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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND THE
DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE IN UGANDA

by

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[Papers]

This essay is written in four parts. The first discusses
two contradictory conceptions of nationalism that flow out
of the theoretical struggles around the French revolution,
one democratic, the other anti-democratic. The section
concludes by calling for an understanding of nationalism
that takes into account its objective as well as subjective
dimensions.

The second part is a brief analysis of the objective context
of the national movement in Uganda.

Part Three returns to a theoretical discussion, this time by
way of a critique of modernisation theorists who proceed in
their analysis of the national question using two central
dichotomies, that between tribe and nation, and that between
tradition and modernity. The section argues that the
methodology of these theorists divorces the analysis of
ideology from that of political practice; in the process, it
tends to give an apologia of state ideology and an
uncritical critique of "tribalism."

The last part returns to a discussion of Uganda, this time
to focus on the national movement in two periods: that of
the 1940's and that of the 1980's. The argument is that the
defeat of the national movement in the 1940's led to a break
between nationalism and the democratic struggle on the one
hand, and the development of nationalism as a repressive
state ideology on the other. This analysis is used both to
shed light on the present period and to draw lessons for
today.

I.   Two conceptions of Nationalism

1.   In the development of nationalism, the French Revolution
represents the first major touch stone. In the ideological
struggles that prepared the groundwork for the French
Revolution and subsequently defended it, and in the
conservative reaction to it, we can trace two contradictory
conceptions of nationalism.

2.   The French Revolution, and the Enlightenment that
preceded it, is the spring board of the broadly democratic
conception of nationalism. For the French Revolution was
understood by its proponents as first and foremost a
revolution of the French *people*. It was associated with
radically new ideas, as those of citizenship and popular
sovereignty. In one fell swoop, in a revolutionary wave
that was a radical seizure and exercise of *rights*, the
French people were said to have *created* the French nation.

The French nation, it was said, was the result of a "social contract". It signified a political category of freely associating individuals.

The tradition that flowed from the French Revolution had a dual character about it. On the one hand, it stressed - as Gramsci would argue later - the *popular* basis of nationhood; on the other, it claimed that the nation was a creation, the result of an act of will. Politically democratic, methodologically this tradition tended to stress the subjective (voluntarist) nature of the development of a nation.

3. A contrary tradition is rooted in the political and ideological reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It derives on the one hand from Herder, Fichte and the German Romantics, and on the other from Edmund Burke and the reaction in England. It denied the rational and implicitly contractual basis of nationalism. Instead, it asserted that national identity has an inherited and traditional character; it is rooted in the genius of a people and in their unique culture and tradition. Nations are not created; instead, they wake up or are brought to life. Instead of a contractual, it advanced an *organic* conception of nationalism.[1]. Politically anti-democratic, methodologically it tended to stress the objective aspect of the development of national movements.

A Methodological Question

4. The issue that I wish to focus on at the outset is the *methodological* one: that of the relationship between the objective and the subjective aspects in the development of national movements. I shall return to the political question, that of the relation between nationalism and democracy, in a subsequent section.

5. Both conceptions outlined above contain an aspect that corresponds to the historical reality of nationalist movements. The German Romantics were correct in emphasizing the *historical* character of the development of a nation, but not in imputing to the nation a natural and an inevitable character. Correspondingly, the theorists of the Enlightenment and the French revolution rightly underlined the *active* and the *subjective* aspect in the development of a nation, but they were off the mark to the extent they

1. The organic conception of nationalism has tended to be put forth by diverse political tendencies, from the fascists in Western Europe to the populists in eastern Europe. While the former were acutely hostile to the left, the latter were not always so.

abstracted from the historical process that is the formation
of a nation. In other words, the nation is a historical but
not a residual category; it is formed as the result of a
process, not invented as an act of will. This historical
process must be seen as a struggle, both ideological and
political. While it unfolds within a changing objective
context and is shaped by it, in no sense is this process of
nation formation inevitable. Without analysing the
relationship between the objective and the subjective
aspects of this process, it is not possible to grasp the
significance of "the national question" in any epoch.

6. If we now turn to the major writings on nationalism, and
try to see how these understand the relation between
objective and subjective factors in the development of
nationalism, we shall find different and even contradictory
trends. I shall examine - briefly - first the academic
tradition in universities, and then the Marxist tradition
flowing out of the experience of major social movements.

The Academic Tradition

7. The academic tradition has been greatly influenced by
the dichotomous analysis of the origins of nationalism in
the French Revolution and the German Romantic reaction to it
- one rational, the other organic - put forth by Hans Kohn
in his voluminous study in the 1940's.[2] From hereon, it is
possible to identify major and influential academic
writings, in each case putting primary emphasis on the
subjective or the objective aspect, in part depending on
whether the focus is on nationalism as an ideology or as a
movement.

8. The focus on nationalism as an ideology is clearest in
the influential study by Elie Kedourie in 1960.[3] Elie
kedourie, Nationalism, London, Hutchinson, 1960. He sees
nationalism as a doctrine 'invented' in Europe at the
beginning of the 19th century. The emphasis is thus on the
central role of the nationalist intelligentsia, on its
retrospective rewriting of nationalist history and in
subsequently presenting the very process of nation formation
as "the awakening of sleeping nations." While the stress on
subjectivity, and on the role of the nationalist
intelligentsia, is clearly of importance, by itself this
emphasis tends to be partial, missing the objective context
of the very development of nationalism as a movement.

2. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York, macmillan,
1944.
3 Elie kedourie, *Nationalism*, London, Hutchinson, 1960.

9.   The foous on the objective context, is most clearly
brought out in another influential academic study, that by
Karl Deutsch on <u>Nationalism and Social Communication</u>.[4]   In
his conception of 'social communication', Deutsch puts his
finger on the need to analyse the more fundamental processes
of social and economic change in which the very prooess of
nation formation is rooted - though he does not do so
himself with any satisfaction.

