Chapter 8

Lenin in East Africa

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Introduction: A Response to the Charge of Eurocentrism

With the contemporary global resurgence of interest in Marxism, including its Marxist-Leninist form(s), as a theoretical framework that can orient contemporary struggles against capitalism and its attendant depredations, it has become even more urgent to address some of the key criticisms that were leveled at Marx, Engels, and Lenin when they came to be treated as “dead dogs” toward the end of the twentieth century. One key criticism was the charge that alleged that Marxism as such, including its Marxist-Leninist form(s), was and is irredeemably Eurocentric in character. While there have been attempts to counter such charges by excavating and reframing Marx’s writings on the “non-Western world,” this essay proposes to take another approach toward the charge of Eurocentrism in relation to Marxism (and Marxism-Leninism in particular). One should take seriously Salah M. Hassan’s methodological insight that an adequate response to the charge of Eurocentrism in relation to Marxism must take into consideration the ways in which Marxism was adopted, adapted, and refined by “Third World
This essay proposes to contribute to responses to the charge of Eurocentrism, by taking seriously the theoretical contributions of two African Marxists to the development of Marxism-Leninism. The focus is on Marxism-Leninism because it is primarily in this form that Marxism came to play an important role in the anticolonial and anti-neocolonial struggles on the African continent. The question of “influence” is treated in a manner that demonstrates that African Marxists were never mere passive “adopters” of Marxism-Leninism. Thus, while it is true that they were influenced by Marx, Engels, and Lenin in specifiable ways, they also contributed to the development and refinement of Marxism-Leninism, through the formulation of insights that are of contemporary relevance both in relation to the African continent and beyond. This essay shows the specific ways in which two prominent East African Marxists, namely Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu (1924–1996) and Dani Wadada Nabudere (1932–2011) were both deeply influenced by Lenin and made important contributions to Marxism-Leninism.

Babu was born and grew up in Zanzibar, where he came to play an important role in the anticolonial movement. In 1964, he attained the position of foreign minister in the revolutionary government headed by Julius K. Nyerere, which was formed after the Zanzibar Revolution. His revolutionary Marxism was seen as a threat by U.S. officials, who attempted to neutralize what they perceived to be his attempt to turn Zanzibar into an “African Cuba” by engineering the unification of Zanzibar with Tanganyika in April 1964. Babu’s critical attitude, formulated from a Marxist standpoint, toward Julius K. Nyerere’s “African socialism” led to tensions between them. Eventually, Babu was imprisoned by Nyerere’s Tanzanian government from 1972 to 1978. In 1979, Babu left Tanzania to teach in the United States, and in 1984 he moved to London. In exile, he continued his quest to develop a version of Marxism that was suitable to conditions in East Africa through contributions to journals such as *The Journal of African Marxists*, *Review of African Political Economy*, and *Africa World Review*. He also served as an adviser to progressive movements from Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Rwanda.

Nabudere, despite his stature as a key figure in African Marxism and an important revolutionary figure in Uganda’s political history, has been described by some of his friends as “not very well known outside the circle of people who crossed his path.” Nabudere was active in the Ugandan struggle against British colonialism as a member of the executive committee of the United Kingdom Uganda Students Association. Nabudere was also...
a member of the youth wing of the Uganda People's Congress, although he was expelled and then accused of organizing a “communist plot,” and eventually he was arrested in 1969. Nabudere would later be released and would work for Idi Amin’s government, until he became disenchanted and left in 1972 to Dar es Salaam where he participated in the famous Dar es Salaam debates. These debates had to do in part with the assessment of Tanzanian “African socialism” from a Marxist standpoint. Nabudere would also go on to play an important role in the founding of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) which came into power in April 1979. After the overthrow of the UNLF on May 1, 1980, the UNLF, which was renamed UNLF (Anti-Dictatorship), with Nabudere as a leading figure, launched a brief armed struggle. Nabudere would eventually leave to teach in Denmark in 1982, where he continued writing works on Marxist political economy. By the mid-1990s Nabudere was back in Uganda, where he eventually founded the Marcus Garvey Pan-African Institute (later to become a university).

Both Babu and Nabudere were preoccupied with the formulation of a Marxist-Leninist critique of the theory and practice of “African socialism” as developed by Julius K. Nyerere. They also both contributed to the Dar es Salaam debates. This essay seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Marxism-Leninism to anticolonial and anti-neocolonial struggles in East Africa by focusing on two aspects of Lenin’s thought which were influential on the theoretical outlooks of Babu and Nabudere. The first aspect is Lenin’s theory of imperialism and his account of the significance of national liberation struggles in light of this theory. The second aspect is Lenin’s critique of the Narodniks in Russia. Furthermore, the essay demonstrates how Babu, through adopting Lenin’s understanding of national struggles against imperialism as part of the global struggle against capitalism, was able to provide a theoretical basis for the endorsement of Pan-Africanism from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, by arguing that Pan-Africanism is the expression of African nationalism vis-à-vis a racialized imperialism. This essay also shows how criticisms from the proponents of African socialism to the effect that Marxism was a foreign ideological import into Africa were met by Babu and Nabudere through a Leninist analysis of the class basis of African socialism, and through a critique of the view of African history that was endorsed by proponents of African socialism, a critique that was consciously modeled on Lenin’s critique of the Narodniks’ view of Russian history. In sum, Marxism-Leninism was not merely adopted in East Africa; it was also further refined and developed.
The Significance of Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism
for East African Marxism

