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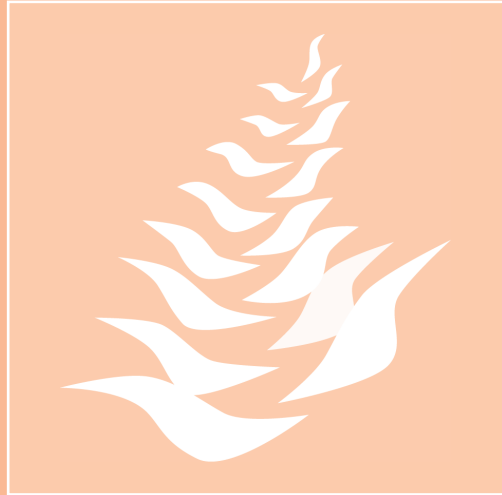## SPECIAL REPORT 14

THE SILENCES IN THE NGO DISCOURSE:

THE ROLE AND FUTURE OF NGOS IN AFRICA

Issa G. Shivji

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OF NGOS IN AFRICA

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By way of a preface

This paper is an attempt to examine critically the role and future of the NGO in Africa in the light of its self-perception as a non-governmental, non-political, non-partisan, non-ideological, non-academic, non-theoretical, not-for-profit association of well-intentioned individuals dedicated to changing the world to make it a better place for the poor, the marginalised and the downcast. It is the argument of the paper that the role of NGOs in Africa cannot be understood without a clear characterisation of the current historical moment.

On a canvass of broad strokes, I depict Africa at the crossroads of the defeat of the national project and the rehabilitation of the imperial project. In the face of the avalanche of 'end of history' diatribe, I find it necessary, albeit briefly, to reiterate the history of Africa's enslavement from the first contacts with the Europeans five centuries ago through the slave trade to colonialism and now globalisation. The aim of this historical detour is to demonstrate the fundamental anti-thesis between the national and the imperial projects so as to identify correctly the place and role of the NGOs in it.

I locate the rise, the prominence and the privileging of the NGO sector in the womb of the neoliberal offensive, whose aim is as much ideological as economic and political. I argue that the NGO discourse, or more correctly the non-discourse, is predicated on the philosophical and political premises of the neoliberalism/globalisation paradigm. It is in this context that I go on to discuss the 'five silences' or blind-spots in the NGO discourse. I draw out the implications of these silences on the contemporary and future role of the NGO sector in Africa.

At the outset, I must make two confessions. First, the paper is undoubtedly critical, sometimes ruthlessly so, but not cynical. Secondly, the criticism is also a self-criticism since the author has been involved in NGO activism for the last 15 years or so. And, finally, I must make it clear that I do not doubt the noble motivations and the good intentions of NGO leaders and activists. But one does not judge the outcome of a process by the intentions of its authors; one analyses the objective effect of actions regardless of intentions. Hopefully, that is what I have done.

The national project and its impediments

1885: The slicing of the African 'cake'

By 1885, when European kings, princes and presidents sat in Berlin to slice up the African continent with their geometrical instruments, the African people had already been devastated by the ravages of the West Atlantic slave trade. In West and Central Africa, the indigenous civilisations from the sophisticated Saharan trade routes, with Timbuktu as its centre, to the empires of Angola, lay in ruins (Davidson 1961:197). On the Eastern seaboard, the European invasion led by the Portuguese defeated and destroyed the city states of Swahili civilisation (ibid., Sheriff 1987:15 et seq.). All in all, some 50 million souls are estimated to have perished in the triangular slave trade that lasted for roughly four centuries (1450–1850).

The development of the European and North American industrial revolution and the global lead that this gave to Europe and America was in no small measure built on the backs of Africans (Williams 1945). The colonial episode was thus the tail end of the long and destructive contact between Europe and Africa. The slave trade tore apart the very social fabric of African societies, destroying the internal processes of change and imposing on the continent a European world view in which the peoples of Africa belonged to the lowest rung of the so-called civilised order. No other continent, including those that suffered formal European colonisation, had their social, cultural and moral order destroyed on this scale.

The dominant European historiography, at best, recounts the colonial episode while ignoring four centuries of pre-colonial contact. Yet the present cannot be fully understood and grasped nor the future charted without constantly keeping centre-stage the centuries-old processes of what Rodney called, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney 1972).

The pre-colonial and colonial legacy of Africa is thus a continuing saga of domination, exploitation and humiliation of the continent by the imperial powers of Europe and America. It is the thesis of this paper that that imperial relationship continues, notwithstanding the brief period of nationalism. In the next section I briefly recapitulate the salient features of the colonial legacy and the abortive national project.

The colonial legacy

From its very inception, the most important feature of colonialism was the division of the continent into countries and states cutting across 'natural'

geographic, cultural, ethnic and economic ties which had evolved historically. *First*, there was the artificial drawing of boundaries literally with rulers reflecting the balance of strength and power among the imperial states. The boundaries divided up peoples, cultures, natural resources and historical affinities. On top of that, the newly-created countries became subjects of different European powers with their own traditions of political rule, public administration, cultural outlooks, languages and systems of education. Africa was never Africa; it was Anglo-phone, Franco-phone, or Luso-phone.

Second, colonial economies answering to the needs and exigencies of metropolitan powers were disintegrated and disarticulated. The notorious export-oriented, vertically-integrated economies, based on export of raw materials and import of manufactured goods was the result. The internal processes of specialisation and division of labour with mutual interdependence (craftsmen and cultivators, producers and merchants, industrial and agriculture, etc), a possible harbinger of future industrial development, were deliberately destroyed and systematically discouraged (Kjekshus 1977 & 1996). Within and between countries, there was extreme uneven development.

The underlying economic logic of the colonial economy was of course the exploitation of its natural and human resources. Colonies became the sites of generating surplus while metropoles were the sites of accumulation, resulting in the development of the centres and the underdevelopment of the peripheries. The processes of production relied heavily on coercion, rather than the apparent consensus of contract for its reproduction – forced labour, forced peasant production, forced cash crop sales, restrictions on organisation and association, criminalisation of 'civil relations' (for example, breach of employment contracts led to penal sanctions, so did non-cultivation of minimum acreages of cash/food crops), etc. Thus force was imbricated in the process of production (Mamdani 1987, Shivji 1987 & 1998).

Third, people were divided along ethnic, religious and racial lines. Some tribes were labelled martial and therefore a recruiting ground for soldiers; others were condemned to be labourers and their areas became labour reservoirs; still others were supposed to be chiefly to provide the political henchmen of colonial state apparatus. Missionary education became the means to spread Christianity and save the souls of pagans while producing the future educated elite. Indigenous religions and world views were condemned as paganism while Islam, one of the oldest religions to enter and be internalised in Africa, was systematically discriminated against.

Fourth, condemned as lazy and indolent, incapable

of learning and entrepreneurship, to be perpetually ruled and disciplined, the internal social division and stratification of African society was suppressed and muted. Instead, traders and craftsmen and skilled labour was imported: South Asians in East Africa, Lebanese in West Africa. Thus a hierarchy of racial privileges was constructed, the epitome of which was the settler colony. The middle classes that developed in the interstices of the colonised social order were stunted at best, or caricatures, at worst (Fanon 1963).