The Marxist Tradition

10.   The dominant conception within the Marxist tradition
has been set by the writings of Stalin on the national
question.   Stalin's major contribution was to underline the
historical character of the objective context of the
development of national movements. Briefly put, he argued
that nationalism can not be understood except in the context
of the development of capitalism. For it is the development
of capitalism that generalises commodity production, oreates
national markets, dissolves age-old communities established
on the basis of 'natural' affinities in the crucible of this
common market, and thus creates the objective need for a
national state to consolidate the growing national market in
the interest of the class that controls or has aspirations
to control that market: the national bourgeoisie.

The weakness of Stalin's analysis, on the other hand, was to
underplay the subjective aspect in the historical process of
nation formation.   His preoccupation with defining a nation
- as "a histtorically evolved, stable community of language.
territory, economic life, and psychological makeup
manifested in a community of culture"[5] - both tended to
assume that a nation existed before "coming to life" and
tended to provide some sort of a checklist of what was a
nation and what unfortunately was not.   It, in other words,
tended to close the historical prooess on the basis of
developments in a single historical epoch, that of rising
capitalism in Europe.

11.   The anti-dote to Stalin in the Marxist tradition can be
found in the writings of Gramsci and Mao.

In his analysis of the failure of the Italian bourgeoisie in
constructing an Italian nation, Gramsci gave full play to

4   Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*,
M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1966
5 Joseph Stalin, "marxism and the national Question," in
Bruce Franklin ed., *Stalin: major Theoretical Writings*,
1905-52, Croom Helm, London, 1973.

the subjective aspect.[6] Gramsci's emphasis on the
ideological is clear from his conception of the state as
"coercion plus hegemony" and the struggle for power as
"domination plus moral-intellectual leadership". He thus
underlined the role of, intellectuals, but not in a social
and historical vacuum, rather as *organic* to particular
classes; and he went on to underline their historical
significance, mainly by asking whether the intellectuals
were organic to a fundamental social class with a *national*
capacity for social transformation.

Similarly, the significance of the subjective aspect,
alongside the objective, is clearly underlined in Mao's
writings on the nature of the Chinese revolution.[7] Two
ideas of Mao are of importance in this context. First is
his general thesis - one of particular importance in the
African context - that in the case of colonies and semi-
colonies, nation formation and national liberation are two
inter-connected aspects of a single process; in other words,
the nation does not necessarily exist first and then become
the basis of a national movement. And secondly, his
insistence on the inter-connection between the national and
the social (class) question. Thus, Mao analysed classes in
Chinese society not simply on the basis of social relations
but also on the basis of the question of national
liberation; one only needs, for instance, to think of the by
now famous distinction drawn by Mao between the 'compradore'
and the 'national' bourgeoisie.

Sum-Up

12. This brief methodological overview, I hope, is a
sufficient backdrop to dilineating the central questions one
may focus on so as to be able to analyse comprehensively the
question of nationalism in the specific context of
contemporary Africa. In other words, it is time to give
concrete content to the objective and subjective dimensions
of this process.

13. By the *objective* dimension, I mean those factors which
together form the overall context within which a national
movement develops. Though these factors tend to influence
and shape the development of the movement, their very
existence is independent of the consciousness or the
activity of that movement. It seems to me that three issues

6. See carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the
Dilemmas of Western Marxism*, Southend Press, Boston, 1984,
pps. 159-62, 223-27
7 Mao Tse-Tung, "The Chinese revolution and the Chinese
Communist Party," and "On New Democracy," in *Selected Works*,
vol. 2, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1967.

merit particular attention here. The first is that of the
uneven level of social development of the various
nationalities that were brought within the fold of state
boundaries carved out at the onset of colonialism, and in
some cases even on the eve of independence.[8] The second
issue concerns the development of commodity production and
its social impact. And the third is that of the role of the
state and, once again, its social impact. The first and the
last questions are of particular significance for the
contemporary African context for a number of reasons. It is
well known that in our case the relationship between state
and society, as it were, stood on its head with the
beginning of colonialism. In most of the continent, state
boundaries bore little relationship to the history of social
development. The history of colonialism, one may say,
begins with the implantation of a bourgeois-colonial state
on a more or less arbitrary conglomeration of pre-bourgeois
societies and unfolds as an attempt by this state to
transform the society from above. Or, as Cabral once wrote,
"in the colonial period, it is the colonial state which
commands history."[9]

14. By the subjective dimension, I mean those factors which
give expression to the will of the movement, both as
consciousness and as activity. In this case, we may
delineate two key issues: one political, the other
ideological. For if the nation is to be understood as a
historical formation, it must then be analysed as the
product of historical struggles, both ideological and
political. In other words, it must be understood as the
outcome of both a political struggle waged by a coalition of
social classes in the course of which a nationalist *movement*
is forged, and an ideological struggle waged by an
associated intelligentsia whose fruit is the development and
spread of a nationalist *ideology* that cements and gives
coherence to the movement. The first concerns the analysis
of nationalism as a social movement, as a welding together
of various social classes; the second, its analysis as an
ideology, as the language in which this movement understands
itself and puts forth its demands to all other social
forces.

Now, though I do not deny the significance of the analysis
of nationalist ideology and of the intelligentsia that
produces it, I shall argue later that in the literature on
Africa there has been undue emphasis on the ideological

8 Though it is commonly said that Africa was carved out
like a cake at the Berlin Conference, it should not be
forgotten that a large number of mini-states in Africa were
the product of the division of various colonial federations
on the eve of independence.
9 Amilcar Cabral, "The Weapon of Theory," in *Revolution in
Guinea*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1969.

aspect at the expense of the political aspect. The
tendency,.in other words, has been to detach the analysis of
the ideology of a movement (or a state) from the analysis of
its practice, and therefore to present the self-description
of a movement (or a state) as its explanation and *raison
d'etre*. The result, as we shall see, is either an
unoritical apologia or an uncritical critique.

