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## Questions from the Dar es Salaam Debates<sup>1</sup>

*Zeyad el Nabolsy*

This chapter aims to revisit some of the key questions which were debated at the University of Dar es Salaam during the 1970s and 1980s. The University of Dar es Salaam was a hotbed of progressive politics during the period in question. Radical political economy was frequently taught and discussed by the students and professors at the university.<sup>2</sup> The ruling party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, was embarked on a project of building socialism, but this was not a Marxist project, rather it was informed by the theory of ‘African Socialism’ which was adhered to by Nyerere. Proponents of African Socialism claimed that because African societies were and are classless societies, a theory of social transformation which was centred on class struggle was inapplicable to such societies.<sup>3</sup> There were other proponents of African Socialism, but it was only in Tanzania that this theory was applied as a theory of socialist development. The proponents of African Socialism in Tanzania held that the situation there was exceptional compared to developments across the African continent in so far as communal forms had survived into the end of the colonial period. On this basis, the claim was made that such communal forms could provide an alternative basis for building a socialist society without the need for going through a stage of independent capitalist development.<sup>4</sup> This view might have appeared especially plausible when its proponents contrasted the case of Tanzania with the case of neighbouring Kenya, where a fairly strong class of rich peasants able to hire the labour of others emerged during the colonial period.<sup>5</sup>

### CONTEXT: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

To contextualise the Dar es Salaam Debates, we will provide a brief overview of class struggles during the independence and post-independence periods.

During the struggle for independence, peasant mobilisation played a significant role in the movement which brought TANU to power.<sup>6</sup> However, the party's other significant base was to be found in the petty bourgeoisie, specifically the traders. It was traders who provided links between the intelligentsia (the leaders of the party) and its mass base (the peasantry).<sup>7</sup> Upon gaining independence in 1961, TANU's leadership, attempted to attract foreign investment in order to develop the productive forces in Tanzania. However, such efforts failed due to various factors, including the underdevelopment of Tanzania's infrastructure and industrial sectors compared to its Kenyan neighbour as well as problems at the level of international relations. Nyerere and TANU's leadership discovered that Tanzania could not maintain an independent foreign policy without paying a significant price.<sup>8</sup> Thus, when Nyerere tried to maintain an independent foreign policy with respect to the German Democratic Republic and when he broke off relations with the UK over Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence, foreign capital fled the country. Between 1964 and 1965 about TZS 290 million left the country.<sup>9</sup>

TANU was also under pressure because of the slow pace of its 'Africanisation' policy, as evidenced by the army mutiny of 1964 as well as union agitation during the 1960s. It was clear that the leadership of TANU had to make important concessions to the professional classes comprising a part of the petty bourgeoisie in Tanzania. Yet this class, at least before 1967, was still unable to break the power of the commercial bourgeoisie (mostly Asian merchants who had attained a privileged position under the colonial state).<sup>10</sup> As the ruling party consolidated its grip on the state, it turned to suppressing labour strikes. The Trade Disputes (Settlement) Act of 1962 essentially banned strikes, and by 1964, all the trade unions were amalgamated into a single national union, the National Union of Tanganyika Workers.<sup>11</sup>

The Arusha Declaration and its attendant policies of nationalisation can be interpreted as driven by at least two main considerations: an attempt to redirect capital towards industrial enterprises and as a successful attempt by the elements of the petty bourgeoisie which controlled the state to break the power of the commercial bourgeoisie. The elements of the petty bourgeoisie which controlled the state also recognised the need to raise agricultural productivity in order to increase revenues, and to acquire the capital necessary for industrial investment. The villagisation programme aimed to concentrate the rural population in villages which would then be provided with more advanced machinery with the aim of increasing agricultural productivity, especially of cash crops for export. However, it was clear by the

mid-1970s that this forced villagisation programme had failed, peasants had resisted attempts at relocation, and food production had decreased.<sup>12</sup> The villagisation programme also provided opportunities for rich peasants to develop greater contacts with the wing of the petty bourgeoisie which occupied local bureaucratic positions, and to use these contacts to redirect the process in their favour.<sup>13</sup> In general, it appears that by the mid-1970s the conservative wing of TANU was in the ascendency.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, we should be careful to not take these developments to imply that essentially nothing changed in the post-independence period, a view which has become increasingly popular among Western scholars of African history, but which does not seem to track the perceptions of the people who lived through the independence period, even those who fell out with TANU at some point.<sup>15</sup>

