

Dani Wadada Nabudere's Theoretical Explanation of Imperialism:

an Exemplary Contribution to its Concrete Understanding

Sehlaire Makgetlaneng¹

The purpose of this brief is to pay tribute to Dani Wadada Nabudere as a distinguished multidisciplinary African scholar of Uganda with a high academic and scholarly reputation in Africa and the rest of the world. He did much to capture the theoretical aspect of imperialism. His exemplary contribution to the concrete understanding of imperialism is an integral part of the struggle on an ideological front to overcome the forces of control, domination and exploitation on the global scale. His theoretical works on imperialism represent his commitment to ending socio-political and economic inequality and social class division by restoring community as the basis of socio-political and economic life. He substantiated this theoretical commitment in practice. He sought a theoretical and practical basis for concerted revolutionary and progressive action directed towards this end. His life was an engagement in the efforts to contribute towards a world united in a search for peace and security through socio-economic justice.

Introduction

Dani Wadada Nabudere passed away on 9 November 2011. Central to his theoretical work on imperialism is his provision of the historical link between the contemporary socio-political and economic development of the dependent capitalist countries of Africa, Asia and the Americas and their domination and exploitation by imperialism since the inception of capitalism. This link has run continuously through the

development of imperialism from its first mercantilist phase, through its second free-trade phase and its third financial or monopoly phase, to its current multilateral or corporate phase. As a revolutionary scholar and political activist against imperialism and capitalism, Nabudere provides the evidence that since its inception, capitalism as an ideological and economic order has been fundamentally opposed to the furthering of the interests of oppressed and exploited people. As a social order established primarily for the

1. Sehlaire Makgetlaneng is a Chief Research Specialist and Programme Leader: Governance and Security, at the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA).

Since its inception, capitalism has been fundamentally opposed to the furthering of the interests of oppressed and exploited people

Mineral and oil resources of dependent capitalist countries are of vital strategic importance to the operations of advanced capitalist countries

strategic interests of capitalists, its existence is structurally antagonistic to the primary interests of the working class, which are irreconcilable with those of capitalists. The people are managed by the state, which is the organ reflecting the division of society into social classes through its maintenance and defence of capitalism and the interests of capitalists. Briefly, Nabudere provides the evidence that the complete victory over imperialism will be through the elimination of capitalism by the revolutionary forces in their own countries.

Imperialism

Nabudere provides a concrete understanding of imperialism and its implications for the struggle for transformation by the revolutionary and progressive social forces of the dependent capitalist countries of Africa, Asia and the Americas. His works on imperialism enable us to view it as 'the socio-political, economic, human resources development, ideological, financial, trade, technological and military' operational means used by the financial rulers of the countries of the centre of capitalism. They use imperialism firstly to resolve the problem of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; secondly, to contain crises of the capitalist system, particularly its organic form. Thirdly, they 'manage antagonistic or primary contradictions between the working class and the capitalist class'. Fourthly, they 'reconcile secondary contradictions within the capitalist class'. Fifthly, they prolong the lifespan of capitalism throughout the world, particularly within the advanced capitalist social formations.¹

The imperialist forces strive to control the ratio of constant capital to variable capital. Central to their struggle is gaining access to and control of cheap mineral raw materials in the dependent capitalist countries of Africa, Asia and the Americas. These resources are relatively cheap compared with the finished products that the dependent capitalist countries then buy from the advanced capitalist countries. They are of strategic importance to the defence and national economy, particularly the manufacturing sector, of the advanced capitalist countries.²

Mineral and oil resources of dependent capitalist countries are of vital strategic importance to the operations of the economy and defence of advanced capitalist countries. Their state and corporations are engaged in an intensified struggle to find and exploit untapped mineral and oil resources of dependent capitalist countries. Central to this

programme is to have control over them not only for their use in the present, but also in future.³ These resources contribute towards the advanced production methods and technological, information, marketing and transportation techniques of advanced capitalist countries. These techniques are critical to the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services on the global scale. The mining sector of dependent capitalist countries is linked less with the manufacturing sector of their own economy than with the manufacturing sector of advanced capitalist countries.

