

# Africa, Nationalism & the State



**Sam Dolgoff**

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E-Mail: [zababooks@zabalaza.net](mailto:zababooks@zabalaza.net) Website: [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net)

# Africa, Nationalism & the State

This work concerns the political, economic and social institutions set up after World War II in economically under-developed “Third World” states, dealing primarily (for space reasons) with African states.

Without in the least endorsing the imperialist policies of either the American or Russian power blocs or trying, in any way whatsoever, to justify their crimes, the widespread notion that the “Third World” as a satisfactory alternative must be dispelled. The pattern of events was already foreshadowed by the anarchist Rudolf Rocker before World War II, in this prophetic passage:

*“...the same nationalities which before World War I, never ceased to revolt against the foreign oppressor, reveal themselves today, when they have attained independence, as the worst oppressors of national minorities within their own jurisdiction and inflict upon them the same moral and legal oppressions, which when they were subjected peoples... this ought to make plain even to the blindest, that a harmonious living together within the framework of the national state is definitely impossible... These peoples who have in the name of liberation shaken off the yoke of the hated foreign rule have gained nothing thereby... in most cases they have taken on a new yoke which is frequently more oppressive than the old...*

*...the change of human groups into nations, that is, State peoples, have not opened out a new outlook... it is today one of the most dangerous hindrances to social liberation... behind everything, the term “National” stands for the will to power of small minorities and the special interests of caste and class... in the State...”<sup>1</sup>*

For Jose Marti, “apostle” of Cuban independence, and for us, formal independence is not enough. “*To change the master is not to be free.*” A nation is really independent only to the extent that the people feel free to lead their own lives. There are very few, if any, free autonomous unions, neighbourhood councils, workers’ councils, co-operatives or other organs of popular control in the “Third World.”

## Notes:

1. Rudolf Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, p. 202
2. Robert W. July, *A History of the African People*, 2nd edition
3. Jean Lecoutre, *The Demi-Gods*, p.256
4. *ibid.* p. 262
5. *ibid.* p. 263
6. *ibid.* p. 179
7. *ibid.* p. 180
8. *ibid.* p. 120
9. *ibid.* p. 102
10. Edwin Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America*, pp. 60, 62, 78, 79
11. July, 3rd edition, p.674
12. *ibid.* p. 680
13. Frank Kirby Jones, *With Castro*, pp. 195-196
14. *Reconstruir*, Argentine Anarchist Bi-Monthly , #43
15. *ibid.*
16. Lecoutre, p. 102
17. Sidney Hook, *Marx and the Marxists*, p. 24
18. July, 2nd edition, p. 650
19. July, 3rd edition, p. 741
20. *ibid.* p. 742
21. July, 2nd edition, p. 679
22. *New York Times*, June 8, 1980
23. Rocker, p. 201
24. Edward Jenks, *The State and the Nation*, pp. 131-132
25. July, 2nd edition, p. 664
26. *ibid.* p. 417
27. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1969 edition, pp. 269-270
28. quoted in July, 3rd edition, p. 648

## ★ Conclusion

Indigenous movements for national independence, which make up so much of history, persist in one form or another to this day. What to do about the complex problems of independence and regional self-determination is now being heatedly debated everywhere.

There is an unbridgeable difference between the concept of the nation-state as against natural communities. The natural community, a confluence of human beings, with a common history, a common language and cultural background, springs from free social alliances.

The nation-state is not a natural community. The absolute power of the state over all its subjects and their associations is the indispensable condition for the survival and expansion of the state. Nationalism, the political theology of the state, must not be confounded with one's natural love for the place and the people with whom one is reared.

The nation-state breaks up the organic unity of the natural community. The Basque community, for example, is artificially split up, with one part under the jurisdiction of the French Government and the other under the rule of the Spanish State.

National self-determination is by no means synonymous with the internal freedom of individuals, groups and communities. Native regimes in "liberated" independent states (in Africa, the Middle East, etc.) are no less despotic and no less corrupt than are their former rulers.