Fifth, religion and education were the vehicle for reproducing the colonial racial and cultural complexes – white was superior, black was inferior. The white man's beliefs were a religion; the black man's, witchcraft/ 'black magic'. The white man's means of communication was language; the black man's, dialect. As Fanon puts it:

> The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. ... The customs of the colonised people, their traditions, their myths – above all, their myths – are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity. That is why we must put the D.D.T. which destroys parasites, the bearers of disease, on the same level as the Christian religion which wages war on embryonic heresies and instincts, and on evil as yet unborn. ... The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen (Fanon 1963: 32).

The 'few chosen', the colonised elite, were thus a caricature, alienated from their own people and yet not fully accepted by their master. Sartre sums it well:

> The European élite undertook to manufacture a native élite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed. From Paris, from London, from Amsterdam we would utter words 'Parthenon! Brotherhood!' and some-

where in Africa or Asia lips would open '…thenon!...therhood!' It was the golden age (Sartre, Preface to Fanon 1963: 7).

Sixth, the colonial state was an implant, an alien apparatus imposed on the colonised society. It was an excrescence of the metropolitan state without the latter's liberal institutions or politics. It was a despotic state. It did not have 'its' civil society in the colonial social formation. 'Its' civil society was the metropolitan civil society, or, at most, the narrow European settler community in the colony. The colonised society was a subject-society, ('a collection of heathens/natives') governed by coercion and regulated by custom, not a civil society (constituted by persons/citizens) governed by rights and duties and regulated by law (Mamdani 1996).

The governance structures of the colonial state reflected and reinforced the racial, ethnic, and religious divisions and fragmentations of the colonised society. For the subject-society, the state was represented by the policeman and the tax collector and the district commissioner who also doubled up as a magistrate, not by the legislative councillor or a judge. To resolve a dispute with a neighbour, the 'native' man went to a chief; to be punished for murder or non-payment of tax or theft of master's property, he was dragged to the magistrate or a judge to be hanged or imprisoned.

We may *sum up* then by stating the obvious. On the eve of independence, African nationalists faced a formidable task: the task of transforming the brutalised colonial societies into national societies. The national project thus called for an African revolution in every sense of the word.

The nationalist challenge and the defeat of the national project

The first challenge and defeat: Pan-Africanism vs. territorial nationalism

The colonial divisiveness, both within and between African countries, seriously undermined the national project right at its inception. The colonial infrastructure was an exact anti-thesis of a *national* economy. The only reason for individual African countries as loci of national independence was the fact that each one of them fell under the jurisdiction of a different colonial power. In sum, the colonial rationale thus became the rationale of the national project, a contradiction in terms and a paradox.

This paradox was acutely felt, if not always clearly understood, by the first generation of African nationalists. Tutored in the ways of their European counterparts, African nationalists coined and crafted the

demands of their peoples in the European idiom of human rights and national self-determination within the international context of the rise of national liberation in the post-second world war period. Yet, the ideological genesis of African nationalism lay in Pan-Africanism. The locus of Pan-Africanism was the continent itself, not the artificially created spaces bound by colonial borders called countries.

Literally, therefore, Pan-Africanism begot nationalism, rather than the other way round. Pan-Africanism preceded nationalism by almost half a century. Logic and history neatly coincided. The founding fathers of Pan-Africanism were African-Americans, the African diaspora, whose only identity could be African, rather than Nigerian or Congolese or Kenyan. The leading lights of the independence movement, like Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, themselves were incubated in the Pan-African movement, conceived, propagated and organised by the likes of the great George Padmore, W. DuBois, C. L. R. James and others (see generally Legum 1965).

When Nkrumah returned to the continent his vision was one of West African federation rather than the independence of the Gold Coast. At the threshold of Ghana's independence, Nkrumah, with great foresight, undertook such historical initiatives as organising All Africa People's Conferences bringing together independence parties and trade unions. Some leading African nationalists like Nyerere realised and repeated often that there could not be African nationalism outside Pan-Africanism. 'African nationalism is meaningless, is anachronistic, and is dangerous, if it is not at the same time Pan-Africanism' (Nyerere 1963a in Nyerere 1967:194) Nyerere was prepared to delay the independence of his country to facilitate the East African federation. He argued that once these countries became independent with their own flags, and national anthems and presidents and prime ministers it would be that much more difficult to dissolve individual sovereignties in a larger sovereignty. History proved him right.

Nkrumah constantly and vehemently argued that left on their own, independent African countries would become pawns on the imperialist chessboard. He too was tragically proved right in the then Congo. Under the guise of United Nations, Western imperial powers led by the United States conspired in the assassination of the great nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba. Since then Congo has descended into the cycle of violence from which it has yet to recover.

As African countries became independent one after another Nkrumah's All Africa Peoples Conferences dissolved into the Conference of Independent African States, which eventually formed the Organisation of African Unity. Nkrumah continued his battle cry for

the Union of African States to the chagrin of even his own friends. Nyerere, who advocated a gradualist-cum-regional approach to African unity, clashed with Nkrumah who believed that the regional approach to African unity would in fact become an obstacle to political unity of the continent and that regionalism would inevitably play into the hands of imperialism (see generally Shivji 2005a). Logic was on the side of Nyerere but history and political economy proved Nkrumah right.

Nkrumah with great foresight wrote *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* for which imperialism never forgave him. He was overthrown in 1966 by a CIA-sponsored coup. Nyerere's own practical attempt at uniting Zanzibar with Tanganyika in 1964 was much more a pragmatic response to intense cold-war pressures rather than an example of Pan-African unity (Wilson 1989). The OAU itself was bedevilled by imperial machinations making Nyerere, one of the founding fathers, angrily condemn it as a 'trade union of African leaders/states'!

In the hands of the state, the national project inevitably and inexorably became a statist project and nationalism resolved itself into various ideologies of developmentalism and nation building, in the process undermining Pan-Africanism (see Wamba 1991 & 1996, Shivji 1986). Ironically, territorial nationalism, born of Pan-Africanism, became the latter's gravedigger. While paying fulsome tribute to Nkrumah's great vision at the 40th anniversary of Ghana's independence in 1997, Nyerere lamented the failure of the first generation of African nationalists to unite Africa:

> Once you multiply national anthems, national flags and national passports, seats at the United Nations, and individuals entitled to 21 guns salute, not to speak of a host of ministers, Prime ministers, and envoys, you would have a whole army of powerful people with vested interests in keeping Africa balkanised (Nyerere 1997).

The second challenge and defeat: developmental state vs. democratic development

The independence movement in Africa was essentially led by proto-middle classes, or petty bourgeoisie, consisting mostly of the educated elite. No doubt it was a mass movement in which Africans were reasserting their African-ness after five centuries of domination and humiliation. Tom Mboya called it 'the rediscovery of Africa by Africans' (Mboya 1963) and Amilcar Cabral defined national liberation as the process of 'becoming Africans' (Cabral 1980). Yet, as

some African nationalists had predicted and others painfully realised, 'territorial nationalism' was an anachronism and that is what it eventually proved to be. But African nationalists like Nyerere, who took the reins of the state on the morrow of independence, had to work within the constraints imposed by 'territorial nationalism'. In the process they ended up making virtue of necessity as the authoritarian logic of the colonial state reasserted itself.

