

156

PROBLEMS IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES
OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN INTELLECTUALS AND THE STATE

By ANYANG - NYONGO

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
THIS BOOK MUST NOT BE
REMOVED FROM THE LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE
DEPARTMENTS OF
ECONOMICS
LAW
POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

Paper 1

PROBLEMS IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES OF THE WORKING
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTELLECTUALS AND THE STATE

by

P Anyang-Nyongu

The African Academy of Sciences, Nairobi

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR SERIES
SEMINAR ON
INTELLECTUALS, THE STATE AND IMPERIALISM:
TOWARDS INTELLECTUAL DECOLONISATION

HARARE
20-22 OCTOBER 1987

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR SERIES

DISCUSSION PAPERS

Please Note: These discussion papers have been reproduced as they were presented at the seminars, without editing. The papers do not necessarily reflect the views of the Co-ordinating Committee members, the Departments of Economics, Law, or Political and Administrative Studies, or the Ford Foundation who have sponsored the seminars.

Some critical notes on

Problems in Third World Countries of the
Working Relationship Between Intellectuals and the State

P. Anyang' Nyong'o
African Academy of Sciences
Nairobi- Kenya

paper presented at the seminar on

"INTELLECTUALS, THE STATE AND IMPERIALISM:
TOWARDS INTELLECTUAL DECOLONISATION"

Department of Economics, Law and
Political and Administrative Studies

University of Zimbabwe
P. O. Box MP 167
Mount Pleasant
HARARE
Zimbabwe

October 20-23, 1987

Introduction

What does it take, in a Third World country, to become an intellectual? The answer is simple: modern education. Yet not everybody who "goes to school" in any Third World country becomes an intellectual. Only those few who, as a result of a favourable environment, their own intellectual endowments and the opportunities they seize in life, actually become intellectuals and contribute to society as such.

Who, however, is an intellectual? Ali Mazrui once argued, in a famous debate with Akena Adoko - Uganda's then Chief Intelligence Officer - in 1968, in Kampala, that an intellectual is "one who is excited by ideas and has acquired the ability to handle some of these ideas effectively". Mazrui, as usual, had the correct impression of who an intellectual is, but he did not go far enough in his definition. I do not think, for one moment, that the definition of an intellectual can be arrived at that easily. But to be excited about ideas and to acquire the ability to handle some of these ideas effectively is only part of the issue. I think an intellectual has much more going for him than Mazrui was prepared to concede. An intellectual, for one, is a literate person; he is one who uses his literacy to systematically analyse nature and society, or certain aspects of both, and present his thoughts and ideas in coherent arguments or discourses that can make ordinary mortals understand how nature and society are constituted, why things happen the way they do and what human beings can do to improve their lot and live much better than their

predecessors did on this earth. For that matter, intellectuals have always been concerned about change: change either in the way ordinary mortals look at things - Galileo's "the world is round and not flat, and it goes around the sun, hence it is not the center of the universe" - or change in the way society is organised.

For those of us who are brought up in western intellectual traditions, it is fair to concede that, as far as we can remember, Lord Byron was one of the first writers to use this term in its modern sense. To Byron, an intellectual denoted someone for whom ideas, science, art and culture are so important as to determine not only the aims of everyday life, but also the roots of political thought and action. The idea that intellectuals, people who are mentally better prepared, groomed and cultured to think above the ordinary affairs of life and to project their thoughts into the future survived Byron, and was taken up by Coleridge who celebrated the role of the intellectual as guardian of cultural and social values, and throughout the nineteenth century, European intellectuals produced similar apologies for their own condition. John Stuart Mill is best known for his defence of the liberal society and the place of the intellectual in it. To Mill, the birth of the modern capitalist society would not have been possible were it not for the "freedom of thought and expression" that somehow preceded it, and that allowed men to experiment with innovative ideas, in the world of technology as well as socio-political organization, during the Industrial Revolution in