II. The Objective Context of Nation Formation: Uganda

15. The overall context of the development of a national
consciousness and a national movement includes social,
economic and political dimensions.

The Social

16. The boundaries of the Ugandan state drawn at
independence included within its parameter not only class-
divided nationalities but also tribes in which the
development of classes was at most embryonic. It is not
accidental that the former tended to become the focal point
of raw material production for export; after all, this was
where the oolonial state could most easily find local allies
from amongst the ranks of the pre-colonial ruling classes
and most effectively implant the policy of indirect rule. On
the other hand, it was amongst the latter, the tribal
societies - where local allies were most difficult to find
and popular resistance the most difficult to quell - that
commodity production advanced the slowest and labour reserve
polioies were most likely to be practiced.

The point is that the colonial state at no point wrote on a
blank slate. To understand the social and economic history
of the colonial period, it is necessary to take into account
not only the interests that crystallised in the organisation
of the colonial state, but also the forces that had
crystallised in the various tribes and nationalities that
were the target of colonial state policy.

There is also a second point here. True, the social
development of the tribes and nationalities that were
brought into the fold of colonial Uganda was uneven. But it
is also true that colonial policy built on and further
accentuated this unevenness. Thus, the uneven character of
social development amongst the nationalities oomprising
Uganda - for no tribe existed by the end of the colonial
period - was greater at the end of colonialism than it was
at its outset.

Beoause the social development of nationalities tended to be extremely uneven, the social composition of the national movement - as it developed - tended to differ from one nationality to another. In some cases, it could find support or sympathy amongst all classes within the nationality; but in other nationalities, however, it could find indifference or even hostility amongst classes with clearly defined pro-colonial interests, for example, Indian compradores or Baganda landlords. [10]

The Economic

17. The overall context of the development of a national movement and a national consciousness also includes the dimension of political economy. From this point of view, it is necessary to emphasize the *contradictory* character of economic processes unleashed in the colonial period. On the one hand, the spread of commodity production within the territory demarcated by the colonial state gave rise to a commodity-producing peasantry that could be rallied around common demands, such as those for higher prices and for freedom of association for marketing purposes. At the same time, the middle class that serviced commodity exchange and were functionaries of the colonial state could also be rallied around common demands for the 'indeginisation' or 'Africanisation' of trade and the civil service.

18. On the other hand, the nature of the colonial economy also put obstacles in the path of a developing national movement. The first major obstacle derived from the pivotal significance of export-import in the colonial economy. This meant that every new step in the development of the commodity economy was one further step towards disintegrating and fragmenting the economy, rather than towards integrating it as a national economy.

Take the example of the historically developing relations between Lango on the one hand and Buganda, Bunyoro and

10 It is interesting that, in his analysis of the class structure in Guinea Bissau, Amilcar cabral moves from one nationality to another, analysing the character of social development of each, the nature of classes that sprang from this concrete history, and only then their attitude to the national movement and the colonial state. See, Amilacar Cabral, "A Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea Bissau," in *Ibid*. The only example I know in academic analysis of an attempt to examine seriously the social development of various nationalities comprising the nation-in-formation, with a view to then understand the class structure of both, is by Richard Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1977.

Busoga on the other. By the onset of the colonial period, all these nationalities were involved in the planned production of surpluses for exchange in the expanding regional market. By 1917-18, the export of simsim from Lango to regional markets was estimated at 1500 tons a year, with an additional 400 tons exported to the world market.[11] In return, the Langi imported salt, ironware and cattle from these regional markets. But with the expansion of the colonial export-import economy, in only a decade, the regional export of simsim was reduced to a few tons, and was replaced by the production of cotton for export to the world market. By 1931, no less than 57% of Uganda's cotton crop was grown in the two districts of Lango and Teso; correspondingly, both ironware and salt were now also imported from overseas.

The point is that the fragmented character of growing markets - organised around the nexus of export-import - had the effect of pulling different nationalities (whose boundaries tended to coincide with that of different markets) away from each other, rather than that of drawing them into the framework of a single, integrated and national economy. Integration of markets would have created the basis of an inter-dependendence of nationalities in their economic intercourse; lack of it created a fragmented society.

19. The second major obstacle in the way of a developing national movement was that the spread of commodity production was *uneven*. As a result, the developing national movement - with its social basis in the commodity-producing peasantry - had also to be uneven. The national movement thus developed on the basis of an uneven mobilisation, moving into action the peasantry of certain nationalities more so than of others. Thus, the UNC organised most successfully in the coffee (Buganda) and cotton (Lango, Teso, Busoga) belts, but not really elsewhere in the country. And then, given the fragmented character of the economy underlined in the paragraphs above, even this unity was more akin to a coalition which could withstand only minimal stresses and strains before it broke up.

The Political

20. Central to political analysis is the character and impact of state policy.

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11 John Tosh, "Lango Agriculture During the Early Colonial Period: Land and labour in a Cah-Crop Economy," *Journal of African History*, xix, 3(1978), pps. 427-28

The sectarian basis for the recruitment of state
functionaries, in Uganda as in other colonies, is well
known. Thus, if commodity production was concentrated
amongst nationalities in one region (the South) of the
country, the recruitment of personnel for the repressive
organs was organised in another region (the North) of the
country. Likewise, the development of schools was
concentrated where commodity production was rooted; and
these nationalities therefore became the main source of
functionaries for state administration.

21. In Uganda, the colonial division of labour amongst the
nationalities was 'always' that 'the North' provided the
major personnel for the repressive organs of the state and
the political leadership of successive governments; 'the
South', on the other hand, provided the bulk of the business
class and the main personnel for the administrative organs
of the state. The 'Northern' middle class, relatively
weaker than its 'Southern' counterpart, considered its
access to political structures vital for personal
advancement. And so long as these state connections
obtained, its preference for a centralised over a
decentralised state structure – and for a 'nationalised'
over an 'Africanised' economy – obtained.