The independent state, Nyerere argued, had the twin task of development and nation building. The state in Africa, he asserted, preceded the nation (Nyerere 1963a & 1963b). Ironically, though, the state that was supposed to build the nation was the inherited colonial state – despotic, divisive, and in every respect antithetical to the tasks of nationbuilding. Nationalism in the hands of the post-colonial state degenerated into statism, politically authoritarian, economically rapacious, internationally compradorial and nationally dictatorial. The ideology of nationalism resolved into various ideologies of developmentalism at best, or ethnicism, at worst. The liberal constitutional order bequeathed by the departing colonial masters was a tragic joke because it was superimposed on a despotic apparatus also invented, strengthened and bequeathed by the colonial master. The despotic infrastructure endured while the liberal superstructure blew off in the winds of factional political struggles or the so-called development imperatives (Shivji 2003).

'We must run while others walk', Nyerere declared. In the hurry to develop, he added, 'we' cannot afford liberal checks and balances. Justifying the executive, or 'imperial' presidency, as it is branded in African jurisprudence, Nyerere wrote in the London *Observer* newspaper:

> Our constitution differs from the American system in that it … enables the executive to function without being checked at every turn …. Our need is not for brakes to social change … – our lack of trained manpower and capital resources, and even our climate, act too effectively already. We need accelerators powerful enough to overcome the inertia bred by poverty, and the resistances which are inherent in all societies (quoted in Mwaikusa 1995, 105).

Independence had raised people's expectations. To maintain their legitimacy, the new regimes had to deliver on both the development and social fronts. As we have seen, the colonial state had deliberately suppressed and undermined the development of a middle class which would have taken on the task of being an agency of development. That fell to the

state. Regardless of the ideology, whether capitalist or nominally socialist, of whatever variety, the state became the site of accumulation, private and public. Public sector in African countries, from socialist Tanzania to capitalist Malawi, played the dominant role. Nyerere justified his nationalisations more on grounds of 'economic nationalism' than on the principles of socialism (Nyerere 1968:262). Whatever the pundits of neoliberalism may proclaim today, the fact remains that the Bretton Woods institutions, the so-called 'donor community' and the multinationals, all in concert, used the African state in its own interest while closing their eyes to mismanagement and corruption when it suited them.

During the first one-and-half decades of independence the African economies showed modest growth rates; modest in comparison to other continents but impressive given the initial conditions at the time of independence. Investment and savings ranged between 15 to 20 per cent of the GDP. Primary and secondary school enrolment was expanded. Tertiary education, which in many countries literally did not exist during colonial times, was introduced. Medical and health statistics also showed improvement. But this growth and development was unsustainable. It was predicated on the reinforcement of colonial foundations.

Growth in agriculture production was based on extensive cultivation rather than a rise in productivity through chemicalisation, mechanisation and irrigation. It depended heavily on exports of a few primary commodities traded on a hostile and adverse international market. The growth in the manufacturing industry was heavily of the import-substitution type with little internal linkages and dependent on the import of intermediary inputs. Investment was largely public while domestic private capital was stashed away in foreign countries. One estimate has it that by 1990, 37 per cent of Africa's wealth had flown outside the continent (Mkandawire & Soludo 1999:11). To top it all, foreign capital concentrated in extractive industries, which simply haemorrhaged the economy rather than contributed to its development.

During this period, the developmental state also borrowed heavily whether for productive or prestigious projects. Petro-dollars accumulated by international banks during the 1973 oil crisis were off-loaded in the form of cheap loans to developing countries. By the end of the 1970s, cheap loans turned into heavy debt burdens. By this time, the limits of the early growth were reached and the economic shocks of the late 1970s plunged the African economies into deep crisis. Numbers fell, growth rates became negative, debt repayments became unsustainable, fiscal imbalances went out of control, and so did inflation. Social services declined, the infrastructure deteriorated and

one after another African governments (including the radical nationalist) found themselves at the door of IMF and the Paris Club pleading for mercy (Cambell & Stein eds. 1991).

The 1980s, described by economists as Africa's 'lost decade', was also the transition decade which marked the beginning of the decline of developmentalism and the rise of neoliberalism, euphemistically called globalisation. The 'lost decade' signalled both the decline of the developmental state and the loss of its political legitimacy. African people seem to have lost out both on development and democracy. Thus the internal situation began to witness political stirrings and rethinking, both practical and ideological. But as the African political economy has again and again demonstrated, the continent is firmly inserted in the imperialist web. Instead of the space opening up for internal struggles of the people, the opportunist imperialist intervention derailed it by imposing top-down, so-called multiparty democracy and good governance, etc. Western powers took the opportunity to reassert their political and ideological hegemony and recover the ground lost during the nationalist decades. Let us quickly recapitulate that trajectory.

The third challenge and defeat: nationalism vs. imperialism

Colonialism left by the front door and returned through the back door in the form of what Nkrumah called neocolonialism. Radical nationalists were overthrown in military coups (Nkrumah, Ben Bella) or assassinated (Lumumba, Pio Gama Pinto, Sankara) in adventures sponsored by Western imperialism (see generally Blum 1986 & 2001; De Witte 2001). A few who managed to survive had to compromise and play 'hide-and-seek' with imperial powers (Nyerere, Kaunda); others became paranoid and despotic at the apprehension of being overthrown or assassinated (Sekou Toure) and many simply became compradors doing the bidding of imperial masters (Kenyatta/Moi, Houphet Boigny, Senghor, etc).

Harking on the need to build nations out of fractious ethnic groups and the need for rapid development, the post-independence ruling classes and governing elites centralised and concentrated power in the executive arm of the state on the one hand, and hegemonised autonomous expressions of civil society, on the other (see generally essays in Shivji 1991). Elsewhere, ruling factions resorted to whipping up ethnic divisions to keep themselves in power.

Yet it is also true that during this period, imperialism was ideologically on the defensive. The movement of the newly independent countries (non-alignment, UNCTAD, new economic world order, right to develop-

ment, etc), the successful Chinese, Cuban, and Nicaraguan revolutions, the defeat of the US superpower in Vietnam, and the student and youth anti-imperialist movement all over the world, enhanced the prestige of national liberation movement. This was what Samir Amin calls the period of Bandung excitement (see generally Amin 1990).

In Africa the triumph of the armed struggle in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau represented, ironically, both the high point of radical nationalism and its precipitous decline in the next decade. Portugal was the weak link in the imperialist chain. It was defeated by the national liberation movement supported by much of the rest of Africa. But imperialism was not destroyed. The national liberation movement in power embarked on an alternative, anti-imperialist path of development. The struggle between nationalism and imperialism found its most concentrated expression in southern Africa. Imperialism, through its proxy, the apartheid South Africa, showed its true colours by supporting terrorist organisations like RENAMO in Mozambique and UNITA in Angola. These organisations caused havoc in these countries, leading to compromises on all fronts, a change in direction of development and loss of the national liberation vision. The national liberation elites were utterly compradorised, disowning their own past and slavishly echoing the rising neoliberal rhetoric.