Nor is national self-determination synonymous with social revolution. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) both the quasi-independent Catalonian "Generalidad" and the Basque regime made common cause with their erstwhile enemy, the Central Republican Government and the capitalists, to extirpate the revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist *National Confederation of Labour* (CNT) and to crush the libertarian social revolution.

The anarchist alternative to nationalism is a libertarian, stateless federation of various peoples with all other peoples of the world. To survive and grow, the fluid, ever-changing associations which constitute natural communities, must be constantly renewed and enriched by free association with equally free communities. The free associations must transcend the unalterable artificial boundaries erected by the state.

Rejecting the artificial national boundaries imposed by capitalism and the state to segregate and divide the workers into hostile camps, the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA, founded in 1864) designated its affiliated organisations of different countries REGIONAL FEDERATIONS OF THE IWMA.

National minorities, struggling to escape the domination of central governments to establish states of their own, will only find themselves shackled by new rulers. They will come to realise, with Bakunin, that "...despotism manifests itself not in the FORM, but in the PRINCIPLE of the State..."

For the 420 million people of Africa, independence has brought little, if any more, freedom than under colonialism. Tanzania has more political prisoners than South Africa. One fourth of the population of equatorial Guinea is in exile.



*Ethiopia's Mengistu and Sudan's Numeiri at May 1980 celebration of Numeiri's coup*

## ★ Militarism

At least nineteen African countries are under military rule. In the last twenty years African countries have gone through twenty major wars and forty military coups (seizure of economic and political power by the armed forces).

Seizure of power by military juntas is a chronic affliction in under-developed lands. Militarism in African societies resembles, in general, the Latin American pattern. Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador,

Nicaragua, - almost all - Latin American countries are, or were at some time, dominated by military governments.

*Between 1952 and 1968 there were over 70 attempted military coups and 20 of them led to the institution of new army-led governments... Dahomey endured 6 successful military coups through 1972. Algerian army revolts in June 1965 deposed Ahmed Ben Bella and installed Houari Boumediene. Military revolts swept away civilian rule in Burundi, Upper Volta, the Central African Republic in 1966, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Libya in 1969, the Malagasy Republic in 1972, Rwanda, in July 1973. By 1973 one third of Africa's 300 million people were living under military rule...<sup>2</sup>*

There have been 6 military coups in Somalia between October 1970 and 1972. In Egypt on the eve of World War II, a group of army officers including Abdel Nasser, enthusiastically following the example set by the Italian, German and Spanish Fascists, organised the "Green Shirt Movement." Nasser seized power in 1954 and suppressed all opposition to his one party dictatorship.

"Marxist Leninists" and others who prattle about a "Workers' State" should revise their ideas. They should take note of the fact that there is an unbreakable connection between militarism and the State, ALL STATES: capitalist democracies, "welfare states", State "socialist", more accurately State capitalist regimes, etc. They should take note of the fact that militarism flourishes in "socialist" Cuba, in the "Soviet" Union and the "People's Republic" of China, in Vietnam, Korea, and the rest of the "Third Socialist World."

## ★ The Demi-Gods

Glorification of "Third World" despots follows, in general, the pattern set by twentieth century tyrants like Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung. In his revealing work *The Demi-Gods: Charismatic Leadership in the Third World*, Jean Lecoutre traces the careers of Gamel Abdel Nasser (Egypt); Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia); Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana); and Norodom Sihanouk (Cambodia).

Deification of Nkrumah, the cult of personality, exceeded even the homage showered on Stalin and Mao. Nkrumah got himself "elected" President of Ghana for life. He boasted:

*"...I represent not only Ghana, but Africa and I speak in her name. Therefore, no African can have an opinion differing from mine..."<sup>3</sup> ...when attending an electoral assembly, Nkrumah made his appearance in an elaborate tribal dress, carried aloft on the shoulders of six red-turbaned escorts...<sup>4</sup> "...in Africa the sun no longer rises in the east, but in the west through the person of Nkrumah... Nkrumah is the Messiah! Nkrumah is the greatest African of our generation!"<sup>5</sup>*

*puted with each other on equal terms as the occasion arose. Societies of this type are found in many parts of western Sudan... the interior of Guinea and Liberia, the northern territories of Ghana, the north of Dahomey and the hill country of northern Nigeria and the Cameroons region." (my emphasis)<sup>27</sup>*