22. From this point of view, then, the coming to power of
the NRA in 1986 marks a dramatic rupture in the historical
division of labour between nationalities. For the first
time in the history of Uganda, the Southern middle and
propertied classes control business, the repressive and the
administrative machinary of the state, and the political
machinary of government. No wonder the 'Northern' middle
class is in a deep crisis. No wonder this same middle
class, historically one of the most avid champions of a
'united' Uganda is today more open to the call of
nationality-bound organisations than ever before.

Sum-Up

23. Throughout this section, I have been using the terms
nation and nationality freely and without explanation. At
one point, however, the concept of nation was qualified – in
our concrete historical context – as that of nation-in-
formation.

In my opinion, the national question in a colony or a neo-
colony has a dual character, external and internal, which
are obviously inter-connected. Externally, the content of
the national question is that of imperialist oppression and
exploitation; internally, it is that of the relation between
nationalities within the country.

By the concept nation, I mean the nation-in-formation. By the national movement, I do not mean any particular empirical movement but really a historical process which may be organisationally and empirically brought forward by a number of concrete movements at different points in time. After all, my central point in this essay is that the further development of the national movement, of the process nation-in-formation, requires a struggle on two fronts, anti-imperialist and democratic. Together, these come to grips with the dual character of the national question in our case.

24. The point I wish to stress by way of concluding this section is that, given the objective context of a colonial and a neo-colonial economy and state organisation, even the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist national movement tends to begin and unfold as a movement of particular nationalities – those most drawn into the crucible of commodity production and exchange, and the management of state affairs – and not of others. The question then is: What is it that tells apart a national movement from a movement of particular nationalities, particularly if the former tends to unfold apparently as a movement of nationalities? Or, to put the question even more starkly, since all these movements must have a social basis in the peasantry of one nationality or another, which of these is historically progressive, and which is not? And further, to preempt my discussion in the next section, where does the answer lie principally, in the analysis of the ideology of these movements or in their political practice?

III. The Ideological Character of the Modernisation Perspective

25. In his study of <u>Orientalism</u>,[12] Edward Said disects – eloquently and passionately – the European discourse on 'the Orient' over the centuries of expansionism beginning with the era of mercantalism. 'The Orient', he says, was constituted as 'the Other', as what Europe was not, but still defined in Europe's own image. It was the not-subject, without initiative, without creativity, and indeed without a living history. Orientalism, on the other hand, as a set of institutions that produced a body of knowledge of 'the Orient', was "all aggression, activity, judgement, will-to-truth and knowledge." (p.204) Indeed, it was a discourse of acquisition and domestication, an example of knowledge as power and power as knowledge.

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12 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979.

26. In his study of the "Africanist Discourse in French",
Christopher Miller[13] takes as his point of departure Said's
dissection of Orientalism. The Orient, argues Miller, was
reconstructed as an "inferior civilisation"; but at least as
a civilisation. Africa, on the other hand, was a "blank
darkness", "an empty slate written on by outsiders". It was
not even the Other, but simply a null.

27. The most blatant and brazen expressions, the quotable
quotes, of such a will-to-knowledge may no longer be as
numerous. But the discourse constructed in the process,
whose method and terminology is the very embodiment of this
will-to-domesticate, still abounds. It is thus no surprise
that the thrust of social science analysis of Africa still
remains strongly anti-historical, and just as strongly
anthropological.

Tribe/Nation

28. The discourse of Africanist social science has been
constructed around two dichotomies: tribe/nation and
tradition/modernity. It has been an accepted practice to
employ the concept 'tribe' for every ethnic group in Africa.
The implicit connotation that the group referred to has a
'premordial' character goes alongside a deafening silence as
regards the social history of the group. The entire history
of the spread of commodity production and exchange, of the
associated development of a division of labour and of
classes with distinct and at times even contradictory
interests, and of social movements anchored in the specific
interests of distinct classes -- all this is easily and
quickly glossed over.

In this essay, I have chosen to use the concept of
'nationality' in preference to that of 'tribe'. The reason
is simple. If one aims at underlining the development of a
division of labour and of classes inside ethnic groups, it
is better to avoid a term which historically has tended to
connote a relatively undifferentiated ethnic group.

29. The tribe/nation dichotomy employed in much of
contemporary literature should also be viewed in the context
of the overall methodological thrust of these analysts.
Broadly speaking, the orientation is that of modernisation
theory, with its rigid demarcation between the 'modern' and
the 'traditional.' The nation is put forth as a 'modern'
political category, the tribe as a 'traditional' one.

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13 Christopher Miller , *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse
in French*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985,
p. 17.

A movement was characterised as 'tribal' or as 'nationalist'
depending on two factors: first the language in which its
demands were articulated, and second, the geographical
parameters within which it organised. Put in the unilinear
evolutionist framework of modernisation theory, 'tribalism'
was defined as pre-modern and backward, either hindering or
at best preparing the ground for modern 'nationalist'
movements. Thus, in one influential instance, 'tribal'
movements were seen as examples of 'primary' resistance and
'nationalist' movements as those of 'secondary' resistance,
the latter seen as the outcome of the former![14]

The political conclusion of such a perspective is worth
noting: that national movements are modern and therefore
historically progressive (or legitimate), and that tribal
movements are pre-modern and therefore historically not
progressive.