Europe. David Landes, in his study of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, has upheld Mill's contention and has gone even further to give men of ideas a central role in igniting the Revolution.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this avantgarde role of the intellectuals in social change in western culture was stated, even with more conviction, by Lenin in his theory of revolution. In Leninism the intelligentsia are given a crucial role in the preparation and instigation of revolution, and are even regarded as suitable members of a subsequent (and, according to the theory, provisional) government. Without a revolutionary theory, says Lenin, there cannot be a revolution. And, we may want to add, without a reactionary theory there cannot be a counter revolution leading society even more solidly back to the pre-revolutionary days of the ancien regime. When Pinochet mounted a counter-revolution in Chile in the mid-seventies, he needed the intellectual services of the "Chicago Boys" to provide the theoretical basis of his counter-revolution. Thus, of course, what is common in all these perspectives on intellectuals is that they are men of ideas who analyse, articulate and project these ideas to conserve society or to change it for better or for worse. Intellectuals, as individuals, have interests which are not necessarily disembodied from the general social dynamics which shape individual interests in any society.

Gramsci had a very interesting notion of intellectuals. He argued that almost every social force in society (whether class,

caste, interest group etc) has intellectuals of its own. Intellectuals are those who seek to articulate and make sense out of the interests of their class, caste, group, nation, party etc. In terms of communicable ideas and reasoned out political/ideological positions. Gramsci was concerned very much with intellectuals, class conflicts and class hegemony in capitalist society.

For Gramsci, a hegemony consists of complex and concealed modes of class domination, whereby positions of influence throughout society are always, by a hidden mechanism, filled by the members of an already ruling class. Classical Marxism asserts that when productive forces have developed to the level at which existing production relations can no longer contain them or serve their further growth, revolution is precipitated and in the ensuing crisis all institutions crumble and disappear to be replaced by qualitatively new ones. The theory of hegemony tries to explain why that does not happen: a powerful mechanism of consolidation exists within the social and political superstructure (in the form of ideas, values, culture etc), which helps to stabilize the ascendancy of a class at the limiting point of production compatible with its continuity. The ruling class will therefore make use of intellectuals, directly or indirectly, to exercise this hegemony by articulating and reinforcing those ideas which seek to conserve and reproduce society as it is. An important task of the revolutionary intelligentsia is therefore to infiltrate the autonomous institutions (institutions outside the state which cannot be easily subsumed directly under the state in capitalist

society) such as schools, professional associations, universities and the Church, through which hegemony is covertly exercised, and to attempt to remove their internal staying power and let loose the flood of revolution that is surging from below. Revolution, thus, should involve the construction of a new hegemony which grows and expands in civil society and, finally, culminates in the capture of state power by the revolutionary party.

Whether we are looking at the ideas of Mill, Lenin or Gramsci, we will find one invariant factor: their ideas have greatly influenced the manner in which society is organized and their ideas continue to explain why things happen in society the way they do. One cannot talk about European civilizations without paying homage to Mill as one of the architects of modern European statecraft.

Intellectuals of Africa

Although it is known, for example, that Africa had flourishing cultures and civilisations in the pre-slavery days, the nasty experiences of both the slave trade and colonialism disrupted most of the societies in which intellectual traditions were already built and evolving. This is truer of Africa South of the Sahara than of Africa within the Arab world. In colonial times, imperialist domination was maintained more by mechanisms of conquest than by hegemonic control; but, by its very transforming nature of transforming African societies, imperialism produced its own grave diggers.

It is equally well known that intellectuals, whether as leaders of trade unions, political parties or welfare organizations played very key roles in the independence struggles of most African countries. In most cases, these were the recent graduates of high schools or foreign universities. Some of them were primary school graduates who were then self-taught either through journalism or the real world of politics. But that vision of an alternative world was very much conditioned by the very colonial experience that they sought to negate in the post World War II period. Hence, in the ideologies of the nationalist parties, we find a commitment to democracy, socialism or the Party System very much within the framework of Europe of the twentieth century. Africans had to prove that the one-party system was democratic because it could allow as much electoral competition as the multi-party systems in the bourgeois democracies of the west. The only thing about the one-party system which was uniquely African was that it was based on the African system of government which, it was argued, was based on consensus and devoid of artificially organized competition. This kind of argument, developed to establish the Africanness of the one-party system, was alright at the level of ideology; at the level of political theory it could not withstand rigorous reasoning and historical experience.