President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania - surprisingly enough - wrote that:

*"...the community of the traditional African village was a truly socialist community. Everyone worked. Everyone shared. There were no classes, no privileges either for food or self-respect. Wealth belonged to all and all shared in its assets. Only exploiters were missing. There were no landlords and no idlers to live off the labour of others..."<sup>28</sup>*



The unsuccessful campaign of ethnic Somali peoples in the province of Ogaden to secede from Ethiopia in which a half million were killed, was suppressed with the help of Cuban troops armed with Soviet weapons. The guerilla war continues.

## ★ Cultural Obliteration

In Latin America the Spanish and Portuguese “Conquistadores” seized the land of the natives, plundered their communities, enslaved the population, and wiped out their culture. By brute force the invaders imposed oppressive regimes which to this day weigh so heavily on the political and economic institutions of so many countries. In North America, European colonialists committed similar atrocities against the Indians.

In Africa, the new “Third World” countries, to their eternal shame, are obliterating rich, varied cultures on the pretext that they are out to “modernise and civilise the inferior savages.” But these cultures are in many respects far superior, far more humane, far freer than the authoritarian institutions imposed upon them by would-be “saviors”.

We extract the following information about the social organisation of millions of tribal peoples in the forest belt of West Africa and other widespread regions of the African continent:

*The relations between communities “were not regulated from above but depended on mutual obligations and alliances maintained by traditions of common descent and intermarriage, ratified by collective ceremonies and feasts and economic exchange.”*

*“A system of lineages, whereby a body of kinsmen... maintained collective claims to resources, co-operating... with similar groups for various ends, appears everywhere to have provided the first order of political organisation within a locality... the larger groups united on occasion... dissolved into ever smaller units on narrower issues...” Disputes were settled “among them by arbitration...”*

*“Political relations between such villages were often those of give and take between independent groups. But whether the social organisation was one of proliferating lineages or of independent villages, communication through trade, inter-marriage and ceremonial exchanges could maintain common speech custom and pattern of organisation over populations of several thousands. Despite the small size of the independent political units, technical skills, aesthetic styles, beliefs and rituals, as well as valued commodities, could be and were transmitted over wide areas.”*

*“...peoples living dispersed in small hamlets or clustered in hill villages for protection, had no central organisation of government. As in the forest belt the kin groups or the village communities of a locality allied themselves or dis-*



*Demi-God Kwame Nkrumah*

Nkrumah’s party designated the house in which he was born as a national shrine. “A forty foot statue of Nkrumah was erected outside of Parliament house.”<sup>6</sup> He slept on a golden bed and his face is stamped on coins and engraved on paper currency.

A psychophantic reviewer of Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba’s biography exults that his native city immortalised him while still alive. The streets are named “Habib” and the avenues are named “Bourguiba”. “...the sun reflects the cold of his eyes... and the storm winds the timber of his voice...”<sup>6</sup>

An old impoverished, sickly stucco worker testified in gratitude to Bourguiba that “...working for Bourguiba on one of his building projects renewed his will to live... pride and gratitude have brought him back to life - an 85 year old man!”<sup>7</sup>

*...During a visit to the Nile Delta in 1950 Gamel Nasser Egyptian Demi-God was swung aloft by the crowds and carried along to the rhythm of heroic-minded slogans. He is the “Great”, the “Generous”, the “Victor”, the “Just”, the “National... Liberator” ... like the people he is everywhere... nothing escapes his eye - neither good nor evil...<sup>8</sup>*

Lecoutre remarks that the:

*...functions of the former colonial governors are those filled by the President in most new and independent African states. Only the title has changed.<sup>9</sup>*



*President Mobuto Sese Seko of Zaire*

## ★ Courting the Masses: The One-Party State

“Third World” demagogues are not primarily ideologues. They are, above all, political adventurers. In their lust for power, they are not guided by ethical considerations, as they pretend. All dictators conceal their true visage behind the facade of a one-party totalitarian state, paying lip service to popular programs designed to win the support of the masses. Edwin Lieuwen, for example, marshals impressive evidence:

*...in Chile in 1924, Major Carlos Ibanez established a military dictatorship that was notably successful in combining authoritarian rule aimed at meeting popular demands for greater social justice.*

...short lived revolutions took place during 1936 under the leadership of young officers inspired by the ideas of social reforms and authoritarian nationalism:

*...in Bolivia a clique of young officers came to power, headed by Major David Toro and Colonel German Busch. They catered to the downtrodden and pledged to build a new nation based on their dictatorial regime's attempts to win mass support.<sup>10</sup>*

Historian Robert W. July points out that nationalist leaders had:



*Biafrans protesting British arms sales to Nigeria, marching through central London*

equal rights. At least 500,000 died and over two hundred thousand were driven from the country in a bitter intractable guerilla war lasting 17 years.

Rwanda and Burundi (Ruanda-Urundi), two historically separate regions were dominated by the Belgian-propped dictatorship of the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority. Rwanda seceded from Burundi in 1962 after a Hutu revolt in which thousands of Tutsis were killed and 120,000 were driven into exile. In 1963 an abortive invasion by Tutsi exiles sparked a massacre of 12,000 Tutsis by the Hutus.

Across the border in Burundi, a Tutsi minority of 15% continues its domination over a Hutu majority of 84%. In 1972 a Hutu insurrection was suppressed by a bloody war of extermination in which eighty thousand rebels were killed. The revolt against the Burundi government was crushed with the military and economic assistance of the “socialist” countries. The North Koreans are building a new palace for President Bagaza. Cubans are training Burundi fighter pilots. Soviet military hardware is on display in the Capital and the Chinese opened a textile mill.

The ten year struggle to break away from the central Nigerian government - Biafran Civil War - was mercilessly crushed. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps a million, were killed, starved to death, left homeless or banished. It is worth noting that both England and Russia provided Military aid and the United States refused to help the rebellious peoples.

Fifty thousand oppressed Lumpus revolted against the Zaire dictatorship in 1964. The rebels abandoned villages, refused to pay taxes, resorted to brigandage and kidnappings and threatened the existence of Zaire.

*...the most distinctive feature of African history following the first World War... was the creation of African nations laid down by the colonial powers... the imperialists instituted laws and procedures totally at variance and alien to local custom... powerful ethnic groups were artificially bound together into one nation as a convenience of colonial administration...*<sup>25</sup>

*...the European relationship with traditional societies during the last decades of the 19th century was one of conquest, then occupation and absorption into expanding colonial territories...*<sup>26</sup>

The partition of Africa by the imperialist powers was a historical tragedy whose magnitude is impossible to assess.

The French, overcoming the resistance of the Tuareg tribes, occupied the greater part of the Sahara. The peoples of Togoland, the Cameroons, and the Chad regions were torn away from each other when their territories were divided between the French and English colonialists. Struggles of the Ashanti peoples to defend their communities against British imperialism were paralleled in other African societies. The attempt to centralise Uganda precipitated a massive revolt of Toro, Buayaro, Ankola, Barenga, Acholi and other peoples.

The criminal partition of Africa which “robbed the people of all dominion over themselves” (Proudhon) is reinforced and perpetuated by the “Third World” independent countries. Like the imperialist colonial powers, the independent nations are also obliterating the natural diversity of indigenous cultures and natural communities. An article in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1964 edition, p. 306 ) fully substantiates these remarks:

*...the new African nations which emerged at mid-twentieth century were not, however, to be based on the traditional political units of the pre-colonial era. They developed instead within the colonial framework in which the national life of the state was superimposed on the diversity of traditional cultures...*

And these self-same colonial atrocities are being committed by the “Third World” countries against imprisoned peoples trapped within the borders of the “independent” states set by both their former and new conquerors. All this while regional movements seeking a free federation of peoples (which would assure local autonomy while reaping the benefits of unity and free association in solidarity) are ruthlessly exterminated.