In order to understand the historical significance of Lenin’s theory of imperialism for Marxists in Africa in general and East Africa in particular, we should note that Lenin posited imperialism as the noncontingent outcome of the logic of accumulation of the capitalist mode of production in its monopolistic phase (characterized by the dominance of finance capital, i.e., the merged capital of the big monopolistic banks with the capital of the monopolistic industrialists). This theory allowed Marxists in the colonies and neoccolonies to identify ties between national liberation struggles and the struggle against capitalism. Lenin, insofar as he had argued that imperialism, and the “territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers” that is associated with it, was not a policy that the ruling classes of the capitalist powers could choose to pursue or not to pursue, as Karl Kautsky had claimed, was essentially arguing that for the colonized or semicolonized peoples of the world the struggle for self-determination cannot come apart from the struggle against monopoly capital. In other words, the successful pursuit of the struggle against monopoly capital may not be a sufficient condition for the emancipation of African peoples, but it is nonetheless a necessary one. Lenin himself was clear that the triumph of socialism was a necessary condition for overcoming national and racial oppression, but he never claimed that it was sufficient: “To abolish national oppression a foundation is necessary, namely, socialist production; but on this foundation a democratically organized state, a democratic army, etc., must also be built. By transforming capitalism into socialism, the proletariat creates the possibility for complete abolition of national oppression; this possibility will become reality ‘only’—‘only’—when complete democracy is introduced in all spheres, including the fixing of state boundaries in accordance with the ‘sympathies’ of the population and including complete freedom of secession.”

Moreover, Lenin’s theory emphasized the significance of colonies, semicolonies, and what we would call neoccolonies for the accumulation of capital in the so-called advanced capitalist countries. This was important, because it allowed East African Marxists such as Nabudere and Babu to argue that contrary to prevalent discourse (and this discourse is still prevalent today), the “Global South” (if I may use this anachronism) was not and is not marginal to the processes of capitalist accumulation in the advanced countries. They argued that the problem of African countries was
not that they are not integrated enough into the global economy. In fact, the problem is that they are too integrated into the world economy in the wrong way. As Babu puts it: “It is clear that foreign investment is the cause and not a solution, to our economic backwardness.” The issue for Babu is that African economies are export-oriented and internally disarticulated (i.e., lacking complementarity between different sectors of their national economies, i.e., agricultural production does not serve the needs of industrial development in most African countries, insofar as agricultural production remains oriented toward the cultivation of cash crops for export): “Our economies are rendered always responsive only to what the Western world is prepared to buy and sell, and hardly responsive to our internal development needs.” Thus, in postindependence East African countries, the agriculture sector insofar as it was geared toward the production of crops that could be exported was articulated with the industrial sectors of Europe, the United States, and Japan, and not with local industrial sectors.

Babu and Nabudere understood Lenin’s theory of imperialism as suggesting that while racism was a factor in the “Scramble for Africa” (1881–1914), one should not attempt to explain it solely or even primarily in terms of racism. Instead, one should understand it primarily in terms of the economic requirements of monopoly capitalists, even if one must recognize that racism informed the manner in which control over African resources was exerted, namely, direct colonial control. This was significant for them (and especially for Babu) because it gave them a vantage point from which to criticize those whom they referred to “as petty-bourgeois intellectuals,” who attempted to provide explanations of societal phenomena and intersocietal interactions from a purely racial standpoint in a manner that obscured the managerial role of many of the ruling African elites in facilitating the continued exploitation of the African continent.

It is important to recognize that Babu and Nabudere were not satisfied with simply adopting Lenin’s theory of imperialism and “applying” it to the African context. They were also interested in updating it and defending it from the objections that had been raised against it. For example, in response to the objection that Lenin overstated the importance of overseas investment to the accumulation of capital in the imperialist centers, and that this is shown by the fact that “the major part of the direct investments of the major capitalist countries takes place amongst themselves,” Nabudere answers that “such profitable investment in the imperialist countries is dependent on the investments in the Third World neo-colonies, since production in the center is dependent on raw materials from these countries.”
words, Nabudere points out that it is not simply a matter of the value of capital exports, because other factors come into consideration, such as the potential future use of resources and cutting off potential competitors from supplies of raw materials. It is interesting to note that some contemporary theorists who think of themselves as working within the Marxist tradition continue to raise this objection against Lenin’s theory of imperialism, without being at all aware that Nabudere had responded to this objection. One way in which Eurocentrism has been detrimental to the development of Marxist theory is that it has hindered the diffusion of important theoretical advances that have been made by Marxists in the Global South/third world. The “rediscovery of imperialism” by the Western Left, should be accompanied by the rediscovery of the theories of imperialism that were developed by third world Marxists.