The 'disarticulated and incoherent' nature of the national economy of dependent capitalist countries is one of the key characteristic features of the relationship between their economy and that of the countries of the centre of capitalism. According to Claude Ake, a 'disarticulated and incoherent' economy is an economy whose parts or sectors are either 'not complementary' or have less or no 'sectoral complementarity and reciprocity'.⁴ This state of forward and backward linkages in the economy of African countries is such that the continent contributes, through its primary products, wealth and employment or job opportunities firstly to the advanced capitalist countries and countries with an articulated and coherent economy and only secondarily to its own people.

This structural relationship has continued in the post-colonial era of the dependent capitalist social formations, sustaining their control, domination and exploitation by the finance capital of advanced capitalist countries. It has survived the end of the colonial rule. As the status quo, it makes it impossible for dependent capitalist countries to reach the socio-political, economic, human-resource development, ideological, financial, trade, technological and military development stage achieved by countries at the centre of the system.⁵

The rise of imperialism

Nabudere provides an explanation and defence of the revolutionary thesis that capitalism constitutes the primary problem of the oppressed and exploited people. This thesis applies to any capitalist country. This dichotomy between the oppressed and exploited people of dependent capitalist countries and the capitalists and imperialists emerged out of the contradictory aspects inherent in the feudal social order in Europe, which led to the rise and dominance of the capitalist social order in Europe. The dominance of capitalism in Europe brought about the end

of mercantilist imperialism. This first phase of imperialism had been based on feudal mercantile capital, named for its dominant actors, European merchants. The next phase of imperialism was free-trade imperialism. It was based on industrial and loan capital. The struggle of the capitalists in the centre of capitalism to maintain their rate of profit led to the transformation of free-trade imperialism into financial imperialism or monopoly capitalism.

Financial imperialism or monopoly capitalism, the third phase of imperialism, which marked the complete division of the world between imperialist powers, is analysed by V.I. Lenin in some of his works, particularly his classic on the system.⁶ According to him, this monopoly phase of imperialism was characterised by, among other factors, the fact that the export of capital is of primary importance in relation to the export of goods, and the emergence of the financial oligarchy controlling the leading financial institutions such as banks. The complete division of the world between imperialist powers was such that only the re-division of the world between these dominant social forces within the global order was possible in future. The re-division of the world between these powers on the basis of multilateral imperialism, immediately after the end of the Second World War, was the socio-historical development anticipated by Lenin. Nabudere provides a critical analysis and concrete explanation of this phase of imperialism, with the main purpose of ending its existence by revolutionary forces. The restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe, including Russia and other countries throughout the world, was another re-division of the world between imperialist powers within the structural framework of corporate or multilateral imperialism.

Nabudere's analysis of imperialism provides a socio-historical background to the origin of the multilateral imperialist system under the leadership of the United States of America (US) and the way in which it took over the leadership of the imperialist camp from Britain.

During the Second World War, the crisis of capitalism throughout the world offered the possibility of either the end of the system or its survival through restructuring, articulated by Margaret Wirth as 'the possibility of the recovery of capitalism and the possibility of its abolition'.⁷ The organic crisis of capitalism on the global scale has so far not led to the end of capitalism, but to its survival through restructuring on an open-door multilateral basis. In the multilateral phase of imperialism, developing countries were opened

up to all imperialist capitalist powers. Replacing the earlier hegemony of Britain in their national economies, the US began its penetration of the spheres of domination and exploitation previously held by Britain. It established its hegemony within their political economy.

How did multilateral imperialism under the leadership of the US come into existence immediately after the end of the Second World War? Before the war, the aim of the US had been to penetrate the spheres of domination and exploitation held by Britain, France, Germany and other imperialist powers in their colonies. However, the mercantilist, free-trade and financial phases of imperialism were bilateral in nature. Their bilateral nature constituted a structural disadvantage for the US in competing with other advanced capitalist countries in the colonies. As a country with few colonies, it therefore embarked upon a programme of action for the system to become multilateral in nature so that it could effectively compete with its imperialist rivals in the colonies.

The end of the war immediately paved the way for the US to achieve its aim. Its competitors, which had been devastated by the war, their resources depleted, particularly on the economic front, were dependent on the US for their reconstruction and development and were not in a position to seriously frustrate and undermine its hegemonic global programme of action. The US strove to reduce trade barriers throughout the world in order to penetrate the internal and external markets of its rivals. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly referred to as the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) were vital organisational means for advancing the US interests on an international scale. The US successfully penetrated the spheres of domination and exploitation of its rivals in the developing countries. It also successfully obtained a large degree of control over the national economy of developing countries by means of direct foreign investment.