Tradition/Modernity

30. What is wrong with such an analysis and such a
conclusion? My first premise is that the dichotomy
tradition/modernity is itself ideological in that it tends
to ossify tradition and render it ahistorical and lifeless.
Historical studies of "tradition" have shown that there is
no simple, unilinear, unproblematic carry over of tradition
from one generation to another. Neither is tradition a
single universal; it is, on the other hand, contradictory.
What constitutes tradition and what does not is the stuff of
sharp social struggles. Tradition is born and reproduced
through confrontation. "Tradition is born in confrontation
with ... aggression," argues a leading Arab intellectual,[15]
"Slavism, *brahmo samaj*, the reinterpretation of Confucius by
Kang Yu-Wei, salafiyya - these responses are doubtless
different but nonetheless display the same structure." As
Michael Gilsnan[16] has shown with admirable clarity and
subtlety in his study of various forms of Islam, "one of the
single most important elements in what is often called

14 T.O. Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary' Resistance
Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central
Africa," Parts 1 and 2, *Journal of African History*, ix, 3-4,
1968; for further discussion on this and related issues,
see, Mahmood Mamdani, Thandika Mkandawire and Wamba-Dia-
Wamba,"Social Movements, Social Transformation and the
Struggle for Democracy in Africa," CODESRIA, mimeo, Dakar,
Senegal, 1987.
15 Abdullah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*,
University of california Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1976,
p. 87
16 Michael Gilsnan, Recognising Islam, Croom Helm, London,
1982, p. 15

Islamic fundamentalism is precisely this struggle over the
definition of what is the tradition. ... Suoh processes ...
have been worldwide in the past two centuries, as capitalism
has spread, and are by no means confined to Islamic
communities."

In other words, "tradition" is as modern as "modernity"!

31. My second premise is that the analysis of ideology can
not be separated from that of politics. Since nationalities
comprise different classes, social movements anchored in
distinct nationalities must be concretely analysed from the
point of view of which classes they organise and the demands
they put forth. This means that we must go beyond the
simple identification of the language in which a movement
puts forth its demands (whether traditional or religious);[17]
just as we must go beyond asking simply whether a movement
comprises certain nationalities or whether it indeed brings
under its fold the bulk of the nationalities within the
country. It is, in my opinion, far more important to
analyse the practice of a movement, including the objectives
around which it is organised and therefore the interests it
hopes to realise.

Nationalism and Democracy

32. To underline this issue, it is necessary to return to
the two conceptions of nationalism deriving from the time of
the French Revolution, but this time to highlight their
respective political orientation, not to contrast their
methodological perspectives.

The conception of nationalism put forth by the Enlightenment
and crystallising in the course of the French revolution -
unlike that advanced by Edmund Burke and the German
Romantics - was profoundly democratic. After all, the
French Revolutionaries put their accent on the *popular*
character of the nation. And also after all, the movements
that were to put the greatest emphasis on the organio

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17 The tendency to take the ideology, the self-description,
of a movement or a state as key to the understanding of its
political character is not confined to modernisation
theorists. The only difference is that the subject matter
in this case are the radical states, those with officially
Socialist, Marxist or Marxist-Leninist ideologies. See, for
example, the writings of John Saul over the past decade or
so about "socialism" in various countries. In each case,
the premise is that socialism is being built in a particular
country because that is the state ideology. The essay then
goes on to detail "the problems of building socialism" in
that particular country!

conception of nationalism inherited from the German
Romantics - the fascist movements of Western Europe - ended
up divoroing nationalism from democracy.

33.   It is to the demooratic tradition of nationalism that I
wish to return in my evaluation of the 'national question'
in the Ugandan oontext.   It is a tradition which puts the
'national question' in the context of the question of
democracy, and makes the analysis of the former contingent
on its analysis of the latter.   It is a tradition best
carried forth in the writings of Lenin, of Gramsci and of
Mao.

It was Lenin who drew a clear distinction between "the
nationalism of the oppressor" and the "nationalism of the
oppressed."

It was Gramsci who developed the category of the "national
popular" and argued that popular democratic struggles must
be included within the struggle for socialism, pointing out
the contrast between Italy where 'nation' had become
separated from the 'people' unlike France of the
Revolution.[18]

And finally, it was Mao who argued that the road to
internationalism, in the case of the oppressed nations, lies
through the intermediate stage of national liberation, but a
liberation which must be in the context of a struggle for a
"new democracy".

34.   My point is simple.   Nationalist movements are of a
contradictory character.   They can neither be universally
supported nor universally opposed.   To determine our
standpoint in relation to a particular movement, it is
necessary to grasp its political and social content.   It is
the question of political practice, of objectives/interests
- and not that of ideology divorced from a political
analysis - that is far more likely to reveal the sooial and
political character and significance of a movement.   Broadly
speaking, one can distinguish a movement for *rights* from a
movement for the realisation or consolidation of *privileges.*
Or, to put it differently, a movement that puts forth the
interests of the oppressed classes - whether within a
national or nationality framework - can be distinguished
from one that advances the interests of the oppressor
classes, whatever its framework.   The former is historically
progressive, the latter is not.

35.   To take an example.   The debate inside Kenyan
histeriography about the character of Mau Mau has posed the
question as to whether it was progressive or not.   This

18 See Ronaldo Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and
Nationalism*, Zed Press, London, 1986, p. 169.

debate has turned on the question of whether Mau Mau was a
movement of particular nationalities (the Gikuyu, the Embu.
the Meru) that were numerically a minority inside Kenya, and
therefore whether it can be conferred the title of a
national movement, and therefore the badge of historical
legitimacy.

First of all, as argued above, one must expect that given
the uneven character of the colonial economy, it should not
be surprising to find the origin of a national movement in
the movement of particular nationalities. The objective
fact was that the forcible alienation of land - to which Mau
Mau was a political and social response - affected certain
nationalities more so than others. In this context, it is
significant that the struggle of the Mau Mau was for "land
and freedom". In other words, Mau Mau was a movement for
rights, not for *privileges*.

All of this, however, is not to say that the *ideology* of Mau
Mau could not at another historical juncture become the
language of a movement seeking *privileges* for property-
owning or property-aspiring classes amongst the same
nationalities!