Moreover, Nabudere makes an original contribution to Marxist political economy insofar as he updates and extends the argument Lenin made in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In this text, Lenin starts out from the fact of the existence of monopolies as a response to the crisis of 1873, and the consolidation of cartels by 1903. Lenin then notes that Marx (at a time when free competition was the rule rather than the exception) had argued that free competition leads to the formation of monopolies. However, Lenin does not provide a rigorous argument that connects imperialism with Marx’s account of the workings of capitalism in *Capital*, and specifically he does not explicitly connect imperialism with Marx’s account of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in chapter 13 of the third volume of *Capital*. This is what Nabudere sets out to do in his *The Political Economy of Imperialism*. Nabudere, following Marx, argues that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is a function of the increase of the rate of constant capital in relation to variable capital, assuming that the rate of surplus value (the intensity of the exploitation of labor) remains constant. Nabudere argues that this tendency explains the rise of monopolies and imperialism: “The tendency of the rate of profit to fall at home could only be reversed by increased supplies of cheap raw and auxiliary materials, expanding markets, and lower wages, which implied an intensification of the exploitation of labor.”

I have used the word *neocolonies* deliberately in my description of Lenin’s theory of imperialism, even though Lenin himself did not employ this term (instead, he referred to “colonial” and “semi-colonial” peoples, and of course, he published his book in 1917, before the post–World War II period and the end of the direct colonial rule in Africa and Asia). However, the important thing to note is that Lenin’s definition of imperialism does not imply that imperialism always involves direct political control (by
“political control,” I mean a form of control that takes the form of direct annexation, the carrying out of a mandate, or the establishment of a protectorate. Lenin himself warned against the possibility that imperialist states when confronted by a rising tide of nationalism might resort to “creating, under the guise of politically independent states, states which are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially and militarily.” He also argued that “[f]inance capital is such a great, such a decisive, you might say, force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting and actually does subject, to itself even states enjoying the fullest political independence.” However, this does not mean that independence is insignificant or that it is not worth fighting for political independence given the dominance of finance capital over the global economy, because there is greater room for maneuver when a hitherto colonized society has attained juridical sovereignty. Moreover, if one argues that one should not struggle for political independence given the domination of finance capital over the global economy, because under such conditions independence is only achievable in a mutilated form, then one must also commit oneself to the claim that one should abandon all other demands of political democracy, since, as Lenin pointed out, all the other demands of democracy can only be achieved in a mutilated form under the dominance of finance capital.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the fact that imperialism implies control and not always occupation or colonization (occupation and colonization being only two possible modes of control that are resorted to under certain historical circumstances) does not imply that imperialism is not “in general, a striving towards violence and reaction.” For the recognition of the juridical sovereignty of former colonial states does not imply that they are not vulnerable to the use of organized violence by former colonizing powers under various pretexts (e.g., intervention on humanitarian grounds and so on). For example, we can point to the various military coups that have been orchestrated by the French state in its former African colonies since the 1960s: coups in the Central African Republic, Mali, Chad, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, and Togo.

If we look at the five features that Lenin took to be the essential characteristics of imperialism: (1) the creation of monopolies, (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital (finance capital), (3) the increased importance of the exporting of capital as opposed to the exporting of commodities, (4) “formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves,” and (5) the “territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers,” we can note that strictly speaking those five conditions can obtain without there being...
direct colonial rule. As Walter Rodney put it: “Imperialism is essentially an
economic phenomenon, and it does not necessarily lead to direct political
control or colonization.” The fifth characteristic should not be understood
in terms of direct political rule per se, but rather in terms of the ability
of the biggest capitalist powers to acquire the raw materials that they need
and to carve up markets and secure investment opportunities.

This point is important because it allowed East African Marxist
theorists such as Babu and Nabudere to make a conceptual distinction
between colonialism and neocolonialism on the one hand, and imperialism
on the other hand. Colonialism (involving direct political control) is only
one way in which imperialism takes form. Depending on historical condi‑
tions, imperialism can also take the form of neocolonialism (whereby the
juridical sovereignty of a specific territory is recognized, but mechanisms
are implemented that allow for the exploitation of its raw materials and its
cheap labor reserves, etc.). Imperialism is a genus, of which colonialism (of
the kind that was manifested in the “Scramble for Africa” for example) is
a species. This conceptual distinction allows Babu to argue in his African
Socialism or Socialist Africa that “direct colonialism is not suited to the
post-war [WWII] economic needs of imperialism. Colonies could not have
supported the enormous debts which are currently being contracted by the
neo‑colonies, because ultimately the responsibility for such heavy financial
burdens would have fallen on the colonial power itself.” In fact, Babu
takes the well‑known Leninist remark that “politics is the most concentrated
expression of economics” and creatively applies it to the situation of the
formerly colonized countries in order to argue that the actualization of the
right to self‑determination (insofar as it requires more than the attainment of
juridical sovereignty) requires the transformation of the economic structures
of the formerly colonized countries. Babu emphasizes this point when he
notes that there can no solution to the problem of underdevelopment by
way of shifting trading partners (i.e., trading with the socialist bloc), without
transforming the internal structure of the inherited colonial economies.