Multilateral or corporate imperialism

In the multilateral phase of imperialism, the intensifying concentration and centralisation of capital takes on new forms in which the giant transnational corporation combines the earlier forms of monopolisation such as cartels, syndicates, trusts and concerns, but at a qualitatively higher level. Nabudere explains this

The US successfully penetrated the spheres of domination and exploitation of its rivals in the developing countries

The transnational corporations represent the most advanced organisational expressions of capitalism

higher combination of the forms of monopolisation by the most advanced organisational expressions of capitalism in the multilateral phase of imperialism as follows:

The new giant corporation that arose represented a more developed stage in the concentration of production and circulation of both goods and capital. Whereas a simple cartel divided the market between independent monopolists, a syndicate organised the centralised sale of their output, a trust gathered under a single management the sale of goods; a concern managed simultaneous enterprises of various sectors by way of production integration, and a cartel of trust divided markets at an immeasurably higher level, the transnational corporation combined all these forms of monopolisation and thus raised it to a qualitatively higher level.⁸

This phase of imperialism is multilateral or corporate in that it no longer operates on a bilateral basis. The transnational corporations represent the most advanced organisational expressions of capitalism in this phase, such that this phase of the system is also referred to as corporate imperialism.

Nabudere shows how the transnational corporations sharpen the weapons they use on all fronts of the global theatre of competition and adjustment as the tactical means of responding to the dynamic, changing environment. This process of competition and adjustment to the dynamic environment contributes towards the volatility of the global system. The transnational corporations continuously adapt their tactics to safety and security requirements and challenges to remove real or perceived present or future threats to their interests. They embark upon their 'on-going and ceaseless' structural adjustment programme of action to 'maximize their profits at points of [their] strength and minimise their losses at points of [their] weakness in order to fulfil the requirements of their main purpose: to obtain a satisfactory (competitive) super profit'.⁹ This means that they adopt and implement 'strategies of being everywhere and 'nowhere''.¹⁰

Accumulation of profit

This theoretical perspective enables us to develop a concrete understanding of 'the mechanisms of exploitation of finance capital' in its global operations in tricontinental Africa, Asia and the Americas. Global capitalism depends on its

control, domination and exploitation of human, natural, material and financial resources of these countries. In Nabudere's words, the 'relations, institutions and structures upon which international finance capital is sustained could never have been built up nor nurtured without the labour and other material resources of these countries'.¹¹ The process of colonialism constituted the base of the mechanisms of international finance capital, controlled from the centre of capitalism. The existence of neo-colonialism is evidence that these relations, institutions and structures of control, domination and exploitation are still in place. The crisis faced by imperialism 'has made the international financiers intensify these exploitative relations and mechanisms'.¹²

To understand the system, it is important to grasp the mechanisms of exploitation of finance capital in its global operations in the dependent countries of Africa, Asia and the Americas, and the dependence of the global capitalist system on its control, domination and exploitation of human, natural, material and financial resources of these countries. Central to this importance is the fact that the investment outlets of the transnational corporations of advanced capitalist countries depend on their profitable investment outlets in the developing countries. This means that the capitalists of the centre obtain the highest rate of profit in the developing countries, not in the centre. This high rate of profit which they obtain in the developing countries enables them to maintain and expand their profitable fields of operations in the centre. Defending this position, Nabudere points out that

there can be no mystification of the question of where imperialist capital gains the greatest returns; the answer is in the Third World. Arguments that this cannot be so, since the major part of the direct investments of the major capitalist countries takes place amongst themselves, can be fairly well answered by the fact that such profitable investment in the imperialist countries is dependent on the investments in the Third World neo-colonies [and colonies – S. M.], since production in the centre is dependent on raw materials from these countries.¹³

Under the rule or the domination of finance capital, developing countries are the principal social formations to which capital is exported for the accumulation of profits. This employment of capital in the developing countries enables

the forces of imperialism to obtain higher profits in these social formations, to maintain profit at a relatively higher rate at home in the advanced capitalist countries, to solve the problem of the falling rate of profit that is a tendency inherent in the system, to manage the social, political and economic crises of capitalism, to prolong the life of capitalism and to defend and maintain their rule of oppression and exploitation internally at home. This reality is tangibly captured by V.I. Lenin in his statement that 'the colonies and dependent [capitalist] countries, oppressed, and exploited by finance capital, constitute a vast reserve and a very important source of strength for imperialism'.¹⁴