Again, as history would have it, the 'success' of one of the longest and most militant national liberation movements in Africa, the South African, was not so much the high point of radical nationalism against imperialism, but rather the beginning of its end. By the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, the nationalist era, particularly its territorial variant, was coming to a close. The defeat of actually existing socialisms in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union further narrowed the space for the expression of radical nationalism and anti-imperialism. Imperialism took the offensive, initially on the economic front with its structural adjustment programmes, followed by an undisguised political and ideological offensive, ridiculing and humiliating nationalism while rehabilitating imperialism. Douglas Hurd, the then British foreign secretary, could say in 1990 that 'we are slowly putting behind us a period of history when the West was unable to express a legitimate interest in the developing world without being accused of "neocolonialism"' (quoted in Furedi 1994:99). And a British historian, John Charmley, launching his book *Churchill: The End of Glory,* could unashamedly declare:

> The British Empire vanishing has had a very
> deleterious effect on the third world. Look
> at Uganda under the British and look at it

now. And you didn't get famines quite as frequently in Africa then as you do now (quoted ibid., 98).

The neoliberal package is, and has been, far more an *ideological* offensive than simply an economic programme. But let me not jump the story. In the next section I quickly retrace the beginnings of the neoliberalist phase in Africa.

The imperial project and its succours

The neoliberal offensive

On the heel of the defeat of the national project came the imperialist offensive to destroy and bury it, which, by definition, is the immanent dream of imperialism. On the economic front, the neoliberal package boiled down to further deepening the integration of African economies into the world capitalist system, thus reproducing the essentially colonial and neocolonial economic structures.

In 1981 the World Bank published its notorious report, *Accelerated development for Africa: an Agenda for Africa.* It was certainly an agenda for Africa set by the erstwhile Bretton Woods institutions with the backing of Western countries but it had little to do with development, accelerated or otherwise. The report and the subsequent structural adjustment programmes concentrated on stabilisation measures: getting rid of budget deficits, bringing down rates of inflation, getting prices right, unleashing the market and liberalising trade. According to the World Bank, the villain of the declining economic performance in Africa was the state; it was corrupt and dictatorial, it had no capacity to manage the economy and allocate resources rationally, it was bloated with bureaucracy, and nepotism was its mode of operation. The Bretton Woods institutions would not bail out the crisis-ridden economies unless the governments adopted structural adjustment programmes to get stabilisation fundamentals right.

Balancing budgets involved cutting out subsidies to agriculture and spending on social programmes, including education and health. Unleashing the market meant doing away with protection of infant industries and rolling back the state from economic activity. The results of SAPs have been devastating as many studies by researchers have shown. Social indicators like education, medical care, health, nutrition, rates of literacy and life expectancy all declined. Deindustrialisation set in. Redundancies followed. In short, even

some of the modest achievements of the nationalist or developmentalist period were lost or undermined (Gibbon 1993 & 1995, Adedeji 1993).

As the international situation changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western imperialist powers regained their ideological initiative. The neoliberal package of marketisation, privatisation and liberalisation now became the policy for, but not of the African states. Good performers would be praised and rewarded with more aid while the insubordinate and recalcitrant would be parodied and left to their own wit. While aid had always come with strings, now there was no attempt to disguise it. Political conditionalities – multi-party, good governance, human rights, etc – were added to economic conditionalities. Political decision-making and policy-making slipped out of the hands of the African state as Western-financed policy and governance consultants[1] in their thousands jetted all over the continent with blue prints of policy on Poverty Reduction Strategies and manuals on good governance on their computers, gobbling up some 4 billion dollars annually (Mkandawire & Soludo 1999:111). In 1985, to give just one example, foreign experts resident in Equatorial Guinea were paid an amount three times the total government wage bill of the public sector (Mkandawire & Soludo ibid.:137).

National liberation ideologies have been rubbished and national self-determination itself has been declared passé. Africa is told it has only one choice: either to get integrated fully into the globalised world or be marginalised. The spectre of marginalisation is so rampant that even progressive African scholars dare say that 'Africa may be graduating from being the region with 'lost development decades' to becoming the world's forgotten continent' (ibid.:xi).

The former US ambassador to my country, Tanzania, speaking to the country's law-makers was blatantly clear on what the superpower expected of African states:

> The liberation diplomacy of the past, when alliances with socialist nations were paramount and so-called Third World Solidarity dominated foreign policy, must give way to a more realistic approach to dealing with your true friends – those who are working to lift you into the twenty-first century, where poverty is not acceptable and disease must be conquered.[2]

African leaders are left with little option: 'you are either with globalisation or doomed!' They have fallen in line one after another even if it means disowning their own past. Blair's Commission for Africa report, which consisted of prominent Africans including one president and one prime minister, castigates the whole of the last three decades, which virtually means the whole post-independence period, as 'lost decades' (for a critical appraisal see Graham 2005). The primary responsibility is placed on the African state for bad governance and lack of accountability, totally ignoring the role of imperialism in both the exploitation of African resources and supporting of non-democratic states when it suited their interests. Africans are told they have no capacity to think and African states are told they have no capacity to make correct policies. As the Blair's Commission for Africa declared with a straight face:

> Africa's history over the last fifty years has been blighted by two areas of weakness. These have been *capacity* – the ability to design and deliver policies; and *accountability* – how well a state answers to its people (p. 14)(emphasis in the original).

So policy-making, an important aspect of sovereignty, has been wrenched out of the hands of the African state. In policy-making, the state is placed on the same level as other so-called stakeholders, including NGOs, as we shall see.

The fundamental premises of globalisation or neoliberalism

Globalisation in Africa manifests itself in the neoliberal economic and political package which centres on liberalisation of trade, privatisation of national assets and resources, commodification of social services and marketisation of all goods and services, tangible and intangible.

In sum, the underlying thrust of the neoliberal and globalised development 'discourse' is deeper integration of African economies into the global capital and market circuits without fundamental transformation. It is predicated on private capital, which in Africa translates into foreign private capital, as the 'engine of growth'. It centres on economic growth without asking whether growth necessarily translates into development. It banishes the issues of equality and equity to the realm of rights, not development. And 'rights' is within the purview of advocacy NGOs, not a terrain of people's struggle. 'Human-centred and people-driven' development that were the kingpin of African alternatives, such as the Lagos Plan of Action, are pooh-poohed into non-existence. Development is within the purview of development practitioners and development NGOs, which, falling in fashion, advocate right-based development.

The African people, who were once supposed to be

the authors and drivers of development and liberators of their nations, are reduced to 'the chronically poor' who are the subject matter of papers on strategies for poverty reduction, authored by consultants and discussed at stakeholders workshops in which, the 'poor' are represented by NGOs. The 'poor', the diseased, the disabled, the AIDs-infected, the ignorant, the marginalised, in short the 'people', are not part of the development equation, since development is assigned to private capital which constitutes the 'engine of growth'. The 'poor' are the recipients of humanitarian aid provided by 'true friends' (thanks to the American ambassador for the phraseology) and dispensed by non-partisan, non-political and, presumably non-involved, non-governmental organisations. In these societies, where stakeholders never tire of policy-making on the poor, there isn't its twin opposite, the rich. These societies apparently do not have *producers* and *appropriators* of wealth; they only have *the poor* and *the wealth creators*.