The Justification of Pan‑Africanism
from a Marxist‑Leninist Standpoint

Lenin's theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism led him to
emphasize the significance of national liberation struggles from a Marxist
standpoint. As Horace B. Davis has noted, prior to Lenin's interventions on
the significance of the “national” and “colonial” questions, the principle of
the right to national self-determination had not been formally recognized
by Marxists (Davis 1967). In fact, some prominent Marxists such as Rosa
Luxemburg had opposed the formal recognition of the right to national
determination. Lenin, on the other hand, was uncompromising in his
recognition of the right to national self-determination (including the right
to form independent national states). As Nabudere puts it, “The Bolsheviks
widened the scope of the national question from the limited question of
combating national oppression in Europe to the general question of eman‑
cipating oppressed peoples, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism in
general.” This extension of the scope of the national question was based
on Lenin’s recognition of the importance of supporting the struggles of an
oppressed nation seeking self-determination, even if that nation did not have
a significant industrial proletariat and even if its struggle for liberation was
led by its bourgeoisie. As Lenin put it in his polemic with Luxemburg: “If
the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights against the oppressing one,
we are always, in every case, and more resolutely than anyone else, in favor;
for we are the staunchest and most consistent enemies of oppression”; he
also argued that “the bourgeois nationalism of every oppressed nation has a
general democratic content which is directed against oppression, and it is
this content that we support unconditionally.”

Babu draws on this characterization of nationalism in the colonies and
neocolonies in order to argue that Pan-Africanism insofar as it represents a
nationalism that is hostile to imperialism is a progressive nationalism that
must be supported and cultivated by African Marxist-Leninists and other
Marxist-Leninists. Babu refines Lenin’s approach by arguing that due to the
fact that the African nation-states that came into being with independence
were the result of various compromises between different imperialist powers,
and “had been artificially created without regard for homogeneous ethnic,
cultural, or even (in some cases) linguistic identity,” expressions of African
nationalism should not be exclusively sought at the level of the African
nation-state. Instead, Babu argues, expressions of African nationalism should
be sought in Pan-Africanism: “African nationalism and Pan-Africanism are
one and the same thing.” Furthermore, he suggests that Pan-Africanism is
a more reliable vehicle for bringing about what he calls the “African Revo‑
lution” (perhaps in a nod to Fanon) than the nation-state.

Babu also makes a conceptual distinction between “cultural” Pan-
Africanism and “political” Pan-Africanism. He does not explicitly favor one
over the other, regarding them as complementary forms. However, he does
note that these two forms have historically been distributed unevenly across Africa and the African diaspora. In particular, he argues that the cultural form of Pan-Africanism “is more common in the Diaspora where Africans are a minority,” whereas on the African continent “the political tendency is more common.”59 In conceiving of Pan-Africanism as the most developed form of African nationalism, Babu made an important contribution to Marxist-Leninist theories of nationalism. If we look at Stalin’s famous definition of nationalism (and of nations), which he advanced in his influential Marxism and the National Question (1913), we will notice that it does not provide a foundation for conceiving of Africans and members of the African diaspora as members of one nation.60 Stalin defines the nation as “a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.”61 It is significant to note that Stalin thought that the nonexistence of any single one of these features was a sufficient reason for not characterizing a given set of people as a nation.62 This definition is problematic, however, from the standpoint of somebody who is attempting to articulate the theoretical foundations of Pan-Africanism as the most developed form of African nationalism. For it is clear that, to take just one of the aforementioned elements, Africans and the members of the African diaspora are not united by a stable community of language, nor, given the historical fact of uneven development on the African continent, can one say that all Africans have historically shared the same form of economic life. Moreover, Babu does not believe that “there is a community of culture” among Africans and people of African descent in the diaspora. As he puts it: “There is no single ‘African culture’ any more than there is a single Asiatic, Europe[an] or Latin American culture.”63 Instead, Babu argues that “it is the common history of oppression and its modern manifestations and the common struggle against them. This is the foundation on which the theory and practice of Pan-Africanism is based.”64 In other words, Pan-Africanism is understood by Babu to be a nationalist movement that responds to the deprivations of racialized capitalism (or perhaps more accurately, capitalism as such) in its imperialist stage of development. If classical Marxist theorists in Europe maintained that capitalism (in its developed phase) creates its own gravediggers by creating an industrial proletariat, Babu argues that capitalism (in its imperialist monopoly finance phase) creates its own gravediggers by creating a common history of oppression that allows Africans and peoples of African descent to act as a collective historical subject that will play an essential role in bringing about imperialism’s demise.
The claim that Marxism-Leninism is Eurocentric and not suited to the interpretation of social reality in other parts of the world is not new. On the African continent, this claim was advanced by adherents of a rival ideological framework and guiding theory for development, namely, “African socialism,” during the 1960s and 1970s. The theory of African socialism, in particular the version developed by Julius K. Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, maintained that the development of African countries is “dependent on the rehabilitation, reactivation, and modernization of pre-colonial communalism, which imparted to the continent a unique humanity based on classless and conflict-resolving communal relations.” Nyerere proposed that the foundation of African socialism lies in the extended family and used the Swahili term *Ujamaa* (meaning “familyhood”) to refer to African socialism. Thus seen as an indigenous framework that was more suitable for African conditions than Marxism-Leninism. Nyerere proposed that “traditionally we [Africans] lived as families, with individuals supporting each other and helping each other on terms of equality” based on communal ownership of land. He argued that insofar as this was true, “traditional African society was a socialist society.” At times, Nyerere suggested that there were no real social classes in Tanzania and that, consequently, it did not make any sense to adopt a theory that emphasizes the role of class struggle in bringing about structural social transformations.

