by the prior access to independence by a number of other African countries, and the illustration of what independence could mean in an African country. You may easily test this for yourself in the writings of the aforementioned political leaders. They would say time and again our struggle is not merely to replace the Portuguese; our struggle is not merely to stain the structures of exploitation and replace white maintainers or white supervisors of that structure with black maintainers of the same structure. They would continually indicate that it is more than the need to raise a glass and celebrate a national anthem

that the people of Angola and Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau were struggling for, and it seems to me that it is a very important dimension of the evolution of thought and action and organization within the liberated territories of what used to be Portuguese Africa.

Of course, there are people engaged in armed struggle who are making, very often, the maximum sacrifice of life, making the sacrifice of limbs, making the sacrifice of being uprooted from their homes. Such people had to be more careful in defining goals that would be considered the goals of decolonization. In a previous era, it was permissible and understandable that people merely said we are struggling for independence, which means freedom from the white man's rule. It was permissible, but at a later stage, when this freedom was supposedly achieved in a number of African countries, then the material conditions of life did not radically alter. And then the cultural conditions were not radically transformed. And then the social structure, the political structure was merely transformed only insofar as it allowed a new possessing class to take control. Then, people in other parts of Africa began to wonder whether this was the kind of state and society for which they were making these tremendous sacrifices. And by and large their answer was no. No one in Angola and Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau could be mobilized to sustain that tremendous people's war on the basis of simply saying we want to be like the other African states which have gained their independence.

And the deepening of the appreciation that undoubtedly took place in Portuguese Africa was in part dictated by the logic of the armed struggle, but it was also partially influenced by what decolonization supposedly meant in these other parts of Africa. I believe in Zimbabwe the situation is bound to be the same thing; that if for the sake of argument in 1964 when Smith unilaterally declared independence on behalf of the white settlers of Rhodesia, if, at that date, the British had had the power and will to organize the transition and the handover to black rule, they would have given the government over to Zanu and Zapu. They would have given the government over to the masses in Matabeleland and Harare. And the pattern which would have emerged in Zimbabwe from 1964 until now could not have been radically different from the pattern that has evolved in Zambia from independence until the present date because the leadership is from the same social structure; the leadership did not indicate that it had any other ideological presence other than that which others had in Zambia. And the

vast majority of the population – the peasantry, the workers, the transient workers and permanent workers in the farms and mines – were not yet involved as participants in that movement for national independence. And therefore, to my mind, in 1964 a transition to independence which we may call decolonization, would have meant something radically different from what decolonization means today in the era of neo-colonialism? The existence of neo-colonialism is there as a guide which transforms the character of the demands and the expectations of those involved as far as decolonization is concerned.

Today in Zimbabwe the masses of the population have already been involved in part in carrying through a political struggle which had to be sustained while it was illegal, and in carrying through a political struggle that has a very significant armed component, having been raised to the level of an armed people's war; it means that there are so many dimensions which have been enlarged, including primarily the political dimension and the dimension of popular participation. So, for Zimbabwe to be decolonized today, it requires, of course, the removal of Smith as it would have required in 1964, but it requires more than that. It requires that the Zimbabwean people should make certain kinds of choices about the options which are being presented by the leadership – and if, as seems to be the case, most of the leadership which survives the original, earlier era, has lost touch with the sensibilities and the demands of the Zimbabwean people in this process of learning, then that leadership automatically becomes outdated. And there will have to be new leadership, new structures, new demands which reflect the contemporary period. So this is the change that is being wrought, in part, by the interpretation of the stages of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

More than that, to the peoples of Zimbabwe we can add Namibia and the Republic of South Africa, who are all colonized in the old, traditional sense, and are also in a position to witness certain changes taking place on the African continent which indicate that, after all, the political rule characteristic of colonialism was only one facet – and at that, a rather superficial element within the pattern of imperialism – and that colonial rule as a political phenomenon was, of course, reflective of much deeper forces of penetration into the African continent – forces which actually intervened in transforming the mode of production within Africa and in transforming the social relations within Africa, forces which went beyond the mere political boundaries as established by the British, the French, the Belgians,

Italians, and so on. And today I believe these forces can be seen more clearly because the facade of political rule has been removed in many territories, and the reality of economic exploitation exposed for all to see. One can see, for example, that not only with the end of colonialism has there been a clear rise of the forces such as the multinational corporations acting now as the new links, as the new forms for guaranteeing the export of surplus; but one can see that there has always been an underlying, economic partition and a continuing economic repartition which has gone on during the colonial period and is even more marked today. And this again, I believe, gives some new dimensions to what decolonization must mean because decolonization in the early epoch meant dealing with the political power which had formal control over one's political system. The British at Westminster controlled the territory, then decolonization meant going to the British and demanding that such political rule be withdrawn.