Nowhere, in the annals of African political thought since independence, do we really find any solid theory of African

politics, or any ideology that has mobilized people into action and sustained the hegemony of an indigenous ruling class for an appreciative length of time. Morocco and Tunisia would be exceptions, so would Swaziland. One-partyism has floundered, and has been replaced by varieties of presidential authoritarian regimes and presidential dictatorships either in civilian or military uniforms. African Socialism stands generally discredited, and is only referred to as a matter of routine in official speeches. In many African countries, the very propagation and discussion of political ideas have been banished in preference to the ritual repetition of official ideologies. Even successes achieved by purely individual initiatives are, for the sake of pleasing the political gods, attributed to the wisdom of the revered leaders. Why does Africa find itself in this kind of position?

The secret lies in the dynamics of African political economies since independence. During the struggle for independence, the popular masses played an important and central role in the nationalist movements. Trade unions, students, professional organizations, peasant cooperatives, cultural associations and demobilized soldiers - all led, in various ways, by their own intellectuals, formed the core of the coalitions which contended for political power. The people were inspired into action by democratic ideals: they chose their leaders through "free and fair elections"; they made specific political and economic demands which went into party manifestoes and provided

the raw materials for writing some of the post-independence development plans; they had their own newspapers and mass organizations autonomous of the state; bourgeois democratic ideals and principles, enunciated so clearly by the intelligentsia, were taken more or less as the governing ethos of the new society that independence was to herald.

It is not as if the popular masses were involved in an exercise of self deception. Popular struggles and mass organizations were the means by which independence had actually been won, and there was really no reason to lead the popular masses to believe that, soon after independence, the democratic principles they had invoked to win Nkrumah's "political kingdom" would become irrelevant in the organization of civil society. Yet, rather rapidly, and as if African states were competing to outdo each other in the art of political demobilization, the role of the popular masses in politics started to dwindle; with them also went the articulate intelligentsia which espoused their cause. As the political arena shrank, so did the institutions of democratic accountability also fall into disuse, and their intellectual leaders equally become irrelevant to the political process. Without institutionalized accountability systems, public officials found it increasingly easy to misuse public offices and resources, quite often undermining the very fiscal basis of the state itself. As the state became the arena for private accumulation, politics became a specific "job group" for power holders, one that they had to defend even by the gun were their

positions to be challenged by certain rival elites or the restless masses.

It is therefore perhaps clear why ideas have been rendered rather marginal in the development process in Africa. And with the banishing of ideas has gone their most active perpetrators: the intellectuals. Perhaps a quick look at the status of African universities will further illustrate this.

The university system has always been, from colonial times to the present, the trigger of change in Africa. It was the products of university education who led the nationalist movements. During the early years of independence, the new national universities were the centers of debates on policies of development and national priorities. During the last ten years, the universities have been on the forefront fighting dictatorial and authoritarian regimes and championing popular causes, from Liberia in West Africa, to Tunisia in North Africa, right down to Swaziland in Southern Africa. It is by and large in universities where alternative ideas aimed at transforming society can continue to be expressed. On the other hand, it is also a fact that from the same universities are to be found those who actively collaborate with repressive regimes; or the unthinking ideologues of the ruling authorities. University dons do go out of their way to seek favours from those who govern, thus compromising their independence to critically and objectively evaluate public policies. Of late, sycophancy rather than critical thinking and social imagination seem

to have become the dominant culture in many African universities.

Perhaps 20 years have not been enough for the African intelligentsia to build alternative institutions, institutions that can operate relatively autonomously of the neo-colonial state. Except for the church and within religious movements - for peculiar cultural and historical reasons which we cannot go into now - all intellectuals have to operate with a great deal of dependence on the state. Great European thinkers - from Galileo to Mill to Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci - were not paid functionaries of the state in any form whatsoever. In Africa, state patronage of intellectuals is part of the demobilization process, hence "intellectual activity either takes place within the framework of "exit" - hence indifference, or "loyalty" - hence sycophancy.