Babu and Nabudere devoted significant efforts to their criticism of “African Socialism.” Babu interpreted Nyerere’s doctrine as a form of African Narodism, based on a conception of development that aims to protect the peasantry’s communal village systems from the corrosive influences of the expansion of capitalist relations of production. Babu drew explicitly on Lenin’s critique of the Narodniki in Russia, (and especially the “old Narodniks” of the 1860s and 1870s who argued that there could be noncapitalist socialist development in Russia based on the traditions of village communes, and who were regarded by Lenin as being more principled and consistent than their epigones). In his *The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve’s Book* (1895), Lenin had characterized Narodism in the following terms: “The essence of Narodism is that it represents the producers’ interests from the standpoint of the small producer, the petty bourgeois.” In thinking that development was possible on the basis of the protection of the small and middling peasantry (and the undermining of the accumulation and concentration of land in the hands of rich peasants),
Nyerere, his East African Marxist critics suggested, essentially formulated a theory of socialism that in reality represented the interests of the small-commodity producers. Babu explicitly characterizes the defenders of African socialism as petty-bourgeois intellectuals, that is to say, intellectuals who represent the point of view of the small commodity producer: “By looking backward, our petty bourgeois intellectuals idealize our backwardness, for example communal life.”

One of the fundamental issues that was the subject of dispute between Lenin and the Narodniks, namely, the characterization of life in the village communes of the peasantry, therefore resurfaces in the dispute between East African Marxist-Leninists on the one hand and proponents of African socialism on the other. Both the Narodniks and Nyerere thought that the values of the peasants who lived in village communes should be preserved. Lenin, on the other hand, argued that the development of capitalist relations of production in the countryside is positive insofar as it tears “the peasant from the patriarchal, semi-feudal family, from the stupefying conditions of village life.” Likewise, Babu and Nabudere maintain that capitalism plays a progressive role at a certain point in its development and that there is something essentially incoherent about the attempt to bring about socialism while attempting to preserve or resuscitate “social values corresponding to a pre-feudal mode of production [the village commune]” (Babu 1981, xv). It is important to recognize that the dispute is not about the “moral character” of the peasantry. Instead, the main issue is whether one can bring about a socialist transformation of society without at the same time bringing about a transformation in the outlook of peasants through the transformation of the objective socioeconomic structures that condition that outlook.

For both Lenin and Babu (as well as Nabudere), socialism in the Marxist theoretical framework presupposes the emergence of the modern individual subject, and this modern individual subject is the product of capitalist relations of production that historically play a progressive role insofar as they emancipate the individual from various ties of personal dependency that encumber the individual in precapitalist societies. Lenin is quite clear on this point: “It was capitalism alone that created the conditions which made possible this protest of the individual.” Similarly, Babu recognizes that the concept of the individual as the bearer of rights (prior to the specification of any duties) is a modern concept that came to be with the rise of capitalism. This view of the individual as the product of capitalism was also adhered to by Marx and Engels. Babu therefore maintains that a Marxist position that deals with its subject matter objectively does not allow one
Lenin and East African Marxism

Lenin and East African Marxism to uncritically romanticize the past. In fact, a Marxist must point out that “to idealize the ‘equality’ or ‘right,’ ‘freedom’ or ‘democracy’ of that past is to play right into the hands of our imperialist oppressors; it is to idealize tyranny and oppression.”