Nabudere: the servant of the oppressed and exploited people of the world

Nabudere, as a scholar, served the masses of the people of his country, the region, the continent and the rest of the South in their liberation struggle. He emphasised the point that their struggle was an integral 'part of the revolutionary programme for the overthrow of existing social, economic and political relations in all countries of the world'.¹⁵ He provided an explanation of the theory and practice of imperialism¹⁶ to give the revolutionary and progressive forces a concrete understanding of it to help them to end it in his country,¹⁷ his East African region,¹⁸ the African continent,¹⁹ the rest of the South²⁰ and the world as a whole. He also provided us with an understanding of the socio-historical relationship between imperialism, the state, the class question and the race question.²¹ He also contributed towards the understanding of the exploitative operations of imperialism in relation to the tasks to resolve the national question²² and to achieve integration,²³ not only in East Africa and other regions of the continent, but also on a continental scale. In his analysis of the socio-historical development of finance capital, he provided the theoretical evidence that the oppressed and exploited people could completely defeat the forces of imperialism in their struggle for socio-political, economic and ideological liberation.²⁴

What is the best and most effective way to honour Nabudere as an African revolutionary and progressive force? The best and most effective way is to intensify the deployment of our leadership of revolutionary and progressive parties, our individual knowledge and talents, as indispensable collective weapons in the 'struggle

for a one world based on the equality of all nations, countries and peoples without exception and discrimination, a world without exploitation, domination and oppression'.²⁵

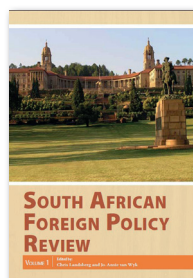
Notes and References

- 1 Makgetlaneng, S., 2011. The role of African intellectuals of South Africa in the struggle for South African economic liberation or independence. *Africa Insight*, 41(1), June, p.117.
- 2 This view of imperialism within the context of the relationship between dependent capitalist countries and advanced capitalist countries is an extension of the relationship between South Africa and advanced capitalist countries, as explained in Makgetlaneng, S., 2011, op. cit., pp. 117–118; and Makgetlaneng, S., 2000. Key issues in the South African economic transformation process. *Politeia: Journal of the Departments of Political Sciences and Public Administration*, 19(2), pp.41–42.
- 3 Klare, M.T., 2012. *Race for what's left: The global scramble for the world's last resources*. New York: Picador, pp.12–13.
- 4 Ake, C., 1981. *A political economy of Africa*. Harlow, Essex: Longman, p. 43.
- 5 For a detailed, comprehensive view and analysis of imperialism see, among others, Nabudere, D.W., 2009. *The crash of international finance-capital and its implications for the Third World*. London: Fahamu Books/Pambazuka Press, September; Nabudere, D.W., 1990. *The rise and fall of money-capital*. Middlesex: Africa in Transition; and Nabudere, D.W., 1983. *The political economy of imperialism: Its theoretical and polemical treatment from mercantilist to multilateral imperialism*. London: Zed Press/Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House; and Nabudere, D.W., 1982. *Essays on the theory and practice of imperialism*. London: Onyx.
- 6 Lenin, V.I., 1970. *Imperialism, the highest stage of imperialism: A popular outline*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- 7 Wirth, M., 1977. Towards a critique of the theory of state monopoly capitalism. *Economy and Society*, 6, pp.307–308.
- 8 Nabudere, D.W., 1983, op. cit., p.186.
- 9 Nabudere, D.W., 1989. *The crash of international finance capital and its implications for the Third World*. Harare: SAPES Trust, p.128.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p.125.
- 12 Ibid., p.126.
- 13 Nabudere, D.W., 1983, op. cit., p.190.
- 14 Stalin, J. 1970. *The foundations of Leninism*. Peking: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p.76.
- 15 Nabudere, D.W., 1990, op. cit., p.349.
- 16 Nabudere, D.W., 1982, op. cit.
- 17 Nabudere, D.W., 1980. *Imperialism and revolution in Uganda*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- 18 Nabudere, D.W., 1981. *Imperialism in East Africa: Imperialism and exploitation*, Vol 1. London: Zed Press.
- 19 Nabudere, D.W., 2010. The global capitalist crisis and Africa's future: What is the way forward? Part 2. *Pambazuka News*, 498, 30 September; Nabudere, D.W., 2010. *The global capitalist crisis and the way forward for Africa*, Seatini, Kampala.
- 20 Nabudere, D.W., 2009, op. cit.