IV.   The National Question in Uganda: Some Ideological and Political Aspects

36.   The high point of the national struggle in the colonial
period was in the years following the Second World War.   A
tide which had peaked towards the middle of the 40's was at
a low ebb by the middle of the 50's.   Before trying to look
at the contemporary situation, it is instructive to return
to that decade and draw certain lessons.

37.   The organisations that sprung up in the 40's were
distinguished by two features, compared to those of the
preceding decade.   One, these organisations had a *popular*
character.   The middle class intelligentsia that organised
in the 30's - as Young Men of Buganda, of Toro, of Busoga,
eto. - seldom bothered to go beyond the narrow confines of
their own olass, either in the demands they put forth or in
their organisational initiatives.   This was the root cause
of their failure.   The intelligentsia that organised in the
40's, on the other hand, consciously reached out to organise
popular classes, peasants and workers, by putting forth
popular and democratic demands through organised forms like
cooperatives and trade unions.

Secondly, the wave of popular protest that culminated in the
general strike and peasant uprisings of 1945 and 1949
displayed a variety of organised forms.   The struggle for
democracy was not confined to explicitly political

organisations. It found expression in diverse organisations,
as far apart as cooperatives and trade unions on the one
hand and religious bodies like the African Hellenic Church
on the other. The form of an activity did not automatically
define its content. For example, political activity inside
the Church was not necessarily secteriah; to the extent it
confronted the pro-colonial and anti-democratic practice of
the Church establishment, there took place a democratic
struggle inside religious organisations.

And thirdly, as the democratic struggle advanced, it pitted
the popular classes inside a nationality against those
interests which constituted the social base of the colonial
state within the same nationality. The most dramatic
illustration of this was of course in 1945 and 1949, when
peasants in Buganda razed to the ground houses of Baganda
landlord-chiefs. In other words, the further the democratic
struggle advanced, the more it tended to dissolve the unity
of all classes on a nationality basis, and the more it
tended to reconstruct a unity of popular classes within that
nationality on a democratic basis.

38. It is important to understand that this movement was
not defeated by the colonial state through simply the force
of arms. Far more important was the fact that the colonial
state was able to seize the initiative, on both the
ideological and the political fronts. Why was it able to do
this and what was its initiative?

39. The colonial state was able to seize the initiative for
two major reasons. The first stemmed from the fact of the
uneven develbpment of the colonial political economy: that
the national movement was rooted mainly in the small working
class of the towns and in the commodity-producing peasantry.
In other words, the base of the anti-colonial and the
democratic struggle tended to be those nationalities most
drawn into the crucible of commodity production and
exchange, not those least drawn into it. This is why the
colonial state was able to present the national movement
ideologically as a movement of certain nationalities, and
therefore a threat to other nationalities. (We may note in
passing that the Obote II regime tried to present the armed
struggle in the Luwero Traingle in 1981-85 in a similar
fashion to the rest of the nationalities in Uganda.) It
thus tried to present a struggle for *rights* by popular
classes within certain nationalities as a demand for
privileges by all classes within these nationalities.

40. The second reason why the colonial state was
successfully able to seize the initiative was due to the
weakness of the democratic movement itself. The democratic
movement was an allaince of various classes, with interests
that coincided up to a point and diverged thereafter. It
was a movement whose *popular* character had yet to be

consolidated in organisational terms. It was thus a
movement which had yet to develop organisational forms
whereby the base could hold accountable its leadership. It
was a movement whose middle class leadership was not only
susceptible to being woed through partial concessions by the
oolonial state, but could also do so at the expense of the
popular classes.

The cajoling and capitulation of this middle class
leadership was the sum and substance of the reform programme
launched by the colonial state in the aftermath of the 1949
peasant uprising and workers' strike. The purpose of this
political initiative was two-fold: simulteneously to
demobilise the popular classes in the advancing national
democratic movement and to mobilise the property-aspiring
strata both inside and outside that movement.

Let us first look at how the popular classes were
demobilised by the reforms.[19] The legislation of the late
40's and the early 50's that was designed to legalise
cooperatives and trade unions at the same time depoliticised
these organisations. Both were brought under the scrutiny
of the state, reorganised in a bureaucratic (rather than
democratic) fashion, put under the control of a middle class
leadership for whom these organisations became a new-found
vehicle for career advancement and the accumulation of
wealth. From then on, cooperatives and trade unions were
less and less vehicles that advanced the interests of
peasants and workers, more and more organisations that
controlled the activity of these popular classes.

At the same time, the colonial state implemented yet another
series of reforms. Directed specifically at the property-
aspiring middle class, its sum and substance was
"Africanisation", of trade and the civil service in the
main.

In the final analysis, the success of these reforms hinged
on detaching the national demands of the movement from its
democratic demands, and then giving the former the narrowest
possible content: i.e., anti-colonialism rather than anti-
imperialism. To succeed, the reforms had to promise that
independence would be 'granted', and at that, soon. Without
this, it would not be possible to convince the property-
aspiring middle class that it was about 'to arrive'; that
the question of the hour was now an internal question. How
were the fruits of the reform to be distributed amongst the
middle class? The more this middle class divided and
organised on a fractional basis, each trying to organise
popular classes of its nationality for political activity

19 For a detailed analysis of this question, see, Mahmood
mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, Heinamann,
London, 1976, chapter 7.

under its own leadership, the more the struggle for *rights* of the popular classes gave way to a jockying for *privileges* amongst middle class-led coalitions, organised variously, on either a nationality or a religious or a regional basis.

41.   The divorce between nationalism and democracy was consolidated in the period after independence. It is in this period that nationalism emerged as a *state* ideology. At first cut off from its popular base and later turning hostile to any demands for democracy, middle class nationalism became no more than a form of *statism*.