A Marxist should also be able to point out to their opponent that the individual protest, based on the moral conscience of a subject that can think of itself as standing outside its given social context, which their opponent is engaged in by comparing the oppressive conditions of the capitalist present with the purportedly idyllic life of precapitalist societies, is itself the product of capitalist relations of production.

Babu makes an explicit analogy between those who claimed that Marxism was not suitable for conditions in Asia and Africa and those who advanced the same claim in relation to Russia pre-1917. Babu’s key point is that the claim to uniqueness is not itself unique. As Nabudere also points out, it is the product of underdevelopment in the neocolonial world, which leads the petty bourgeoisie there to abandon the arena of political and economic struggle against imperialism and to attempt to wage a struggle exclusively in the cultural field. “Neocolonial culture as expressed in the writings of the neo-colonial intellectual reflected this depressed culture. Appeal to the past instead of the future dominated so-called ‘Black culture,’ ‘Arab culture’ or ‘Asian culture’. This reflected generally backward conditions in the neocolony.” Thus, underlying the claims to uniqueness was in fact a more or less uniform condition of underdevelopment and domination by finance capital.

This does not imply that the cultural sphere is an unimportant arena for struggle against imperialism. Nabudere’s point is that it is a mistake to wage a struggle against imperialism solely through cultural contestations, especially when “African culture” is presented in monolithic terms, thereby obscuring the fact that “culture is a class product. There is no such thing as human culture devoid of class bias.” Nabudere argues that given the dominance of finance capital, to claim that there is something uniquely African is to underemphasize the manner in which Africa has been successfully (from the point of view of imperialist exploiters) integrated into the capitalist world system: “There is nothing uniquely African in an era where finance capital has united all the peoples of the world under its rule. An African proletariat is no less international than an Asian one or a European one. They are all exploited by the same monopolies, the same class, the same capital, only in different measure. There can therefore be no different general solution to the problem of imperialist exploitation.”

This is not to say that Nabudere and Babu were opposed to the development of a concrete analysis of specific sociohistorical situations and
contexts. However, they made a conceptual distinction between the demands for a concrete analysis of specific historical contexts and claims that uphold what Olúfémi Táíwò has described as the “metaphysics of difference,” that is, the thesis that there is an essential difference in kind between Black African peoples and other peoples. For instance, some of the proponents of African socialism argued that there is something uniquely African in the manner in which individuals support one another in African communities, namely, the claim that “traditional” African societies were historically socialist societies. Babu does not deny the existence of strong bonds of solidarity in many African societies at various points in African history. However, he argues that such bonds of solidarity were a characteristic of all human societies that were at a similar level with respect to the development of their productive forces: “The qualities which our petty-bourgeois intellectualists describe as essentially African are really human qualities which find expression when a community is at a certain level of productive capacity. When a community does not have the capacity to produce social surplus, there is simply no means of becoming unequal.” The emergence of individuals capable of asserting themselves in relation to their communities in a manner that can undermine communal ties of solidarity is thus contingent upon the existence of sufficient levels of surplus that would allow for the emergence of inequality. Babu’s point is that when we adopt a historical materialist approach to the study of African history, we do not need to rely on “the metaphysics of difference” in order to explain African realities. By contrast, fidelity to the realities of African societies is compatible with denying that there is anything uniquely African that requires a specifically African theory that expresses a specifically “African culture” understood in essentialist ahistorical terms. As Babu puts it, “In Africa, as everywhere else, survival entailed exploitation and class struggle; the greater the development of productive-forces, the sharper the struggle.” A true historical materialist approach to African history, Babu asserts, would undermine the thesis that there is something uniquely African that sets African history apart from the rest of human history. Moreover, we should add that it has been pointed out by some scholars that the concept of “traditional” African societies that was employed by proponents of African socialism was, at least in part, derived from colonialist anthropology.

In contrast to proponents of African socialism who asserted that there might be a path toward the construction of socialism on the African continent through political projects that rejected class struggle, Babu and Nabudere argued that such approaches were inadequate even if they
were carried out in good faith. They criticized the thesis that there was no class-based stratification in African societies before the advent of colonialism. Babu argued that different social formations have existed throughout African history, including tributary empires: “Since Africa, like the rest of the world, is subject to uneven development, it is not difficult to find, from its very rich past, evidence of various levels of social development.”\textsuperscript{95} In his historical account of the colonization of East Africa by the British and the Germans, Nabudere points out that many societies in East Africa were characterized by the existence of an aristocratic ruling class, for example, in areas such as “Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Kigezi, Toro, Buhaya and Barwanda-Burundi.”\textsuperscript{96} In sum, Babu and Nabudere were able to successfully draw on Lenin’s thought in order to counter claims that Marxism was an essentially foreign theoretical framework that was being foisted onto Africans. More importantly, these East African Marxists were able to make important contributions to Marxist-Leninist theory by refining and developing the Marxist-Leninist research program in African contexts.