Developing countries are the principal social formations to which capital is exported for the accumulation of profits

Nabudere, as a scholar, served the masses of the people of his country, the region, the continent and the rest of the South in their liberation struggle

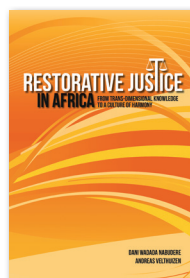
- 21 Nabudere, D.W., 1982. Imperialism, state, class and race: A critique of Issa Shivji's Class struggle in Tanzania. In Tandon, Y. (Ed.), *University of Dar es Salaam Debate on Class, State and Imperialism*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- 22 Nabudere, D.W., 1977. *Imperialism and the national question*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- 23 Nabudere, D.W., 1981. *Imperialism in East Africa: Imperialism and integration*, Vol 2. London: Zed Press.
- 24 Nabudere, D.W., 1990, op. cit.
- 25 Ibid., p.318.



South African Foreign Policy Review Volume 1

Edited by Chris Landsberg and Jo-Ansie van Wyk

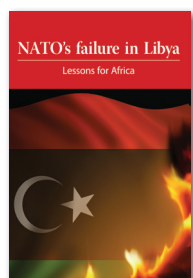
ISBN 987-0-7983-0291-3



Restorative Justice in Africa From Trans-Dimensional Knowledge to a Culture of Harmony

Dani Wadaba Nabudere
Andreas Velthuisen

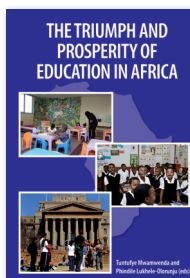
ISBN 978-0-7983-0358-3



NATO's failure in Libya: Lessons for Africa

Horace Campbell

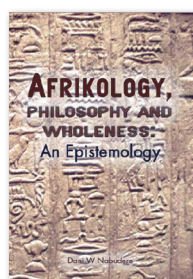
ISBN 978-0-7983-0343-9



The Triumph and Prosperity of Education in Africa

Edited by Tuntufye Mwamwenda and Phindile Lukhele-Olorunju

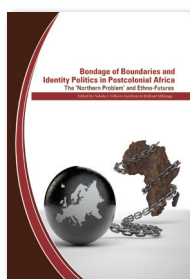
ISBN 978-0-7983-0371-2



Afrikology, Philosophy and Wholeness: An Epistemology

Dani Wadaba Nabudere

ISBN 978-0-7983-0255-5



Bondage of Boundaries and Identity Politics in Postcolonial Africa:

The 'Northern Problem' and Ethno-Futures

Edited by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Brilliant Mhlanga

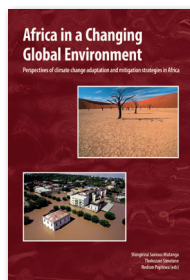
ISBN 978-0-7983-0391-0



Nationalism and National Projects in Southern Africa: New critical reflections

Edited by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Finex Ndhlovu

ISBN 978-0-7983-0395-8

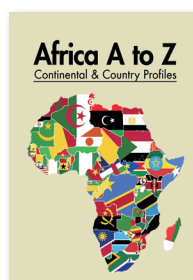


Africa in a Changing Global Environment:

Perspectives of climate change and mitigation strategies in Africa

Edited by Shingirirai Savious Mutanga, Thokozani Simelane, Nedson Popiwa

ISBN 978-0-7983-0375-0



Africa A to Z:

Continental & Country Profiles

Cartographer: Elize Van As



Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Knowledge, Skills and Development Cooperation

Edited by Li Anshan and Funeka Yazini April

ISBN 978-0-7983-0367-5



**Africa Institute
of South Africa**

Development Through Knowledge

PO Box 630

Pretoria

0001

South Africa

Embassy House

No 1 Bailey Lane

Arcadia

Pretoria

Tel: +27 (0)12 304 9700

Fax: +27 (0)12 323 8153

E-mail: publish@ai.org.za,

Website: www.ai.org.za

AISA is a statutory research body focusing on contemporary African affairs in its research, publications, library and documentation. **AISA** is dedicated to knowledge production, education, training and the promotion of awareness on Africa, for Africans and the international community. This is achieved through independent policy analysis, and the collection, processing and interpretation, and dissemination of information.

ISSN 1998-7994



9 771998 799009