In the neoliberal discourse, the African state is villainised and African bureaucracies demonised as corrupt, incapable and unable to learn. They need globalised foreign advisors and consultants, who are now termed development practitioners, to mentor, monitor and oversee them. Among the mentors and monitors are, of course, NGOs. After all, the so-called advisors and consultants move freely between the 'Triad Family' – the DONs (donor organisations), the INFOs (international financial organisations) and the NGOs, including GoNGOs (government-organised NGOs) and DoNGOs (donor-organised NGOs).

In this 'discourse' the developmental role of the state is declared dead and buried. Instead, it is assigned the role of a 'chief' to supervise the globalisation project under the tutelage of imperialism, now called, development partners or 'true friends'.[3] The irony of the recent Commission for Africa was that it was convened, constituted and chaired by a British prime minister, while an African president and a prime minister sat on it as members. This symbolises the nature of the so-called 'new partnership'. The message is clear: African 'co-partners' in African development are neither equal nor in the driver's seat.[4]

It is true that the neoliberal discourse has not gone without being challenged, both intellectually and practically. African people have fought on the streets against SAPs; they have protested in their own ways in their villages and towns and neighbourhoods. African intellectuals have written and argued and shown the fallacy of the underlying assumptions of neoliberalism and globalisation. Yet, it is also true, that at least for the time being, neoliberalism seems to hold sway. Virtually the whole of the African political elite and establishment (unlike, for example, in Latin America) has fallen in line, whether for pragmatic reasons of survival or to defend their own vested interests. A large part of the African intellectual elite too has been co-opted and accommodated within the neocolonial discourse.

It is the argument of this paper that the sudden rise of NGOs and their apparently prominent role in Africa is part of the neoliberal organisational, and particularly ideological, offensive. We turn to this argument next.

NGOs or the so-called 'third sector'

At the inception of the neoliberal offensive in the early 1980s, the rise and role of NGOs was explained and justified within the conceptual framework of the problematic of civil society. The concept of civil society came into vogue in the 1980s with the impending collapse of the Soviet and East European systems and the democratisation drive in Africa. In Eastern Europe, following the collapse of bureaucratic socialist regimes (or actually existing socialism, as they were then christened), the construction of civil societies was seen as returning to '"normal society" on the Western model' (*Journal of Democracy,* January 1996, 'Civil Society after Communism', p.11). In Eastern Europe itself, the term has been used in as many different ways as contexts (see generally Shivji 2002:101–118).

The discourse on civil society in Africa too used the term with all kinds of meanings from associational connotations ('civil societies') to all-virtuous, harmonious social space (see, for instance, the International Peace Academy Publication 'Civil society and conflict management in Africa', 1996). But it is in the meaning of free associations, 'independent' of the state, that the term has stuck and very often the term civil society organisations (CSOs) is used interchangeably with NGOs.

Influenced heavily, as always, by US based Africanists, it is the false bi-polarity or dichotomy between state and civil society that has predominated. Within the neoliberal ideologies, as we have seen, the state is demonised and civil society, often conflated with NGOs, is privileged. Non-government organisation is presented as the 'third sector', the other two being the state (power, politics), and the private sector (capital, economics). This ideological presentation of non-government organisation is also the dominant self-perception of the NGO world. Yet it is based on utterly false historical and intellectual premises with serious political implications (see generally Shivji 2002).

The concept of civil society in European history

represented the transition from medieval feudalist to capitalist society. This was part of the bourgeois revolutions. In that context civil society was, both for Hegel and Marx (and even perhaps Weber), for example, an ensemble of free, equal, abstract individuals associating in the public sphere of production as opposed to the private sphere of the family. For Marx, civil society was synonymous with bourgeois society. The concept is developed in opposition to feudal relations where the public and the private are merged and statuses are determined by birth and privileges, where politics is direct 'that is to say, the elements of civil life, for example, property, or the family, or the mode of labour, were raised to the level of political life in the form of seignority, estates, and corporations' (quoted in Sayers 1991:75).

At the same time for Marx (and this is directly relevant to our conceptual debate on civil society), whereas civil society presents itself as an ensemble of free individuals and as a separate sphere from state/politics, it is, as a matter of fact, the soil from which arises, and in which is embedded, state power. For our purpose, it is necessary to highlight two conclusions. First, that so-called civil society, in the sense of the public sphere of production, is not a harmonious whole but rather a terrain of contradictory relations between classes – the two poles being the producer class and the appropriator class. Second, that the separation between state and civil society, between economics and politics, is ideological; that is how the bourgeois society *appears* and *presents* itself. The reality, rather, is that those who command and control the sphere of production also wield political power, that is, the state.

When applied to colonial society, we find that the colonial sphere of production is essentially controlled by imperial capital. The colonial mode of production is characterised by extraction of surplus from non-capitalist classes through the use of (state) force. The national bourgeois project promised by the independence movement is aborted and defeated as we have seen. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a great debate among third world intellectuals as to whether a national bourgeois project can succeed at all in the third world, particularly in Africa, in the era of imperialism (see Amin 1990, Tandon 1982, Mahjoub 1990).

Be that as it may, in Africa the transformation from colonial subject society to a bourgeois civil society is incomplete, stunted and distorted. What we have is the continued domination of imperialism – a reproduction of the colonial mode – in different form, the current one being labelled globalisation or neoliberalism. Within this context NGOs are neither a third sector nor independent of the state. Rather they are inextricably imbricated in the neoliberal offensive which fol-

lows on the heels of the crisis of the national project. Unless there is self-consciousness on their part of this fundamental moment in the struggle between imperialism and nationalism, the NGOs end up playing the role of ideological and organisational foot soldiers of imperialism, by whatever name they are called.

In the next section we will demonstrate how the five silences in the NGO discourse contribute to the mystification and obfuscation of the role of NGOs.

The five silences

What are NGOs?

We quickly state without much argument the salient features of NGOs in the African setting.

First, a large number of African NGOs were born in the womb of the neoliberal offensive which began to open up some space for freedom of association. One of the features of the statist period was the organisational hegemony of the state. In the first flush of the opening up of organisational space, NGOs proliferated without critical examination of the place and role of NGO and its underlying ideologies and premises. The anti-state stance of the so-called donor-community was the real push behind the upsurge in NGO activity.

Second, NGOs are led by, and largely composed of, the educated elite, located in urban areas and well-versed in the language and idiom of modernisation. Broadly three types of NGO elite may be identified. First is the radical elite that was previously involved in political struggles with an explicit vision for change and transformation but which found itself suppressed under the statist hegemony. Many of these elites took the opportunity to express themselves politically in the NGOs. They saw NGOs as a possible terrain of struggle for change. This section of the elite is essentially politically motivated without being necessarily involved in partisan, party-politics. The second category includes well-intentioned individuals driven by altruistic motives to better the conditions of their fellow human beings/compatriots. In other words, they are morally motivated. Third is the mainstream elite, not infrequently even former government bureaucrats, who shifted to the NGO world once they found that that is where the donor funding was directed. The motivation of this elite is quite simply careerist. It is driven by material gains rather than any altruistic motives. It is personally motivated. This category keeps swelling as jobs in the state and private sector become more and more competitive or difficult to come by.