Nationalism as a state ideology represented not only a divorce of nationalism from democracy but ultimately an opposition of that specific form of nationalism to democracy. This is clear from the experience of a number of 'radical' African states: Uganda under Obote I, Nkrumah, Tanzania, to take but a few examples.[20]   In each of these experiences, the counter-position of state nationalism and democracy was evident time and again. In the process, nationalism turned into a language of state repression. The demand for national unity became in practice no more than an attempt to legitimise state control in all its forms. Correspondingly, official denunciation of "secterianism" and "tribalism" turned into so many attempts to discredit any demands for democracy, i.e., the freedom to organise outside and independently of the state.

And finally, we may note that the stifling of democracy in the name of nationalism and national unity tended to give rise to a double phenomenon. On the one hand, governmental power was increasingly exercised in the interest of - and was seen to be an expression of - the *privileges* of the property-owning or aspiring classes and strata of the nationalities 'in power'. On the other hand, this encouraged the development of oppositional movements also based on nationality (or religious) affiliation, and also crystallising the leadership of property-owning or aspiring classes and strata within the nationalities 'out of power'.

The NRA Experience

42.   The NRA experience can be divided into two periods: 1981-85, the period of oppositional activity; and 1986 onwards, the period beginning with the capture of state power.

43.   From the point of view of the question of nationalities and the national struggle, the experience of the NRA from 1981 to 1985 is remarkable for a number of reasons. Most

20 See Jitendra Mohan, "Nkrurumah and Nkrumanism," *Socialist* register, 1967; reprinted in Forward, vol. 9, no. 1, 1987, Kampala.

obvious was the success of the NRA in forging an allaince of
popular classes cutting across nationalities, some of which
had even apparantly hostile relations in the immediate past.
The first phase of the armed struggle successfully
established a peasant base in Buganda, but under a
leadership which substantially came from outside Buganda.
The second phase expanded this peasant base from Buganda to
Bunyoro, establishing an allaince between nationalities
whose dominant classes had been at loggerheads for most of
this century.

In another article,[21] I have tried to argue that its success
in organising the peasantry of diverse nationalities needs
to be traced to the democratic component of the struggle
waged by the NRA. Key to the social programme of the NRA
was not the replacement of one set of state agents by
another set, but in fact their replacement by popularly
elected organs, called Resistance Committees. In other
words, just as with the national movement of the 40's, key
to winning over the support of the peasantry of various
nationalities from its 'traditional' state-connected
leadership was the successful pursuit of a democratic
struggle inside each nationality.

From the point of view of this same question, that of
nationalities and the national struggle, the weak point of
the NRA's struggle was that its organised base was
restricted to certain nationalities by the time it took
power in 1986. Most importantly, it lacked an organised
base - though it did have popular sympathy - amongst
nationalities on the other side of the Nile.

Most observers seem to agree that in the period since, these
popular sympathies have not been translated into popular
organisation and a social base amongst the popular classes
of these nationalities. On the contrary, it would seem that
popular sympathies have tended to erode rather than to be
consolidated. The question is: why?

In what follows, my basic premise is that the answer can
only be found in the zigzag nature of the relationship of
the NRA to the democratic struggle. In order to underline
the tentative nature of the discussion which follows, I
shall proceed by way of posing a series of questions, each
of which is intended to open up a field of inquiry, rather
than by presenting any definitive answer to the question I
have posed above.

44. From the moment the NRA took power, a contradiction
emerged that had not existed before. Can the struggle for
democracy be waged from the position of state power? If the

21 Mahmood Mamdani, "Background to Takeover of State Power
by NRA," Forward, vol. 8, nos. 1 and 2, 1986, Kampala

cutting edge of the democratic struggle is the establishment
of popular democratic organs – Resistance Committees – is it
possible for the state power to take the initiative in
establishing these committees, the very reason for whose
existence is to *resist* any encroachment on their rights by
officials of the same state power? Or, to put it in a
nutshell, can the object of a struggle be its subject too?

And yet, one could argue that this contradiction was still
embryonic in January, 1986, because the NRA could not be
said to have 'taken power' in a definitive sense at that
time. What the NRA did destroy was the neo-colonial
repressive machinary. What it had yet to touch was the
remaining machinary of the neo-colonial state: the civil
service and the judiciary. This aspect of the struggle
would be particularly complicated for two reasons: one, in
the concrete conditions of Uganda, it can be said that
almost every regime since independence has come and gone
with its army. The pillar of the neo-colonial state that
has remained firm since colonialism has not been its
repressive but its administrative organ, complemented by the
judiciary. The consciousness of this historical fact has
tended to give the Ugandan civil service and judiciary a
measure of confidence and arrogance in their relations with
regimes. For, according to the former, the latter come and
go while they alone guarantee a semblence of stability and
continuity to the state.

Secondly, the struggle against the administrative and the
judicial organs of the state can not be waged using arms.
It was bound to be a far more complicated and a far more
political struggle. To be successful, it also had to be a
profoundly democratic struggle, since to be successful it
would require the organisation of those popular classes who
had historically borne the brunt of the injustice meted out
by this same civil service and judiciary.

For these very reasons, it is clear that the outcome of the
struggle could not be a foregone conclusion in 1986. One
could, and many did, ask: Was the NRA going to transform the
neo-colonial civil service and judiciary, or was it going to
be swallowed up by the neo-colonial state leading to the
consolidation of the latter?

45. To return to the questions I posed above, it must be
clearly stated that a democratic struggle can not be waged
from the position of state power. On the other hand, if the
NRA expected to wage it (the struggle for "fundamental
changes"), it could only be because it was not yet in
control of state power; in fact, after January 1986, the
contention for state power intensified, and the focus of
this contention shifted to the very organs of the state that
still remained intact: the civil service and the judiciary.

Under these conditions, for the democratic struggle to be waged successfully - this time from above and from below - three issues assumed vital significance. The first two concern the relation between the Movement and the state on the one hand, and popular democratic organs and the state on the other; whereas the third concerns the advance of the democratic struggle into areas where the NRA had no organised base by the time it took power, i.e., areas "on the other side of the Nile". I shall outline them below, once again in the form of questions rather than answers.

