

Pan-Africanist inspiration: The Julius Nyerere Intellectual Festival Week

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From the 13 to 17 April 2009 the University of Dar es Salaam experienced moments of great reflection and soul searching. Travelling from various parts of Africa and the world to grace this great occasion, comrades, intellectuals, students and members of social movements reflected on the great contribution made by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah to Africa's liberation struggle from colonialism and the continent's unity under the banner of Pan-Africanism.

The intellectual festival was organised by the Mwalimu Nyerere chair of Pan-African Studies Issa G. Shivji and the University of Dar es Salaam. As we navigated Dar es Salaam and its main bus terminus Ubungo toward the intellectual hill – as it was commonly known in the famous days of the Guyanese revolutionary Walter Rodney – we had mixed feelings of hope and despair. These are feelings that universities in Africa have undoubtedly suffered in the neoliberal onslaught of the past two decades, but the Mwalimu Nyerere Intellectual Festival inspired us that African universities and progressive, organic intellectuals have continued to resist and advance ideological struggles against neoliberal forces. African universities can recapture the university space as the central battleground of ideas, and revitalise themselves to participate in the continent's liberation project from imperial powers, neocolonial agents and despots that keep the African masses in bondage.

The debates, songs, poems and lectures that took place during these five days were a great eye-opener to many young people, students from Dar es Salaam's university and especially to me and a comrade from [Bunge La Mwananchi](#) social movement. We had travelled from Nairobi for some 13 hours by road to make an appointment with this historic moment of remembering Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, the father of African unity.

As we entered the historic Nkrumah Hall in the entrance, there was a billboard of Mwalimu Nyerere and Fidel Castro. Engraved on the billboard were the words of a Fidel Castro speech given to South Africa's parliament in Cape Town in 1996 that read: 'An avoidable and deep economic crisis, perhaps the worst in history, is threatening all of us today. I only know that great crises have always delivered great solutions; I have confidence in the intelligence of people and of man. I have confidence in the need for humanity to survive ... let there be more generosity, more cooperation and more humanity.'

These words captured a moment when the seeds of humanity's destruction during an economic crisis were manifesting themselves in food, healthcare and education. This was crisis that most of our African countries responded to by faithfully following the footsteps of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

It was the organic intellectual Professor Shivji who with sarcastic remarks welcomed back the neoliberal professors who had become the self-proclaimed think-tankers of neoliberal policies that became the source of poverty in the global South. Mwalimu Shivji said when welcoming back these

neoliberal professors at Nkrumah Hall – the central battleground for ideas as the Washington consensus was being buried at the G20 meeting in London in early April 2009 – that the world's capitalist system was in tatters, and that the champions of capitalism in the global North were rewriting the rules of the game to save it. He emphasised that the crisis has created an opening for the global South – and our motherland Africa in particular – to refuse to play the capitalist imperialism game, whatever the rules, and to start to rethink a new alternative for the continent's development in the 21st century.

Mwalimu Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah's revolutionary work was celebrated by a strong delegation from CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), a pan-African research organisation based in Dakar present throughout the five-day festival. A notable lecture was given by Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, who systematically exposed the attacks African universities were subjected to during the era of neoliberal policies. The capturing of African universities by USAID and IMF-sponsored research legitimised the role of imperialist instruments of control in political and economic policy towards Africa.

There was also a memorable moment when Oliver Fanon, son of the great revolutionary Frantz Fanon, revisited the African national liberation movement and the role that peasants and workers – with the support of the petty bourgeoisie – played in shaping the national liberation movements in Africa. Fanon reminded the young generation of the battle waged by African liberation movements during the struggle for independence. He gave the examples of FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) of Mozambique, the Mau Mau of Kenya, the FNL (Front de Libération Nationale) of Algeria, the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) of Angola and the great sacrifices that were made to liberate Africa from colonialism.

Mwalimu Nyerere's leadership and passion in South-South cooperation were also revisited, as was the great role he played in the South during his tenure. The festival also noted the challenges the southern countries were facing, which triggered a debate on social struggles in Latin America and what the African continent can learn from the model of the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA) in mitigating the impact of the financial crisis and the challenges of neoliberal globalisation.

We left the University of Dar es Salaam to go back to Nairobi to attend the wananchi congress organised by community-based grassroots movements and [Bunge La Mwananchi](#) to advance the course of social struggle in Kenya. We left with the message of hope from the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Intellectual Festival that Africa can unite and take back again the Pan-Africanist road of development and unity and make the dream of Kwame Nkrumah and Mwalimu Nyerere a reality. As Frantz Fanon said in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it.'

Gacheke Gachihi

P.S.

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