A Concluding Methodological Plea

Returning to this essay’s opening remarks on the need to come to terms with the charge of Eurocentrism that has been leveled at Marxism-Leninism, the success or failure of this essay should be judged not in relation to whether it has adequately answered the question: Is Marxism-Leninism Eurocentric? For it is obvious that a fully adequate answer to this question would require a much longer discussion. Instead, the success or failure of this essay should be judged in relation to whether it has adequately answered the following question: With what must the attempt to respond to the charge of Eurocentrism begin? The answer offered in this essay is that it must begin by a serious and critical examination of the writings of those intellectuals in the “third world” (or the “Global South,” in current parlance), who have found Marxism-Leninism to be a useful theoretical framework in their anticolonial and anti-neocolonial struggles.\textsuperscript{97} Methodologically speaking, it must be recognized that it is absurd for Marxist-Leninists (or Marxists in general) in the Western world to attempt to grapple with the charge of Eurocentrism, while at the same time continuing to systematically ignore the intellectual contributions of Marxist intellectuals from the “third world.”\textsuperscript{98} For example, it is only by engaging in a serious critical study of the work that has been produced by Marxist theoreticians from the African continent, that
any progress can be made regarding questions such as whether historical
materialism is an adequate theoretical framework for studying the history
of African social formations. When viewed from the perspective of the rich
intellectual history of Marxism in the third world, the specter of Eurocen-
trism appears rather old and frail.

Notes

I wish to thank Afifa Ltifi, Charisse Burden-Stelly, the editors of this volume, and
two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this
manuscript.

1. In 1873, Marx famously remarked that it had become fashionable to
treat Hegel as a “dead dog” and he vehemently criticized this superficial treatment
1990), 102. This very same fate also befell Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other Marxist
thinkers toward the end of the twentieth century.

2. For an attempt to counter the charge of Eurocentrism that has been leveled
at Marx by excavating his relatively unknown writings on the “non-Western world,”
see Kevin Anderson, Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western
Societies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For an attempt that focuses on
Marx’s scattered references to the African continent, see Stefan Kalmring and Andreas
Nowak, “Viewing Africa with Marx: Remarks on Marx’s Fragmented Engagement with

3. Salah M. Hassan, How to Liberate Marx from His Eurocentrism: Notes on

4. Badawi Riad ‘Abd al Sami’a, Al-Ard we al- ‘ansuryia fe Itihad Janub Ifriqy-
iah [Land and Racism in the Union of South Africa] (Cairo: Matba’at Dar al-Kutub
we al-Wathaq al-Qumyia be al-Qahira, 2014), 268. Also see, James Morris Blaut,
Morris Blaut, “Marxism and Eurocentric Diffusionism,” in The Political Economy of
Imperialism: Critical Appraisals, ed. Ronald H. Chilcote (New York: Rowman and

5. For a biographical overview of Babu’s life, see Amrit Wilson, “Abdul
Rahman Mohammed Babu: Politician, Scholar and Revolutionary,” The Journal of
Pan African Studies 1, no. 9 (2007): 10–24. For a periodization of Babu’s political
activities by one of his friends, see Samir Amin, “The First Babu Memorial Lecture,”

6. For a full account of this episode, see Amrit Wilson, The Threat of


11. Ibid.


15. Vladimir I. Lenin, “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,” in *Imperialism and War: Classic Writings by V. I. Lenin and Nikolai Bukharin*, ed. Phil Gasper (Chicago: Haymarket Books 2017 [1917]), 101–102. Note that “imperialism” can also be used to characterize, for example, the Portuguese expansion into the Indian Ocean and the East African coast from the sixteenth century onward. However, this kind of imperialism was based on mercantilist accumulation techniques, that is, it was based on the accumulation of “surplus products” as opposed to “surplus value”; see Dani Nabudere, *Imperialism in East Africa. Volume 1: Imperialism and Exploitation* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 6. In other words, it is clear that there is a sense in which imperialism has always been an important feature of the capitalist world system. However, it is important to differentiate between different forms of imperialism, namely, mercantilist imperialism, “free-trade” imperialism, and monopoly capital imperialism. In this chapter I will be using the term *imperialism* to refer to the latter form of imperialism.


20. Ibid., 5.


24. Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu, African Socialism or Socialist Africa? (London: Zed Press, 1981), 102–103. Babu’s position on the issue of racism and the analysis of its underlying socioeconomic causes is evident in his approach to politics in Zanzibar on the eve of the revolution of 1964. Babu’s Umma Party was the only political party in Zanzibar that did not recruit on a racial basis, and it was the most multiracial party on Zanzibar’s political scene. In fact, Babu was able to convince some of the “Arabs” that their class interests aligned with the revolution against the sultan’s regime, and some of the “Arabs” who joined the Umma Party ended up fighting against the sultan. Walaa’ Saber Al Busati, Afariqah we Arab fe Thawrat Zanjibar 1964 [Africans and Arabs in the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964] (Cairo: Maktebat Gezirat al-Ward, 2016), 153–58. See also, Wilson, The Threat of Liberation, 42.