Thirdly, an overwhelming number of NGOs are donor funded. They do not have any independent source of funding and have to seek donor funds through the

usual procedures set by the funding agencies. In this respect, the degree of independence they can exercise in relation to donor agendas varies from NGO to NGO, depending on the perspectives of its leadership. In practice, though, as would be readily acknowledged by even the most radical among them, their scope for action is limited. This does not necessarily mean that a few may not exercise greater autonomy in their outlook and ideology and be still accepted; exceptions are necessary to prove the rule.

While some NGOs may be quite involved with and appreciated by the people whom they purport to serve, ultimately NGOs, by their very nature, derive not only their sustenance but also legitimacy from the donor community. In the current international conjuncture, even political elites located in the state or political parties seek legitimacy from the so-called 'development-partners' rather than their own people. Not surprisingly, there is a fair amount of circulation of the elite between the government and the non-government sectors.

Fourth, by far the greatest number of NGOs are advocacy NGOs, focusing on particular areas of activity such as human rights, gender, development, environment, governance, etc.[5] While there are always NGOs set up by politically or morally motivated individuals with a genuine desire to 'do something', and which are genuinely meant to respond to the need of the people, it is also true that a substantial number of NGOs are set up to respond to what is perceived to be in vogue among the donor-community at any particular time. Donor-driven NGOs, I would guess, are perhaps the most dominant.

Besides advocacy tasks, NGOs are also increasingly commissioned by donors, or the state, or even the corporate sector, to do consultancy work for them or to be their executive agencies to dispense funds or services. Thus NGOs have come to play a major role in the 'aid and development industry'. In the NGO world, it is not at all ironical that a *non-governmental* body is assigned by the *government* to do a *governmental* job funded by a donor agency which is an outfit of a *foreign government*. Thus USAID may fund a gender NGO to raise awareness among women on the new land law whose terms of reference are set by a government ministry. To complete the picture, one may find that the same USAID may have recommended and sponsored a consultant who drafted the land law for the government in the first place.

Fifth, while most NGOs may insert in their charters a vision or a mission statement, these are vague, amorphous ('poverty-reduction'!) and often meaningless. In any case, they are quickly forgotten and what takes over are the so-called strategic plans and log frames which can be tabulated, quantified and ticked

for triennium reports and proposals for more funding. The 'success' of an NGO is measured by how efficiently it is managed and run and the criteria for measuring efficiency are borrowed from the corporate sector. Training NGOs are set up to train NGO managers in 'strategic framework analysis', in charting 'inputs' and 'outcomes' tables, in setting indicators and in methods and techniques to log the vision and the mission and the strategy in log frames! As Brian Murphy observes in a pithy article he wrote for Oxfam's *Development in Practice* series (Murphy 2001:60–85):

> This ethos has been embraced by and is now aggressively – sometimes ruthlessly – promoted by senior managers in many of our leading NGOs, convinced that restructuring our organisations along corporate lines is the ticket to successful integration in the new trilateral global order that sees the public, private, and voluntary sectors somehow as partners in development … (ibid., 74).

> Increasingly the model for the 'successful' NGO is the corporation – ideally a transnational corporation and NGOs are ever more marketed and judged against corporate ideals. As part of the trend, a new development scientism is strangling us with things like strategic framework analysis and results-based management, precisely the values and methods and techniques that have made the world what it is today (ibid., 80).

Finally, the rise, role and features of NGOs which objectively situate them within the imperial project is reinforced by certain 'silences' in the NGO discourse. I discuss this next.

Privileging activism or changing the world without understanding it

During the revolutionary moment of the 1960s and 1970s, when the national liberation movement was at its height, it used to be said that we should 'think globally and act locally'. This summed up four fundamental ideas. One, that imperialism was global and oppressed all peoples worldwide, so we must understand it in its global context. Two, that imperialism would have to be fought at its local manifestations. The concrete analysis of the concrete situation was underlined. Three, the slogan expressed the international solidarity of all peoples across the globe against imperialism. Fourth, that imperialism and national liberation had to be clearly understood and correctly described in all its aspects so as to

conduct an organised and conscious struggle against it. This was the basis of the profound intellectual debates on the theory and practice of imperialism and national liberation. As Amilcar Cabral, one of the foremost leaders of the African liberation movement, put it in his 'weapon of theory', 'every practice produces a theory, and that if it is true that a revolution can fail even though it be based on perfectly conceived theories, nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory' (Cabral 1969:73–90, at 75).

What is interesting about that period is that the radical intellectual discourse was integrated with militant activism; the two were mutually reinforcing. The NGO discourse in the current period of apparent imperial 'triumphalism' eschews theory, emphasises and privileges activism. In the African setting in particular, whatever is left of critical intellectual discourse, largely located at universities, runs parallel to and is divorced from NGO activism. The requirements of funding agencies subtly discourage, if not exhibit outright hostility to, a historical and social theoretical understanding of development, poverty, discrimination, etc. Our erstwhile benefactors now tell us, 'Just act, don't think' and we shall fund both!

The inherent bias against theory is manifested at various levels. We may mention a few. First, the penchant for project funding which is supposed to be operated and completed within a given time – a triennium for example – does not admit of thinking the underlying premises of the so-called project. Second, the managerial techniques of monitoring and evaluating projects, such as log frames, by their very nature compartmentalise and slice up life such that invariably one not only loses sight of the whole, but even the capacity to think holistically.

Third, the projects are issue based and are supposed to be addressed as issues. The issue itself is identified as a problem at the level of phenomenon; its underlying basis is not addressed but assumed. The issue is isolated and abstracted from its social, economic and historical reality; therefore, its interconnectedness to other issues and the whole is lost.

Fourth, issue-oriented and time-limited projects do not admit of any long-term basic research based on solid theoretical and historical premises. If at all, the so-called research by NGOs or consultants (rather than researchers) relates to policy, not to social, economic and political interests which underlie the phenomenon under investigation nor to how these interests reproduce themselves. The 'researches' by consultants degenerate into rapid appraisals (some kind of 'opinion-polls').

In sum, NGO activism is presented and based on 'act now, think later'. Theory, and particularly grand theory, is dismissed as academicism unworthy of activists. Yet, we know that every practice gives rise to theory and every action is based on some theoretical/philosophical premise/outlook. NGO action too is based on certain theoretical premises and philosophical outlook. This, however, is assumed as 'common sense' and therefore not interrogated.