## ★ Civil War

Civil war in Africa's largest country, the Sudan, was precipitated by the revolt of the Nilotic peoples in the southern provinces who demanded a federation of peoples with

*...absorbed in full measure the Marxist-Leninist perspective, a view which instilled an image of the state and its welfare prospering through the doctrine and activities of a single party state... the new governments inherited from the colonial past a position of authoritarian control which led to the perpetuation of bureaucratic government.*<sup>11</sup>

*While superficially a political democracy, the state was operated by an oligarchy and the government was shaped to the needs of its rulers... one party government came to be the hallmark of African states... The Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Chad, Gabon, Uganda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Sudan, Zaire, Senegal, Ruanda and Burundi and Kenya - all of them are predominantly one party states... The program upon which new independent states in every region of Africa raises the banner of nationalism and at the same time, accepts without question, the whole bag and baggage of the European nation-states...*<sup>12</sup>

The Cuban Demi-God Fidel Castro praised the militarists of Portugal, Peru and Panama for playing “...a decisive role in political change... implementing agrarian reform, social development and industrialisation.”<sup>13</sup> Even the French marxist, Henri Lefevre, hailed the military takeover of Peru as “...one of the most important historical events of the contemporary world.”<sup>14</sup>

When the “revolutionary” military junta seized power in Peru, the new military government proclaimed the fundamental principle underlying all “progressive” one party military states:

*...the final aim of the State, being the welfare of the nation; the armed forces being the instrument which the state uses to impose its policies, therefore... in order to arrive at collective prosperity, the armed forces have the mission to watch over the public welfare - the final aim of the State.*<sup>15</sup>

This is essentially the attitude of the African military rulers. Thus Gamal Abdel Nasser also justified his seizure of power in practically the same terms:

*...the army, being the least corrupt and most reform-minded organisation, constituting the new regime's elite... will exercise concerted government efforts to improve the people's existence and organise agrarian reform...*<sup>16</sup>

The assassinated dictator of Egypt, the late Anwar Sadat, a graduate of the Egyptian military academy and successor to Nasser, faithfully followed the example of his mentor.

In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, the self-styled “builder of African socialism”, was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize. His *Convention People's Party* was designed to attract multitudes of dissidents by falsely proclaiming “self-government”.

In Sudan, young army officers seized power and proclaimed a one party “Socialist State” and in Somalia the one party dominated “Revolutionary Council” promised to

“eliminate corruption and establish socialism...” Ugandan President Obote seizing power with the support of the army was determined to make Uganda “a Pillar of Socialism” and his *People’s Congress Party* promised to establish a centralised “welfare” state. In Tunisia Demi-God Habib Bourguiba’s dictatorial *Destour Socialist Party* also proclaimed “Socialism”.

A dispatch to the *New York Times* (June 18, 1982) describes the corrupt one-party totalitarian regime of President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. Mobutu vowed that “...as long as I am alive, there will be no second political party in Zaire.”

According to the dispatch, “...there is outrageous violation of elementary civil rights, arbitrary arrests for political reasons and increasing numbers of political prisoners are detained in unofficial secret prisons...”

Mobutu lives in grand style in a domain three times the size of Texas, rich in diamonds, copper and other minerals. While in Zaire “...people live in darkest misery, Mobutu goes off to Florida with a delegation of three hundred... the amount spent on that trip alone, could have fed Kinasha the capital for two or three months...”



Volta River dam, Ghana

The President of Togo bankrupted the nation, got himself immensely rich and indulged in the most outrageous violations of human rights. He was able to buy two town houses in Paris and build a splendid Presidential Palace outside the capital, Lome.

The President of Gabon built himself a \$600 million palace with revolving doors and windows that disappear at the touch of a button.

The President of bankrupt Zaire on an overnight stay in Nairobi with his entourage, is accompanied by two doctors, two headwaiters, a chef and a bevy of lovely ladies.

The EMPORER of the Central African Republic, one of the poorest nations in the world, collected nine palaces, one for each of his nine wives, a mansion in France, and spent millions of dollars on his coronation,

In Uganda, armed soldiers roam the capital at night, demanding cash, jewelry and sometimes sex.<sup>22</sup>

Bakunin long ago pointed out that corruption is a fundamental attribute of the state. State functionaries charged with enforcing its laws are themselves corrupted by the exercise of power. “...Would you make it impossible for anyone to oppress his fellow man? See to it that no one has the power to do so...”