#### A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE PLACE OF MARXOLOGY IN THE DEBATES

Having provided a very condensed account of class struggles during this period, we now turn to analysing how Marxists living in Tanzania during this period assessed Nyerere's policies, and some of the internal debates which arose between them. Some of the prominent questions which were raised during the Dar es Salaam Debates were: (1) What is the nature of the ruling class in the neo-colonies? (2) What is the relationship between the attempt to build socialism and the national question, given the reality of imperialism? (3) What is the relationship between the base and the superstructure, and is there anything specific about this relationship under the condition of domination by foreign capital? (4) What is the nature of neo-colonialism, and how can it be combated?<sup>16</sup> I contend that all these questions are still pertinent today for African liberation struggles. I do not suggest that one can find all or even most of the answers to these questions by revisiting these debates. However, I do argue that reflection on these debates can help us refine our understanding of these questions today, and that by paying attention to the rich intellectual history of African Marxism, we can also avoid reinventing the wheel. To this end, I provide a brief exposition of some of the main themes of these debates. The list of participants in these debates includes some very famous names and some less famous names, and some of them later changed their views on the issues which are presented below. Hence, this account will restrict itself to considering their views in the 1970s and the 1980s. While this account is primarily expository, I will also point out inconsistencies in some of the views that were put forward. Further-

more, I should warn the reader that the debate itself was often characterised by appeals to authority, specifically to Marx and Lenin's authority. However, in my view, such appeals to authority seem to have been largely performative. By this I mean that the arguments presented by the various participants stand, for the most part, on their own. I have therefore chosen to excise such deferential appeals to authority. However, there were important moments in the debates where the appeal to the textual corpus of classical Marxism cannot be characterised as an instance of an illegitimate appeal to authority. This took place when the debate shifted from evaluating a specific explanation for a given phenomenon to evaluating whether the explanation offered was compatible with the basic theoretical commitments that Marx, Engels and Lenin held – i.e., the extent to which the explanation offered is compatible with Marxism. There are obvious parallels here to other kinds of debates – e.g., philosophers can appeal to Kant's texts in order to ascertain whether a specific explanation which presents itself as Kantian is in fact consistent with what Kant is committed to. There is no illegitimate appeal to authority in such cases, since the participants all present themselves as Kantians, or at least as interested in discerning whether the explanation offered is Kantian.

#### ON THE NATURE OF THE RULING CLASS IN THE NEO-COLONIES

It is obvious that Marxists in Tanzania had to clarify the nature of the ruling class in Tanzania in order to be able to justify taking any specific determinate stance towards Nyerere's project. One line of thinking, put forward by Peter Meyns and Issa Shivji, claimed that the ruling class in Tanzania under Nyerere was a bureaucratic bourgeoisie. As Meyns put it:

the leading force in the development of class struggle in Tanzania since independence has been the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Based on its alliance with the peasants and workers it has successfully reduced the influence and strength of the commercial bourgeoisie and consolidated its own.<sup>17</sup>

However, there was a conceptual problem here in thinking of the ruling class as the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, for strictly speaking, 'wealth is not a Marxist criterion of class'.<sup>18</sup> Babu put this point elegantly: 'A petty-bourgeois, say a successful auctioneer, may be wealthier than a small manufacturer but because of his position in production, i.e., appropriating no direct surplus value, the former will still remain a petty-bourgeois and the latter full bourgeois.'<sup>19</sup> That is, we cannot just point to a wealthy group of corrupt political

elite and say that they are the ruling class simply because of their wealth. Rather, it is one's relationship to the means of production which serves to fix one's class identity, according to Marxist social theory. This was a point that M. Mamdani and H. Baghat made in response to Shivji.<sup>20</sup> Now of course, this does not imply that wealth has nothing to do with class, for in most cases, the wealthiest members of society are those who control the means of production. Nevertheless, it means that the explanation of wealth distribution must refer to different relationships to the means of production. What this implies is that saying that ruling class in Tanzania is the bureaucracy is to say that it controls the means of production. Nationalisation would be a necessary condition for this to take place:

only when state power becomes, through nationalizations of means of production, not simply the agent of oppression, but also that of exploitation; and of a social group, because of its control over the state, exercises control over [the] means of production, only then can we identify the emergence of bureaucratic capital and thus of bureaucratic bourgeoisie.<sup>21</sup>