I believe I have shown sufficiently that the 'common sense' theoretical assumptions of the current period, and which underpin NGO role and action, is neoliberalism in the interest of global imperialism and fundamentally contrary to the interests of the large majority of the people. Taking for granted the fundamentals of neoliberalism and financial capitalism, or challenging them only piecemeal on specific issues (debt, environment, gender discrimination, etc), as a matter of fact draws in the NGOs as protagonists of the imperial project. Brian Murphy argues that many mainstream NGO leaders have internalised the assumptions and ways of neoconservatism and are convinced that globalisation/neoliberalism is inevitable and irreversible and have thus joined its acolytes, ironically without much critical analysis of what 'it' actually is or means. He continues: 'What the corporate PR manager understands implicitly as economic propaganda, NGO people often repeat as articles of faith' (Murphy op.cit. 81).

The permanent present

Recently, African poverty has been brought to the centre stage of the NGO world, ironically by the likes of imperial leaders such as Tony Blair. The African NGO world echoes and repeats the slogan generated by their Northern benefactors: 'Make Poverty History'. But how can you make poverty history without understanding the 'history of poverty'? We need to know how did the poverty of the 5 billion of this world come about as we need to know even more accurately how the filthy wealth of the 500 multinationals or the 225 richest people was created (Peacock 2002). We need to know even more precisely how is this great divide, the unbridgeable chasm, maintained, reproduced and increasingly deepened and widened. We need to ask ourselves: What are the political, social, moral, ideological, economic and cultural mechanisms which produce and reinforce, and make such a world not only possible, but *apparently* acceptable?

Yet, the NGO discourse seems to have internalised the thoughtless idiocies of right-wing, reactionary writers such as Fukiyama who propagate the 'end of history' in which the present – that is, of course, the present global capitalism under the hegemony of the imperialist North – is declared *permanent*. Any historical understanding of our present state is ridiculed and dismissed, or tolerated as a token to create the illusion of 'diver-

sity'. In the African setting, any discussion on colonial history invariably elicits the standard response: Let us stop blaming the colonialists! How long shall we continue lamenting about colonialism? Thus history is reduced to, and then ridiculed as, a 'blaming exercise'.

And yet, as I have traced only in a sketch here, the colonial and imperial history is at the heart of the present African condition. History is not about assigning or sharing blame, nor it is about narrating the 'past', which must be forgotten and forgiven or only remembered once a year on remembrance or heroes or independence days. History is about the *present*. We must understand the *present as history* so as to change it for the better. Per force, in the African context where the imperial project is not only historical, it is the present. Just as we cannot 'make poverty history' without understanding the history of poverty, so we cannot chant 'another world is possible' without accurately understanding and correctly describing the existing world of 5 billion slaves and 200 slave masters. How did it come about and how does it continue to exist? And to answer these questions we have to understand history as much as the philosophy and the political economy that underpin the existing world and the vested interests – real social interests of real people – that ensure and defend its existence.

Society as a harmonious whole of stakeholders

Much of the NGO discourse is based on the following premises inherent in the liberal capitalist world outlook and its new variant, globalisation. 1) The separation of self and society, where society is seen as an aggregate sum of atomic individuals. 2) The liberal goal is to privilege individual interests which are knowable and ascertainable (individual self-determination in the language of post-modernism), assuming that social interests would thus have been taken care of. In the post-modernist variant, social interests are in any case unknowable. 3) The social whole is presented as a harmonious whole in which there is a variety of diverse interests, more or less at par. The premise that social interests are not all at the same level and that some are dominant and in conflict with others is eschewed. 4) The neoliberal model of development based on private property and accumulation, and the market as the motor of society and commodification of resources, services and basic needs is taken as 'common sense' requiring no further proof. In Africa this translates into further and deeper integration of the economies into the global capital and market circuits, the opening up of natural wealth and resources for exploitation by voracious transnational corporations, and the outlawing of resistance as aberrant or outdated at best and 'terrorist' at worst.

Thus is derived the basis of the so-called triad of stakeholders – the state, the private sector and the voluntary sector. The state is presented as the neutral referee, the guarantor of law and order, whose main function is to provide stability and an enabling environment for private capital. Private capital is the main engine or motor of growth, which growth will eventually trickle down to the whole of society. In this drive for inexorable growth and progress, it is acknowledged that some would inevitably be left behind, marginalised, or simply be unable to cope, the so-called 'poor'. You therefore need the voluntary sector to take care of them. Social welfare and provision of basic needs and services to the community is no longer the responsibility of the state or the private sector; it is assigned to the NGOs. Thus is completed the 'holy trinity' of development partners: the state, capital and the NGO, who are supposedly the major stakeholders in the 'participatory' development enterprise. The net effect is that the so-called NGO sector, which is presented as pro-poor and morally driven, legitimises the essentially exploitative capitalist system while the progressive agenda of people-driven development (the radical, populist agenda of the nationalists of yesteryear) is co-opted. In effect, therefore, we see a re-enactment of the missionary positions of the colonial period where the church, charity and catechists played a legitimising role for the colonial enterprise, duping the colonised and damning the freedom fighters. The role assigned to NGOs is in principle not very different, whatever the secular language in which it is articulated and however universal the platitudes of globalisation ('global neighbourhood', 'global village', 'global citizenship', etc) it is clothed in (Manji & O'Coill 2002).

Just as the colonial enterprise assumed the garb of a civilising mission and used the church as its *avant-garde*, so the globalisation pundits put on the clothing of secular human rights and use the NGOs as their ideological foot soldiers.

The international and national orders within which we are functioning are unequal and have conflicting interests. To pretend that society is a harmonious whole of stakeholders is to be complicit in perpetuating the status quo in the interest of the dominant classes and powers. In the struggle between national liberation and imperialist domination and between social emancipation and capitalist slavery, NGOs have to choose sides. In this there are no in-betweens.

Non-governmental = non-political?

The separation between politics and economics, between state and civil society, is how the bourgeois

society appears and presents itself. But that is not its real essence. In reality, politics is the quintessence, or the concentrated form of economics. The sphere of politics is built on the sphere of production and there is a close relationship between those who command production and those who wield power. Yet, the NGO sector which by its own proclamation stands for change accepts the ideological myth that it is the third sector, that it is non-political, not-for-profit, that is, it has nothing to do with power or production. This bourgeois mythology mystifies the reality of capitalist production and power thus contributing to its legitimisation. NGOs by accepting the myth of being non-political contribute to the process of mystification and therefore objectively side with the status quo contrary to their expressed stand for change.

Ironically, the non-political NGOs are taken on board in the process of so-called policy-making. They participate in, or are made to feel that they are participating in, policy-making and policy dialogue among stakeholders. This has several implications. First, policy-making, which is an attribute of sovereignty for which the government of the day is supposed to be accountable to its people, is wrenched from the state and vested in the amorphous coterie of 'development partners' or stakeholders. Every one knows who is really the determining stakeholder – the old adage applies: the one who pays the piper plays the tune. Second, that the NGOs really participate in policy-making is an illusion, which in this day and age of donor-driven policies applies equally to the African state itself. Third, it is presumptuous on the part of NGOs to pretend that they represent the people in the process of policy-making. Fourth, the whole process undermines the supposedly democratic/representative character of the state as the state abdicates its responsibility for 'its' policies, ceases to be accountable to its own people and becomes accountable to the so-called development partners.