26. Ibid., 218.


30. Ibid., 40–41.


34. Ibid., 77.
46. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 164.
52. Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu, “Pan-Africanism and the New World Order,” in The Future that Works: Selected Writings of A. M. Babu, ed. Salma Babu and Amrit Wilson (Asmara, Eritrea/Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002 [1994]), 98. It was Babu who was most concerned with providing a Marxist-Leninist account of Pan-Africanism, since Nabudere, unlike Babu, believed (at least in the early 1980s) that “the nation state is today the most revolutionary instrument in the majority of the countries of the world . . . for redressing the uneven development that has been exacerbated by imperialism”; Nabudere, Imperialism in East Africa. Volume 1, 181.
Babu, on the other hand, was a staunch advocate for Pan-Africanism throughout his life and he “was the driving force behind the 7th Pan African Congress held at Kampala in April 1994”; Wilson, “Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu,” 22. Babu was also instrumental in presenting Black radical struggles in the United States to an African audience; Seth M. Markle, *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964–1974* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2017), 60. However, while Nabudere was not as interested in issues of race during the 1970s and 1980s, it should be noted that by the 1990s he came to show greater interest in Pan-Africanism; Tandon, “Dani Wadada Nabudere,” 335–41.


In Nabudere's later work, we can detect a kind of autocritique of his earlier approach. Since he seems to indicate that the political economy perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s did not sufficiently emphasize problems of culture and cultural identity (including, one assumes, racial identity); Dani Nabudere, *Archie Mafeje: Scholar, Activist, and Thinker* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2007), 34.


54. Babu claims that this situation is uniquely African: “The problem of nation states as an accidental offshoot of imperialist aggression was a uniquely African experience” Babu, *African Socialism*, 101. However, I think that this is not correct. A similar situation occurred in the “Arab World,” specifically in the Levant or “Greater Syria region,” see Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London/ New York: I. B. Tauris, 1995). In this sense, one can say that Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism emerged in response to structurally analogous (at a sufficient level of abstraction) circumstances. Babu limits the general applicability of his analysis of Pan-Africanism and its conditions of emergence in a way that is not justified.

55. Babu seems to have believed that ethnicity was inadequate as a basis for African nationalism because of the manner in which states in Africa were constituted in a way that cut across ethnic lines. However, it is not clear why one should not seek to construct multinational or multiethnic states, which, moreover, are the norm throughout the world.


59. Babu sees the political form of Pan-Africanism as more universalist in its orientation insofar as “it includes North Africans as an essential part of Pan Africa and as an essential part of Pan-African struggle”; Babu, “Pan-Africanism and the New World Order,” 97. In general, one can say that Babu was a staunch critic of
the division of Africa into North Africa and Africa “proper” (Africa south of the Saharan desert): “Our enemy, therefore, is anyone who wants to disrupt that unity. In their attempt to divide Africa the imperialists tried to classify us into two groups. Africans North of the Sahara and Africans South of the Sahara. The creation of the All African People’s Conference [held in Accra, Ghana [in 1958] dealt a decisive blow to this imperialist scheme”; Babu, “Speech Delivered at the 4th PAFMECA Conference,” in The Future that Works, 60.

60. I should note that at least theoretically speaking, Lenin seems to have endorsed Stalin’s definition, with the caveat that a given set of people must wish to be considered a nation (this voluntarist element is absent from Stalin’s definition); Davis, “Lenin and Nationalism,” 171. For an example of Lenin’s emphasis on this voluntarist element, see e.g., Vladimir I. Lenin, “The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up,” in The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, 89.


62. Ibid., 7–8.


64. Ibid.


70. Ibid., 199.


72. Babu, African Socialism, xiv–xv; the question of whether Babu was correct in his interpretation of Nyerere’s views is beyond the scope of this essay, although I will note that Nyerere also recognized some of the limitations of what he called


76. Lenin, “The Economic Content of Narodism,” 414.


82. This mode of argument essentially mirrors Hegel's critique of Romanticism. For a defense of this claim and for an account of the significance of Hegel's critique of Romanticism for Marxist movements today, see Zeyad el Nabolsy, “Nasserism and the Impossibility of Innocence,” International Politics Review (2021): https://doi.org/10.1057/s41312-021-00105-1.


87. Ibid., 93.


90. Babu, African Socialism, 57. For example, many of the features that have been claimed to be uniquely African were found in rural communities in nineteenth-century Russia, as is evident from Dimitrii Ivanovich Rostislavov, Provincial Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: The Memoir of a Priest’s Son, trans. and ed. Alexander M. Martin (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 86–96.


95. Babu, African Socialism, 60.


Bibliography