As a conditional statement, this seems correct. And it leads to another conclusion, namely that while nationalisation is a necessary condition for the transition to socialism, it is not a sufficient condition, for it is also a necessary condition (at least in the Tanzanian context) for the rise of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie. In other words, nationalisation taken abstractly does not determine the nature of the development which is unfolding. Shivji, who believed that the ruling class in Tanzania was the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, thought that the nationalisations which took place in the aftermath of the Arusha Declaration in 1967 created the economic basis for the emergence of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie as a ruling class in the Marxist sense, and not just as a governing class:

up until the Arusha Declaration, the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' cannot be said to have really become a *bourgeoisie*. Although the state played an important role in the economy, it was mostly a regulatory one. With the Arusha Declaration the state and state institutions (including the parastatals) became the dominant factor in the economy ... political power and control over property had now come to rest in the same class.<sup>22</sup>

However, there was a problem for Shivji here, for he also did not deny that foreign capital was still dominant – this was what he meant when he wrote

that ‘the “bureaucratic bourgeoisie” is a *dependent* bourgeoisie – dependent on the international bourgeoisie.’<sup>23</sup> Everything hinged on what he meant by ‘dependent’. On the one hand, if it only meant that the bureaucratic bourgeoisie needed to enter into relations with foreign capital in order to reproduce itself, then every bourgeoisie (whether located in the core or the periphery) that has ever existed can be said to have been dependent in this sense, and as such the thesis is rather weak (but true). On the other hand, if he meant to say that it was dependent in the sense that it accumulated through service to an international bourgeoisie and that the latter was the primary owner and controller of the means of production in Tanzania, then he was wrong to say that the Tanzanian state was the dominant factor in the Tanzanian economy in the aftermath of the Arusha Declaration. And if the Tanzanian state was not the dominant factor in the Tanzanian economy, then the necessary condition for the rise of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie did not obtain.

If we emphasise the point about the Marxist criterion of class, then a new problem emerges: if it is true that the economies of states like Tanzania were dominated by foreign monopoly capital (and this is a minimal commitment for any Marxist version of the theory of imperialism) during the period in question, then it follows that there was a complicated problem in identifying the ruling class in the neo-colony. For if the ruling class of a given society is comprised of the wealthiest members of that society, then by definition this ruling class will be comprised of a group of people living in (or belonging to) that society. However, if the ruling class of a given society is comprised of the people who control the means of production of that society, then that group of people may or may not be members of that society (in the sense of living in that society). What this implies is that the ruling class of a given society might not be a part of that society. In fact, if African states in the post-independence period in the 1960s–1980s were neo-colonies, in the sense that their economic and political trajectory was controlled by forces that were external to those states, then the ruling class in those states did not exist (in the common spatiotemporal sense of that term) within those states. Indeed, this is the **conclusion Dan Nabudere** arrived at:

the political achievements of the neo-colony are brought under the control of the financial oligarchy [in the West] – a process that has never been disposed of. Under these circumstances, can there be any doubt that the economically dominant class in the neo-colony is the financial oligarchy of the imperialist countries, and that politics [in the long run] must reflect the base?<sup>24</sup>