But decolonization today means going to these economic command centres of the capitalist world-system and recognizing that one has to break the particular character of the connections that exist with those command centres, and therefore enter the United States of America. The US has never been a colonial power on the African continent, but always lying somewhat in the shadow, lying somewhat in the background behind French, British and Belgian colonialism. American capital has emerged in various parts of Africa but particularly in the southern section from Zaire southwards to the Cape behind the cover provided by the Portuguese, the Belgians, the British in Rhodesia and the South African government in Namibia and the Republic of South Africa.

There was a continual process of economic repartition in so far as the United States was constantly gaining at the expense of other colonial powers, in their share of the African trade, in this share of the investment in Africa and of the profits which were being repatriated from Africa. This process was highlighted by the development of the Anglo-American corporation in the inter-war years and in the full galaxy of multinational corporations in the post-war years. The United States has clearly come in a crooked position where it is now hegemonic within this economic partition of Southern Africa. It has quite clearly taken over from the Portuguese; quite a while ago it took over the leadership from the Belgians and the French in the old Congo, the Republic of Zaire, and it has for long time been bolstering and supporting the British in the Republic of South Africa,

and has clearly taken the lead from the British in South African investments. So that economic repartition is a very significant element because the peoples of Southern Africa today in speaking about decolonization have not merely to look to their colonial power or the white settler minority which is resident; it has to look beyond that and ask what forces sustain the particular mode of production, what sources sustain the mine labour and the farm labour, what forces sustain the particular ways in which Southern Africa is integrated into the capitalist world-system. And the principal forces which sustain this happen to reside within the most developed capitalist sectors of this economy, the multinational or transnational sector.

The entry of the United States into the diplomatic realm and the political manoeuvrings around Zimbabwe and around Angola and the Republic of South Africa is ample testimony to the fact that the United States has been forced to assume this hegemony, taking over the political role of policing Southern Africa from the British who are no longer capable of so doing.

It seems to me then if we're going to enlarge the meaning of decolonization, one of the most useful ways of doing so is precisely to lay side by side these two modalities of colonialism and neo-colonialism and recognize that in the process of carrying through a struggle for decolonization in the formal territories, one is automatically guided by the transition taking place in the continent as a whole – which includes, of course, those areas that are supposed to be independent. I would go further; it works the other way. The reverse is also true, that in a territory which is supposedly independent, looking at the total configuration inside of Southern Africa where the Africans of Southern Africa are fighting against apartheid, seemingly against apartheid alone, where the people of Zimbabwe are fighting for independence. Those in the rest of Africa can well ask themselves what are the principal contradictions manifested on our continent today, and they will know those contradictions go far beyond the old formulations of mere political rule. Someone looking at the configuration in Southern Africa from territories such as Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria and the like, such an individual must be able to recognize that the confrontation and the contradictions are much broader, much deeper than the confrontation which they themselves in the

independent African states might have considered to be the most important during the 1960s.

One takes a look at the economic structures to recognize that there is no way to speak about decolonization without talking about the recovery of the national resources, for instance. Yet, the question of recovering the national resources has really only been posed in the period subsequent to political independence, and it still remains a legitimate concern for decolonization. So, we have to be careful with the use of language here, or we will wrap ourselves in some knots. We now, therefore, have to recognize the continuum of change and recognize that political independence was merely a moment, and perhaps not necessarily a very important moment in a totality of transformation which we might call decolonization, and that the territory which has achieved political independence, if not necessarily perhaps to lose the terminology of the colony, at the very least we must retain the title of neo-colonial until we can see more fundamental changes taking place. And if those changes are going to take place at the level of the economic structure, there are those of us who would argue that they must automatically take place also within the class structures because economies of formally colonial or neo-colonial territories must be sustained by some social mechanisms. They don't operate in a vacuum. There are specific social classes which represent, first of all, the links between external capital and the indigenous labour, and there are local classes that are emerging which are consolidating their own strength vis-à-vis other sectors of the African people, usually by consolidating around the state apparatus and securing a large portion of the goods and services that are being produced within the economy. And, therefore again because of the conjunction of stages, one is forced to ask more profound questions than a nationalist or a decolonizer might have asked a decade ago. One has to give a social content, an ideological content to the programme for decolonization. Whereas decolonization was, some years ago understood as Africanization, one now has to talk about socialism as an integral part – not a later stage – of the very process of decolonization itself. Without speaking about reorganizing the class relations within Africa, one is not in fact addressing oneself to cutting the reproduction of capitalism as it has reproduced itself in Africa over the last five decades or more.