46. The waging of a democratic struggle from above is possible only under very special conditions: that is, when the summit is not cohesive but divided with various forces in contention. And yet, such a struggle can not be waged simply from positions of state authority. It requires the existence of a political organisation anchored in some sector of the popular classes and independent of the state. Thus the question of the NRM.

From available information, it would seem that in the armed struggle waged from 1981-86, there did not exist a political cadre separate from the military cadre. Except in places where there was no armed struggle - that is, in governemt-controlled parts of the country where an underground functioned and in the external wing - the political cadre and the military cadre were one and the same. This is why in January 1986 the NRM did not exist except at the summit, as a Secretariat, but without any significant cadre.

Its experience in trying to create cadres through 'politicisation' in the cadre school has gone through two phases. In the first phase, the political school admitted anyone and everyone who volunteered. The result was a rush of lumpen and opportunist elements who expected to become the security personnel of the new regime. This realisation was partly behind a change in admission policy in the second phase. Then, admission was in the main compulsory; its targets being primarily various categories of state functionaries.

One would have expected, on the other hand, that a democratic movement would look for its political cadre in the cadre thrown up by the democratic struggle of the popular classes and the intelligentsia, i.e., in peasant struggles, workers' strikes, student struggles, etc. - and not in the functionaries of the neo-colonial state, without any discrimination whatsoever. The question that arises as a result is: to what extent is the NRM today an adjunct of the state?

47. The second key issue from the point of view of pursuing the democratic struggle today is that of the relation obtaining between popular democratic and state organs. I

have pointed out that RCs originated in lieu of state
authority in the guerilla-held regions.

Since January 1986, there have been a number of changes in
the role of RCs. To begin with, RCs are no longer seen as
replacements for chiefs but as popular organs that are to
hold state officials (chiefs) accountable. This, in my
oinion, is a positive development. If the RCs had developed
as replacements for chiefs, they would indeed have turned
into new chiefs. Given the organisational weakness of civil
society in general, and popular classes in particular, RCs
would have been popular democratic organs in name only, for
there would have been few realistic ways of holding them
accountable to the people.

But the development of RCs has not gone ahead without
resistance from the very state officials RCs are supposed to
hold accountable. A clear and growing tendency can be
discerned that aims at turning RCs into adjunts of the
state. This can be discerned in attempts to turn RCs into
administrative adjuncts of the state, whose duties are
increasingly defined by top state officials as convinience
demands (e.g., in the distribution of commodities). The
tendency can also be seen in the attempts to turn RCs into
political adjuncts of the state power, e.g., in decisions by
DAs to dismiss entire Resistance Committees, as in Arua and
Iganga for example.

My second question, then, is: To what extent are popular
democratic organs(RCs) also being turned into adjunts of the
state, in the process losing both their independence and
their popular accountability?

48. Finally, the question of the advance of the democratic
struggle "on the other side of the Nile." In political
terms, this issue has a dual significance. I have already
argued that, from the point of view of the division of
labour between nationalities, the changes of January 1986
represent a dramatic turn. For the first time, the
historical division of labour between the "South" and the
"North" no longer obtains. For the first time, the Southern
propertied and middle classes control the main lines of
business, the political machinery of government, and the
repressive and administrative organs of the state. One
element in the present situation is thus the acute political
crisis of the "Northern" middle class.

The second aspect of the crisis stemmed from the fact that
the NRA had no organised base in these parts of the country
when it came to power in January 1986. This issue, however,
was compounded by a second fact. The "broad base" (united
front) built by the NRA after January 1986 included in the
main parties and individuals with a historical base in "the
South", but exclued in the main those with a historical base

in "the North". Ironically then, the coalition that came to
power following January 1986 had a "broad base" in "the
South" where the NRA had a historic presence and an
organised base, but a "narrow base" in "the North" where the
NRA had little historic presence and no organised base! In
other words, where the NRA needed to create a broad base -
in "the North" - its base remained narrow; where it did not
- in "the South" - it made concessions to parties which had
already lost their popular base.

This combination of factors meant that the extension of the
new government on the other side of the Nile gave this
political machinary most often a "Southern" face in the
"North"! Under such conditions, it could not be very
difficult for the "Northern" middle class to convince the
"Northern" peasantry that the "broad base" was simply
another name for a "Southern" government!!

While the most dramatic expression of the crisis on the
other side of the Nile is the military confrontation between
bands of rebels and the NRA, this should not obscure the
fact that the crisis is in essence political. In other
words, it can not have an exclusively or even mainly a
military solution. Simply put, even a defeat of the rebel
bands will not solve the crisis in "the North". If the
"Northern" peasantry is to be convinced of the national
character of the new government, at the minimum, the
political machinery in the "North" will have to have a local
face.

How is this possible under today's circumstances? Two
possible alternatives can be spelt out. The first would
involve an extension of the "broad base" to the "North". In
political terms, it would mean that the purveyers of the
anti-democratic politics of the neo-colonial state will be
rescued once again, as they have been by the "broad base" in
"the South." From the point of view of the "Northern"
peasantry - and therefore from a national point of view -
this would still be preferable to the present situation.

The second alternative would be to democratise politics in
"the North", from the bottom up. Democratic organs, not
only at the grass roots level, but also at the summit, would
ensure that all levels of the political machinery in "the
North" will wear a face that is not only local but also a
result of popular initiative.

The first alternative, by itself, will tend in the direction
of peace and the consolidation of the neo-colonial state
after nearly a decade of continuous instability. Only the
second alternative can advance the democratic struggle
inside every nationality in the country and thus arrest the
cancer of a political struggle organised increasingly along
nationality lines and under the leadership of anti-
democratic forces in each nationality.