Intellectuals of Other Third World Countries

Latin America presents an intellectual challenge to Africa, so does Asia in both their revolutionary and conservative phases. Both Latin American and Asian countries present a relationship between the intellectuals and the State which, in comparison to Africa, is qualitatively very different. The success of Japanese capitalism rests in a fusion between entrepreneurial and intellectual nationalism. The new industrializers, the so-called "gang-of-four" - Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong - did not simply rely on foreign investments to boost their

economies; the dynamism of their indigenous businessmen and the primacy they put on research and development by nationals gave them the cutting edge in electronic technology and led them to very advanced methods of producing mass consumer goods. China, in its heyday of building socialism, was prepared to lure Chinese nationals working abroad, irrespective of their ideology, to "go back home" and put their intellectual and scientific skills to building their country. In other words, intellectuals have not just been patronized by state jobs or sinecures, their talents have been recognized and put to constructive use in building economies whose very foundation is to be found in unflinching Asiatic nationalism.

When we turn to Latin America, we find some very interesting phenomena. Andre Gunder Frank and the dependencia school have analysed how Latin American countries, in spite of many years of being independent from their former colonial masters, have suffered from economic dependence on the north and internal underdevelopment of their economies. Fernando Henrique Cardoso and others have retorted by saying that dependence and underdevelopment do not tell the whole story: in certain countries, e.g. Brazil and Mexico, there have been dependent capitalist development whereby the internationalisation of imperialism has actually been deepened.

These Latin American "success stories" have also gone a long way to involve their own intellectuals in the struggle to build

some kind of indigenous capitalism. But where Latin America really excels in terms of intellectual/state relations is the way in which intellectuals have managed, in spite of state terrorism and repression, to build traditions and institutions autonomous of the State. These traditions and institutions are by and large responsible for the ability of the Latin American intellectuals to generate original theories of Latin American development as well as indigenous critiques of their own development.

Although we have been struggling very hard to develop our own paradigms of development and theories of our own political processes, we African intellectuals are still very much dominated by the past and current social theories that are poured on us from the north. Thandika Mkandawire has tried to explain this difference between Latin American and African intellectual traditions in terms of the relative autonomy of Latin America from the north with regard to their own lingua franca in the social and economic sciences, and the near total integration of Africa into Western Europe and North America in this regard. Latin Americans communicate in Spanish and Portuguese, two languages used in two of Europe's weakest imperialist powers. In post-colonial times, Spain and Portugal have not been as able to dominate intellectual discourse in Latin America as Western Europe and North America have been through the use of the English and French languages in Africa. In the same way, state functionaries have been able, in the English and French speaking countries of Africa, to propagate conservative official ideologies more

effectively given their thorough schooling in the west from which these ideologies derive their rationale. Thus the critique of the status quo by African intellectuals who wish to propose alternative systems of government and economic development have not been as original, or as effective, as they have been in Latin America.

It must also be remembered that in certain major Latin American countries - Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Mexico - intellectual traditions have been built over long periods of time. Bourgeois families exist which made their original wealth in the last century and have since then been supporting institutions of thought and research autonomously of the state. These institutions have, since then, developed webs of connections among themselves such that their sons and daughters can now, with ease, operate independently of the state. This makes it much easier to build a tradition of social enquiry, and establish an atmosphere of public discourse, which is not easily intimidated by the state even in its most repressive state as in Chile under Pinochet, or the military dictatorship from which the Alfonsin regime emerged in Argentina.

In short, civil society is more highly developed in these Latin American countries than it is in Africa, and this also partly explains why their intelligentsias are more productive, more original in thought, and more capable of operating independent of the state.

Conclusion

I have been thinking aloud as I write. These are initial notes. But I hope they will generate some discussions from which a more full blown paper can be written.