This view was also stated by A.B. Kayonga and S.M. Magara: ‘as the financial oligarchy dominate the state of their own countries, so do they also politically dominate the states of other countries where they are economically dominant.’<sup>25</sup> What this implies is that, strictly speaking, classical political philosophy and political theory in so far as they take the primary question to be how to regulate the relationship between citizens and the state (treated as closed system) are misguided, and that they are inapplicable (without significant modifications) to neo-colonies.<sup>26</sup> If this is correct, then this by itself would be a significant result. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Marxist strategising, which is fundamentally centred around the notion of class struggle, the non-existence of an internal ruling class can lead to an impasse in terms of political action. After all, how could Tanzanian Marxists organise against an external ruling class?<sup>27</sup> Nabudere’s claim also led to other significant problems, since it seemed to imply not only that the independence of the neo-colonies was compromised, but also that it was non-existent. This was the point Karim Hirji raised in his response to Nabudere: ‘what independence implies is the establishment of a *separate* state and thus of a *separate* class controlling the state.’<sup>28</sup> But Hirji did not thereby claim that the means of production in the neo-colonies were primarily controlled by an internal ruling class. This in turn entails that he thought that the political ruling class can be different from the economic ruling class. In other words, this was a claim about the ‘relative autonomy’ of the political. This relative autonomy was presented not as a function of internal causal factors, but as a result of the existence of inter-imperial rivalries, as well as the rivalry between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp in the context of the Cold War. Yash Tandon stated this point clearly: ‘the contradictions between imperialist countries and between imperialist and socialist countries provide the basis for the relative autonomy of the dependent ruling classes in the neo-colonies.’<sup>29</sup> The question then becomes: is it possible to specify this relative autonomy in a manner that is consistent with historical materialism as a framework for socio-historical explanation? One prediction which seems to be entailed by the framework of historical materialism is that the relative autonomy of the political in such a situation cannot survive in the long run – i.e., control over state power without control over the means of production, which are left in the hands of foreign capital, will lead to either the overthrow of the class which only holds state power, or to its subordination in the long run. This also essentially explains the demise of the Bandung movement: in long run, the economic must assert its primacy, good intentions (and bad intentions) notwithstanding. This is in fact what happened

in Tanzania. At the end of the day, Nyerere had to concede and enter negotiations with the International Monetary Fund between 1981 and 1985, and Tanzania had to submit to ‘structural adjustment’.<sup>30</sup>

#### FRIENDS AND ENEMIES IN THE NEO-COLONY

The debate about the specification of the nature of the ruling class in the neo-colonies is obviously important for understanding who the primary enemy is. For if one holds, as Nabudere did, that the ruling class in the neo-colonies was the ruling class in the imperialist countries, then this class will be marked as the number one enemy of the working class and the peasantry in the neo-colonies. This was exactly the conclusion Nabudere arrived at: ‘to us in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, the principal enemy is imperialism.’<sup>31</sup> In Nabudere’s view, there was, strictly speaking, no such thing as a national bourgeoisie in any African country in so far as there was no internal social group which accumulated surplus through ownership of the means of production, and which structured social, economic and political relations in those societies to suit its interests – i.e., there were no national capitalists. There was a governing class – i.e., the class whose members occupied political office – but the laws it passed and the changes it made in society were geared towards the interests of finance capital. This does not imply that it did not benefit from this relationship, but only that it was subordinated. In other words, if there was a clash of interests between its interests and the interests of finance capital (or the bearers thereof), its interests would have suffered, all else being equal. Of course, one can choose to define ‘national bourgeoisie’ in a different way. For example, Babu claimed that there are two segments of the national bourgeoisie in the neo-colony. The first segment is ‘the small one which generates and accumulates capital without recourse to finance capital’, and the second is ‘the big bourgeoisie whose capital is part of imperialist finance capital.’<sup>32</sup> One way Nabudere could have responded to Babu’s objection was to note that in political and social analysis, the bare fact of existence is not important, and that what is important is causal efficacy – i.e., if there is an element in the social system which exists, but which does not exert any significant causal influence on the rest of the elements in the system, then it can be safely ignored. After all, any model must simplify to be useful.

Nabudere thought that a segment of the petty bourgeoisie in the neo-colony had interests which were in contradiction with the interests of overseas finance capital, and he also believed that this segment might be persuaded



to enter into an alliance with workers and peasants (and radical petty-bourgeois intellectuals) as part of the ‘national democratic revolution’:

the petty-bourgeoisie is a product of imperialist domination. It cannot be disjointed from it but at the same time it has a contradiction with imperialism because of this oppression and domination. That is why, the national democratic revolution encompasses a wide body of the population of our countries.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Nabudere was clearly influenced by Mao’s ‘New Democracy’ of 1940. According to Mao, the rise of a socialist power in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution reconfigured the global order in such a manner that it was now possible to reconfigure the project of a bourgeois democratic revolution, which, in the classical Marxist account, was the first stage of a two-stage process which would lead to a socialist revolution in the colonies and semi-colonies; in the classical version of the theory, the first phase was a struggle against feudalism which would end with the rule of the bourgeoisie, against whom the struggle would be waged in the second phase. For Mao, in the semi-colonies there were segments of the bourgeoisie whose interests were opposed to the interests of the imperialist capitalists: ‘China’s national bourgeoisie has a revolutionary quality at certain periods and to a certain degree, because China is a colonial and semi-colonial country which is a victim of aggression.’<sup>34</sup> However, this oppressed bourgeoisie was also seen as dependent on imperialist capitalists, and to this extent, while it was thought that they may be induced to join a united front against imperialism, they were also viewed as unreliable allies, who could not be expected to lead the struggle for a national democratic revolution successfully:

At the same time, however, being a bourgeois class in a colonial and semi-colonial country and so being extremely flabby economically and politically, the Chinese national bourgeoisie also has another quality, namely, a proneness to conciliation with the enemies of the revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, they did have a role in the national democratic revolution, but only if they could be stripped of leadership and only if they were subordinated to a movement which was guided by proletarian ideology (and note that this is distinct from a movement lead by the proletariat, a distinction to which we will return below). But it was obvious that these segments of the bourgeoisie could not be induced to join any nationalist movement unless concessions

were made to them. For Mao, these concessions necessitated recognising that the successful outcome of a national democratic revolution will bring about a state that is not under the dictatorship of the proletariat, but neither would it be under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie – instead, it would be ruled by a coalition of different classes.<sup>36</sup> In this transitional phase, private property will not be abolished and there will be no socialising of agriculture, but the state will nationalise (with the aim of socialising) key strategic sectors. But why did Mao think that the path to capitalist development in the classical sense was blocked? First, he thought that the imperialist powers will struggle against attempts towards independence, regardless of whether such attempts aim at the imposition of an independent capitalist order or an independent socialist order – for example, it is not unreasonable to think that today, even if Cuba abandoned socialism and turned towards capitalism, while attempting to maintain its independence, the US would still exert tremendous pressure on it, as long as it refuses to be part of the American empire's 'backyard'. The second reason is closely tied to the first reason, namely the need for assistance from the socialist camp in order to fight off imperialism, and this in turn meant that there would be a demand that the country should not fall into the capitalist camp when it attained independence.<sup>37</sup> A third reason, which was especially salient in the case of Tanzania and other African countries, had to do with the non-existence of an independent national capitalist class that can restructure society on the basis of its interests while preventing systematic surplus drain. As Tandon put it in his defence of Nabudere: 'capital [in the neo-colonies] belongs to the imperialist bourgeoisie, the local [ruling?] class which employ that capital, while unquestionably appropriating a part of the surplus value, are *objectively* only servicing agents of imperialist capital'.<sup>38</sup>

However, here we might suggest that while this is true of Tanzania and Uganda (to take two of the most discussed cases in these debates),<sup>39</sup> it is not clear that this is generalisable to places like India, or indeed, to take an African example, Egypt. This is a point made by J. Shao, but Shao went further than that and defended something close to Bill Warren's thesis when he wrote:

colonialism, the domination of the world by the capitalist mode of production, the international division of labour and development of the productive forces in the colonies are not incompatible. On the contrary, they provide conditions for the rapid development of the productive forces on a world scale.<sup>40</sup>

Warren's thesis was that 'the imperialist countries' policies and their overall impact on the Third World actually favour its industrialization; and that ties of dependence binding the Third World to the imperialist countries have been, and are being, markedly loosened.<sup>41</sup> The problem with Warren's thesis as it was applied to African economies was that it failed to explain any of the significant empirical data. And when its proponents have looked at African economies during the colonial period, they have tended to invent forward and backward linkages where these do not exist.<sup>42</sup> Also, they have tended to discount the fact that in many places, including in parts of East Africa, levels of development were higher before the colonial period than during it.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Warren assumed what he was supposed to argue for, namely that the proliferation of joint ventures in the former colonised countries implies the nationalisation of foreign capital, rather than the denationalisation of local capital.<sup>44</sup> For this is precisely the crux of the issue.<sup>45</sup>