It seems then that when Cabral, who was writing within the period of struggle when he had not yet got rid of formal colonial rule, said, 'we

regard it as indispensable, as an indispensable prerequisite for national independence that we should have recovery of our national resources', he had reached a level of analysis which is only now being reached by many Africans within independent Africa who had postponed the question of the recovery of economic resources as though it were not relevant to the phase of decolonization. But to someone like Amilcar Cabral, and to Samora Machel and to Agostinho Neto, and hopefully we would see to some of the Zimbabwe nationalists such as Mugabe, the question of recovery of the national resources is one of the items that has to be placed on the agenda in the present phase of the achievement of political independence. They have to organize political movements which are in themselves more participatory, more representative of the mass of the common people in their own territories, and therefore at the moment of the conquest of state power these systems will incorporate an element of participation that will allow the mass of these mobilized cadres to operate in a situation where at least there will be layers of grassroots leadership prepared with both political education as well as the arms which may be necessary to combat the deformation that takes place under neo-colonial domination.

To be concrete, let's look at the example of FRELIMO.² This was a system which did not initially conquer the state power of the Portuguese. Rather it began to create and initiate systems of political participation and political organization and civilian administration in the liberated areas which at least represent a counter to the alienation which one would find when you inherit the state structure that was left by the colonialists, so that I can assure that when one inherits the state structure of colonialism, one merely becomes a tool of that colonialism. It is not that such a structure can become the tool of independent Africans, but rather the structure becomes the determinant and the African rulers become mere participants in the same type of capitalist and authoritarian structure. And it seems to me that in those parts of Africa which are still struggling for independence, they have the opportunity – given these lessons from so-called independent Africa, from neo-colonial Africa – to deal with issues which have not at all been posed in the earlier phase.

And I conclude with a look at the independent states which are aiding the liberation movements of Southern Africa. One rough yardstick that indicates the level or extent to which an African state has been decolonized in any profound way is the extent to which that African state is capable of

entering into meaningful relations with the liberation movements. That is to say, outside of Southern Africa it is not an accident that the most conservative, the most reactionary states are the ones which have consistently failed to give any meaningful support to the liberation movements. They all start from the premise of national liberation. Yet, they are incapable of and unwilling to give support to the liberation movements. They are the ones who always drag their feet with regard to contributions to the OAU Liberation Committee.³ They are the ones that always put obstacles in the way of any of the more progressive sectors of the liberation movements. They are the ones, who around Angola, prevaricated and delayed and manipulated to try and avoid the recognition of the MPLA,⁴ and instead, to introduce the government which incorporated UNITA⁵ and the FNLA⁶ as spokesman of the imperialism interest so that one can use this almost as a touchstone, the formal independent African state. What attitude does it take towards the independent states that are struggling for formal colonialism? To them, if Southern Africa were to become independent in exactly the same way as Zambia or Kenya is independent, then that is good enough.

I spoke, for example, with a representative of the OAU Liberation Committee who said at the time – when it was clear that the Portuguese were about to be defeated – that as far as they were concerned in Mozambique, the task of the Liberation Committee was at an end. They couldn't care less to whom the Portuguese gave independence because the Portuguese were manoeuvring to try and give independence to some other organizations in Mozambique, in Guinea-Bissau and in Angola too. And this official was saying that it was okay with him. He said, 'we are not concerned with who is going to rule and how they are going to rule. We are only concerned with freedom; that is decolonization.' Such officials and such elements of the African ruling class in independent African countries would prefer to see an independence that is merely nominal, because the Mozambique that FRELIMO is striving for is something more than merely nominal independence and threatens not just the Republic of South Africa but threatens the elites of independent Zambia too. And it threatens Malawi by virtue of the fact that there are some sorts of social confirmations taking place in this state but not in their own.

Let us sharpen our awareness of what is to be done in Southern Africa, as well as what is to be done in independent Africa, by recognizing that the definition of decolonization is itself undergoing transformation – that it is becoming richer and deeper because of people’s struggles, because of the life experience of Africans in various parts of the continent; and by recognizing that, in effect, decolonization is going to be inseparable from a total strategy for liberation that encompasses a control of the material resources, which encompasses a restructuring of the society so that those who produce have the principal say in how their wealth is going to be distributed. These essentials would have to be taken into account when we consider decolonization in any part of the African continent, and indeed outside, although that is not our concern at the present time.