## ★ New “Third World” Colonialism

Rudolf Rocker summed up the invasive character of colonialism in this striking passage from his *Nationalism and Culture*:

*...a nation encompasses a whole range of different peoples who have by more or less violent means been pressed into the framework of a common State... there is no state which does not consist of a group of different people who were originally of different descent and speech and were forged into one nation solely by dynastic, economic and political interests...<sup>23</sup>*

The anarchist Rocker’s conception of the nature and origin of the state, differing sharply from the marxist interpretation, was sustained as far back as 1919 by the distinguished non-anarchist political scientist, Edward Jenks:

*...the state in its origin was not an economic but a military institution formed by conquest and plunder... the invading hosts settled down like a swarm of locusts on their prey... from its earliest stages its policy has... been annexation or plunder of its own or alien communities...<sup>24</sup>*

Although the bourgeois historian July complains that “tenacious tribalism complicates all efforts to build a sense of security and national pride”, he nevertheless marshals massive evidence confirming both Rocker’s and Jenks’ views:



**Idi Amin Dada, former president of Uganda**

## ★ Corruption

Like government mismanagement, waste and bureaucratic bungling, corruption in the “Third World” is an incurable chronic infection. Historian July emphasizes this fact:

*...That corruption grew to be a commonality throughout independent Africa has long been a truism... from Morocco to Malawi, from Kenya to Nigeria, from Guinea to Zaire, it touched all regimes, socialist or capitalist, with equal impartiality. It was present in civil governments and military governments; among elected officials or appointed civil servants...<sup>19</sup>*

*...in 1962 the wife of Krobo Edusi, an influential minister in Nkrumah's government, ordered a gold plated bed from London at the cost of \$8400 and Nkrumah accumulated a \$6.5 million fortune on such deals as collecting \$400,000 commission for allowing a multi-million dollar contract...<sup>20</sup>*

*...in East Africa the Swahili term “Wa Benza” describes the bureaucratic class' fondness for Mercedes Benz automobiles... despite national incomes which rarely average \$200 a year, corrupt officials in all African countries... are able to afford luxuries utilising their position for private gain...<sup>21</sup>*

## ★ Economic Role of the State

As indicated above, the compulsion of military regimes to shape the economy also indicates the increasing role of the state to control - to a greater or lesser degree - the economy of “socialist” as well as “free world” states.

In the light of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, the preponderant role of the State in determining social and economic life, not by the “...economic forces of production...” (Marx) but by DECREE has led even marxist revisionists to repudiate Marx' s theory of the State. Economic developments in Russia led the marxist economist Rudolf Hilferding to revise his ideas about the nature of the State. The State is not only the product but also the creator of economic, political and social inequality.

*...the present day state having achieved independence, is unfolding its enormous strength according to its own laws, subjecting social forces and compelling them to serve its own ends... therefore, neither the Russian, nor totalitarian systems in general, is determined by the character of the economy. On the contrary, it is the economy that is determined by the ruling power...<sup>17</sup>*

Arbitrary decisions of the state determine economic life. The industrialisation of Russia DECREED by Stalin was achieved at the cost of millions of lives and untold millions in slave labour camps. The “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution” DECREED by Mao Tse Tung practically paralysed the social life of China.

A good case can be made for the proposition that the monopoly of power, ie. the state, more than any other factor, shapes and perverts human society. These truths are unfortunately confirmed by developments in the “Third World”.

*...all independent African states attempt... to manipulate an economic revolution controlled by a rigorous state authority. Kwame Nkrumah continually emphasized the close relationship between political action and economic development... Julius Nyerere, chief of Tanzania boasted of the economic development he engineered... on a national scale... engaged in rigorous economic planning...<sup>18</sup>*

## ★ Economic Mismanagement

Economic mismanagement and corruption brought Ghana to the brink of economic disaster. The rulers failed to take into account the realities of Ghana's economy. In the rush to modernize, industrialisation was over-stressed and agriculture downgraded. A dispatch to the *New York Times* (April 12, 1980) from it's Ugandan corre-