If there is indeed no 'national bourgeoisie', and if exploitation is carried out by foreign capital or its local representatives (as providers of an intermediate service), then it would be a strategic mistake to identify the principal enemy as an internal enemy – the politically governing class or the office holding class. In fact, for both Nabudere and Tandon, it was not feasible to think of any democratic national revolution which did not bring a significant portion of the petty bourgeoisie to the side of the workers. If one believes this, then one will also believe that attacking 'the bureaucratic bourgeoisie' is liable to weaken the anti-imperialist movement, by attacking 'important sections of the anti-imperialist united front'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the debate was really about the line which Marxists in Tanzania should take towards Nyerere's TANU – i.e., should they enter an alliance with it, at least in its struggles against imperialism, or should they denounce it as the principal enemy? Supporters of the view that the main struggle should be carried out against the internal ruling class, claimed that the Nabudere-Tandon line was essentially a concession to the petty bourgeoisie, and that it would disarm the proletariat. This is the position which was taken up by Mamdani: 'so long as a specific imperialism does not physically invade Uganda ... the class struggle remains principally internal'.<sup>47</sup> Critics of the Nabudere-Tandon line also pointed out that since African intellectuals tend to be from the same petty bourgeois class as the governing class, they are often hesitant to criticise it or identify it as the enemy.<sup>48</sup> Of course, this cannot be an argument against the truth of the Nabudere-Tandon line, but it can be rhetorically powerful, and it can be deployed to show why this view was held (although the view itself would have to be refuted on independent grounds). However, in my view, it

does appear that the Nabudere-Tandon line was simply the conclusion of a valid argument that starts from basic Marxist-Leninist premises:

1. In the era of imperialism, the means of production in at least some of the neo-colonies (including Tanzania and Uganda) are owned, for the most part, by foreign capital, and its bearers – i.e., the ruling class in the imperialist countries.
2. The group that owns most of the means of production in a given society is the ruling class of that society, even if it is not the governing class (i.e., does not hold political office).

The conclusion is that in the era of imperialism, the ruling class in at least some of the neo-colonies (including Tanzania and Uganda) is the ruling class of the imperialist countries.

This argument is, I submit, valid (i.e., if the two premises are true, then the conclusion must be true). The dispute about its soundness can be divided into an empirical dispute over the truth of the first premise and a theoretical or conceptual dispute regarding the truth of the second premise. One can accept the truth of the second premise while denying the truth of the first premise on empirical grounds, as Cranford Pratt did.<sup>49</sup> We clearly cannot resolve this dispute here, but I hope that I have contributed, in a very small way, towards its resolution through clarifying the **issue** at stake.

#### PEASANTS AND WORKERS IN THE NEO-COLONY

So far, we have been concerned with identifying the different contending positions regarding the characterisation of the ruling class in the neo-colony in general and Tanzania in particular. However, we will now turn towards a discussion of the relationship between the peasantry and the workers as it was conceived by some of the participants in the Dar es Salaam Debates. Nabudere, as has been pointed out above, envisioned a united national front that was to be led by the working class: ‘only on the basis of a new democratic revolution [in the Maoist sense] in which the working class plays a leading role can imperialism be contested.’<sup>50</sup> There was an obvious problem with this proposal, namely the fact that because of the narrow industrial base which was inherited from the colonial period, there were not that many workers in Tanzania. In 1961, for example, there were only 411,538 wage earners in Tanzania,<sup>51</sup> the vast majority of whom were not employed in industry, which was practically non-existent. To this extent, the significance of the working

class in Tanzania was derived more from the strategic location it occupied than from the number of its members. Their ability to carry out strikes that could paralyse the economic life of the country despite their small numbers was on full display during the 1950s, when they engaged in a series of strikes in support of the independence movement.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, most of the participants in the Dar es Salaam Debates believed that due to their greater exposure to certain facets of modern urban life, the proletariat were capable of articulating, with the help of radical intellectuals ‘who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole’,<sup>53</sup> their opposition towards its exploitation in a more systematic and radical manner than the peasantry. Furthermore, at the level of political capacity, they also believed that the way workers are organised in factories, docks and plantations across different parts of the country allows them to act more effectively as a unified force. This claim goes back to at least Marx and Engels: ‘this union [of workers] is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with each other’.<sup>54</sup>

The peasantry vastly outnumbered the workers; however, they were seen as a great physical force, and not as a great revolutionary force per se. They shared this view with Amílcar Cabral, who adhered to this thesis on the grounds of his experiences in Guinea-Bissau:

I shall confine myself to my own country, Guinea, where it must be said at once that the peasantry is not a revolutionary force – which may seem strange, particularly as we have based the whole of our armed liberation struggle on the peasantry. A distinction must be drawn between a physical force and a revolutionary force.<sup>55</sup>

Cabral’s thought in general was clearly influential on some of the participants in the Dar es Salaam Debates, like Shivji.<sup>56</sup> On this specific issue, there seems to have been agreement by most of the participants that this distinction must be taken into consideration.