Finally, the process of policy-making, a political process par excellence, is presented as if it were a neutral non-political exercise in which the non-political NGOs may participate without losing their non-partisanship! Needless to say, policy-making is a terrain of intense conflict of interest and there is nothing neutral about it. The question always is which interest is being served by a particular policy, a question on which an NGO cannot plead either neutrality or non-partisanship.

'What is a better or an alternative world?'

'A better world is possible' goes the NGO slogan but to build a better world we must understand the world better. This then has been the message of this paper.

'An alternative world is possible', goes another saying of the NGOs. The question that this paper has been trying to raise is: What would be an alternative world in the current African context? I have tried to argue that Africa is at the crossroads of the defeat of the national project and the reassertion of the imperial project. The national liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, which put imperialism on the ideological defensive, have been aborted. Imperialism under the name of globalisation is making a comeback while refurbishing its moral and ideological image. NGOs were born in the womb of neoliberalism and, knowingly or otherwise, are participating in the imperial project, or at least in the process of refurbishing its image. No doubt, there are very fine and dedicated people in the NGOs who are genuinely committed to the struggle to better the world. But there are serious blind spots and silences in the NGO discourse which objectively result in the NGO world participating in the imperial, rather than the national, project. For NGOs cannot be pro-people and pro-change without being anti-imperialist and anti-status quo. So I argue that NGOs must engage in a critical discourse and *political* activism rather than assume a false neutrality and non-partisanship. In this perspective, African NGOs need to build bridges with African intellectuals and scholars where there is a serious debate, albeit on the fringes of the mainstream, on the 'alternative African world'. Currently, under another false dichotomy between activism and intellectualism, the critical intellectual discourse runs parallel to the NGO discourse. We need therefore to bring together African activism with African intellectualism in which we critically interrogate both 'our' compradorial states and their imperial masters. In the next concluding section, I briefly sketch some of the thinking that is emerging among critical scholarship in Africa.

Towards Pan-African liberation, social justice and human emancipation: Where do we stand?

First, we must record that the neoliberal project in Africa has not been accepted without practical and intellectual resistance. In a preface to a book by African scholars significantly sub-titled *Beyond Dispossession and Dependence*, Nyerere observed:

> Africa's history is not only one of slavery, exploitation and colonialism; it is also a

story of struggle against these evils, and of battles won after many setbacks and much suffering (Adedeji ed. 1993:xv).

Just as the African people have struggled and opposed structural adjustment policies in the streets, African intellectuals have critically scrutinised their neoliberal underpinnings and exposed globalisation as a new form of imperialism. African NGOs must creatively appropriate these intellectual insights. African NGOs must learn from the actually existing struggles of the people before evangelising on donor-fads of the day – gender, human rights, 'fgm' (female genital mutilation) good governance, etc, etc. The educators must be educated.

Second, critically interrogating the national project, African scholars have noted the resurgence of nationalism and observed both its positive and negative aspects. The first lesson to be drawn is that the African national project located at the territorial level is bound to fail. African nationalism, as some of the fathers of African nationalism realised, is and must be Pan-African. Pan-Africanism, they argue, is the nationalism of the era of globalisation. Only Pan-Africanism can carry forward the struggle for national liberation in Africa. Without a Pan-African vision, there is the danger that the resurgence of nationalism as a reaction to the new imperial assault can degenerate into narrow, parochial, national chauvinism and even ethnicism and racism (Shivji 2005a & 2005b, Yieke 2005).

But this new Pan-Africanism must be bottom-up, people's Pan-Africanism, not a top-down statist Pan-Africanism. In the hands of the African state and its 'leaders', Pan-Africanism degenerates into NEPAD-ism or phony African renaissance (Landsberg & Kornegey 1998). NEPAD, or the New Partnership for African Development, as the very name suggests, is a donor-dependent programme seeking more aid and assistance from the erstwhile 'international community' predicated on further integration of Africa in the unequal global structures (see generally Nyong'o et al. 2002). Calling it a 'feudo-imperial partnership' Adebayo Adedeji says, the objective of NEPAD is 'for the African canoe to be firmly tied to the North's neoliberal ship on the waters of globalisation' (ibid.:36).

Third, that a fundamental transformation of African societies, an African revolution, if you like, is very much on the agenda. The nature of this revolution is very much debated. It is suggested though that it has to be a revolution that is thoroughly anti-imperialist and consistently pro-people; a revolution based on popular power, fighting for and defending popular livelihoods and predicated on popular participation (Mafeje 2002, Shivji 2000).

Fourth, that the actually existing states in Africa are essentially compradorised, that is, they are neither democratic nor pro-people. That the states themselves have to be restructured and reorganised with roots in the people and seeking legitimacy from the people rather than from a consortia of G8 ('the global gobblers') imperial powers called the 'international community'.

Fifth, that the African people have to recover their sovereignty and self-determination, their right to think for themselves, albeit in genuine solidarity with the oppressed people of the world.

All in all, I am submitting that there is a need to integrate the intellectual and activist discourse. Only thus can the NGOs truly play the role of catalysts of change rather than catechists of aid and charity. Indeed, the potential of the NGO sector to play such a role is demonstrated, albeit in its infancy, in such struggles as the Seattle street fights against the world's foremost imperial institutions and in the demonstrations condemning the invasion of Iraq against the world's foremost and most brutal superpower.

If the NGOs are to play that role they have to fundamentally re-examine their silences and their discourses; they must scrutinise the philosophical and political premises that underpin their activities; they must investigate the credentials of their development partners and the motives of their financial benefactors; they must distance themselves from oppressive African states and compradorial ruling elites. NGOs must refuse to legitimise, rationalise and provide a veneer of respectability and morality to global pillage by voracious transnationals under the guise of creating a global village.

I dare say that if in the NGO world we understood well the history of poverty and enslavement in Africa; if we did scrutinise the credentials of the so-called development partners; if we did distance ourselves from the oppressive African state; if we did refuse to lend our names to 'poverty reduction polices and strategies' which are meant to legitimise the filthy rich; if, indeed, we vowed to be a catalyst of change and refused to be a catechist of charity, we would have been toyi-toyi-ing at the doorsteps of Blair and his commissioners, beating our tom-toms and singing 'Make imperialism history' instead of jumping on the bandwagon of Sir Bob Geldof's Band Aid.

Notes

1 Some time ago, the World Bank assigned Marti Athissari to advise the Tanzanian president on governance.

2 Press release, US Embassy in Tanzania, 29 July 2003.

3 Incidentally, in a different context, a statement from CCM (the ruling party in Tanzania) reacting to adverse comments made by the US on the Zanzibar election also called 'development partners' 'our true friends' (see *The Citizen*, 9 November 2005). 'We call upon our true friends not to issue statements which will encourage or incite bad-intentioned people, political parties or any group to cause chaos or conflict among Tanzanians.'

4 The irony of Blair's Africa Commission turns cynical when it is recalled that one of Blair's commissioners, President Mkapa, comes from the same country whose first president, Nyerere, in retirement, chaired the South Commission, which was conceived and financed by the South!

5 There are also many humanitarian NGOs responding to various the disasters to which many of our countries are prone. I do not directly deal with these in this paper. They have to be treated differently.

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