What this meant was that while any revolutionary movement had to recruit the peasantry, its ideological orientation could not be determined by the class instincts of the peasantry. Instead, its demands would have to be articulated as an elaboration and a rendering explicit about the demands inherent in the class instincts of the workers despite their numerical inferiority. For the participants in the Dar es Salaam Debates, the peasantry, because they were still petty commodity producers (even if only in a very

formal sense), could not be expected to come to a socialist standpoint without being guided by a party led by proletarian ideology. Moreover, it was thought that the articulation of grievances by the peasantry often takes the form of emphasising unequal exchange – i.e., exploitation through price manipulation at the point of exchange. When this view of exploitation is extended to workers, there is a danger that one reverts to a pre-Marxist socialism which tended to view the exploitation of workers as happening at the point of exchange rather than at the point of production. We should not forget that there were Ricardian socialists before Marx, such as Thomas Hodgskin, John Gray and William Thompson, who attempted to understand the exploitation of workers as occurring at the point of exchange, and whose political proposals were adversely affected by this theoretical misunderstanding.<sup>57</sup>

The aforementioned characterisation of the peasantry becomes clearer when contrasted with the view of Fanon. In his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon wrote:

the peasantry is systematically left out of most of the nationalist parties' propaganda. But it is obvious that in colonial countries only the peasantry is revolutionary. It has nothing to lose and everything to gain.<sup>58</sup>

The problem with this view is that even in the Algerian case, the resistance of the peasants and their revolts and attacks on the *colons*, which Fanon observed, did not lead to a general revolutionary war until the peasants were mobilised by leadership coming from the urban areas. This was acknowledged even by scholars who were sympathetic to Fanon's account.<sup>59</sup> One of those scholars, B. Marie Perinbam, attempted to defend Fanon by arguing that because the working class was so small in the African colonies, Fanon had no choice but to mark out the peasantry as the revolutionary class.<sup>60</sup> However, this argument is not convincing because it seems to conflate two issues: the necessity of drawing on the peasantry in any struggle that could have a reasonable chance of success, and the question of whether the peasantry is a revolutionary class. These are two distinct claims which should not be conflated. Moreover, the fact that there are peasant revolts and acts of resistance is not what is at issue, since the mere fact of revolt and resistance does not indicate any revolutionary tendency. For one could revolt against the existing situation because it has made it impossible to fulfil one's 'traditional role', and such a revolt could occur without being revolutionary in any way in so far as it does not involve rejections of 'traditional' norms and social

relations, although it might be channelled by outside forces in a revolutionary direction.<sup>61</sup> Marxism, if it is anything at all, is a theory of revolution, not a theory of revolt or of everyday resistance.

For the participants of the Dar es Salaam Debates (and on this, there was agreement), Fanon conflated the fact that there could be no successful revolution in African countries without the mobilisation of the peasantry with the thesis that the peasantry is a revolutionary class. Shivji articulated the discontent with Fanon's claims in a representative manner: 'Fanon is completely confused on these issues. Unlike Lenin he had neither a grasp of the scientific theory nor experience in working class struggle. His was essentially a very radical petty bourgeois populist.'<sup>62</sup> It is not my aim here to defend or criticise Fanon on this point. However, I wish to indicate this divergence between the participants at the Dar es Salaam Debates and Fanon because it is not unfair to say that there have been attempts to depict Fanon as essentially representing all that is interesting about African anti-colonial Marxism. The uncritical worship of Fanon in some circles is, in my view, partially explained by referring to the fact that he is taken as the sole representative of African anti-colonial Marxism, and this in turn is explained by the fact that there is ignorance about the diversity of standpoints which were taken up by African Marxists in the aftermath of the struggles for national independence. This chapter has aimed to contribute towards remedying this situation by introducing readers to some of the key debates that occurred at Dar es Salaam during the 1970s and 1980s.

#### NOTES

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