

From Slave Ship to Space Ship: Africa between Marginalization and Globalization

ALI MAZRUI

When we formulated the title "From Slave Ship to Space-Ship", we did not have Senator John Glenn's 1998 space odyssey in mind. By coincidence this odyssey was happening at the same time as this panel in November 1998. We did have in mind a link between the slave ship and the subsequent Western capacity to launch space ships or space shuttles.

Africa and the African people made a far bigger contribution to the technological revolution of the West than the West did to industrial change in Africa. Walter Rodney was concerned about how Europe retarded Africa's development. But is there not another big story-- the story of how Africa accelerated Europe's development? Did not Rodney also contribute to this second debate? Especially in Chapters III and V of his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

How Africa Developed the West

Each step in Africa's contribution to the development of the West was itself a stage in the history of globalization. I referred to these stages in my M.K.O. Abiola Lecture for the African Studies Association of the United States in 1994. The era of the labor imperative was when the labor of Africa's sons and daughters was what the West needed for its industrial take-off. The slave ship helped to export millions to the Americas to help in the agrarian revolution in the Americas and the industrial revolution in Europe simultaneously. The enforced dispersal of Black people to serve Western capitalism was itself part of the emerging globalization.

In the era of the territorial imperative, the West docked the slave ships away forever and launched the gunboats in their place. This was the era of imperialism and gunboat diplomacy.

*Whatever happens, we have got
the maxim and they have not!*

The West stopped exporting Africa's sons and daughters and colonized Africa itself. Imperialism and gunboat diplomacy were part of the ugly side of globalization. Raw materials for Western manufacturing industries became a major temptation.

Ali A. Mazrui is Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies and Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at the State University of New York at Binghamton. He also holds the titles of Albert Luthuli Professor-at-Large, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria; Ibn Khaldun Professor-at-Large, School of Islamic and Social Sciences, Leesburg, VA; Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large Emeritus and Senior Scholar in Africana Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; and Walter Rodney Professor, University of Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i4a2.pdf>

Then came the era of the extractive imperative. Africa's minerals became the next major contributor not only to Western economies but also to Western technology. Uranium from the Belgian Congo was part of the original Manhattan project which produced the first atomic bombs. Other minerals, like cobalt, became indispensable for jet engines. There were times when Africa had 90 percent of the world's known reserves of cobalt, over 80 percent of the global reserves of chrome, and a hefty share of platinum and industrial diamonds.

Africa's impact on the West's technological history in this phase was heavily based on Africa's industrial minerals. The space ship was slowly in the making. As we have reminded ourselves at this conference, Walter Rodney's most popular book looked at how Europe underdeveloped Africa (*the slave ship syndrome*). The other side of the story is how Africa developed Europe (*the space ship potential*).

Rodney is better known for the negative consequences. We need also to investigate the positive consequences of Africa's impact upon Europe from economic production to space communication and how Walter Rodney contributed to this other debate. Also relevant was Eric Williams's examination of the interplay between capitalism and slavery.

We now come to areas of metaphor. Walter Rodney's stay in Tanzania coincided with the promulgation and aftermath of the "Arusha Declaration on Socialism and Self-Reliance". Arusha is the name of the town where the Declaration occurred in 1967. But what does the word "Arusha" literally mean? It means: "He makes fly (into the skies)." In standard Kiswahili the word is anarusha. In other dialects it is simply arusha: "He makes fly into the skies." Who makes fly? Ancestrally it was God. In 1967, the year of the Arusha Declaration, it was Julius K. Nyerere. He made socialism and self-reliance (*ujamaa na kujitegemea*) fly. In the space age it could be an astronaut or a cosmonaut who makes a space ship fly.

Why is Arusha town called "He makes fly into the skies"? Because the town is located close to Mt. Kilimanjaro, whose pinnacle is the highest point on the African continent. Kilimanjaro is the roof of Africa--from whence God makes things "fly into the skies."

It has been alleged that Walter Rodney's inadequate command of Kiswahili was no handicap for his communication with rural Tanzanians. I beg to disagree.

We must not trivialize the relevance of language in human communication; otherwise we might sound like the song:

*You don't have to know the language -- With a girl in your arms and the moon up above,
you don't have to know the language!*

Of course Walter Rodney could relate in friendly terms with rural Tanzanians. But being friendly is different from being Socialist, let alone being Marxist. He could not convey his socialism linguistically to the Tanzanian peasant.

In Africa in the 1960s and the 1970s one could not be a Marxist without being substantially Westernized through a European language. Walter Rodney could not reach rural Tanzanians as a socialist or as a Marxist. He could only reach them as a friendly man. In reality a friendly man could belong to any ideology.

A dialectic faced Walter Rodney in relation to the twin policies of Julius Nyerere's Tanzania. Under the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere's policy of socialism brought the national ideology of Tanzania closer to Walter Rodney's own leftist paradigm.

On the other hand, Nyerere's simultaneous language policy of greater Swahilization made Tanzania less and less accessible to Walter Rodney's ideo-cultural skills. Nyerere's socialist policies were opening up ideological doors to Walter Rodney, while Nyerere's Swahilization policies were closing down cultural doors to Walter Rodney.

Every stage of Africa's contribution to globalization was also a stage in its own marginalization. Rodney was all too aware that African captives who were turned into slaves entered the emerging world of international capitalism. But those captives were simultaneously a symbol of the marginalization of the African peoples.

Imperialism and gunboat diplomacy made colonized Africa part of world-wide empires. But colonized people are inevitably marginalized people. The extractive imperative made African minerals fuel the world economy. African minerals enriched other economies rather than Africa's own.

The space ship was also born out of the rivalries of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. Sputnik in the firmament in 1958 put the Soviet Union first into orbit. The Soviets borrowed a lot from Western technology, but carried it further. The process of "Arusha" had been sparked out. Soviet Yuri Gagarin was also the first man in space. The West was temporarily beaten at its own game. The "Arusha" space enterprise had been accomplished.

A resurgence of American resolve under John F. Kennedy inspired the U.S. space program and enabled the United States first to circle the earth (John Glenn) and later to land the first man on the moon.

The Cold War: Globalizing or Marginalizing?

Africa's involvement in the Cold War was another globalizing experience, but in this case marginalization was temporarily suspended. The rivalries between the two super powers temporarily increased Africa's global strategic value and enhanced Africa's influence in the United Nations, UNESCO, the Commonwealth, and a number of other international forums. It was the end of the Cold War which reactivated Africa's marginalization. The end of the Cold War was a kind of "dis-globalizing" experience.

Part of the dis-globalization was good news. The end of the Cold War has initiated the second phase of the French decolonization of Africa. This is the gradual reduction of the French informal empire in Africa. Rolling back French neo-colonialism from Africa is partly the result of the decline of the strategic value of Africa and partly due to the rise of French economic aspirations for the newly liberated former members of the Warsaw Pact.

The good news is that the end of the Cold War has helped to initiate the second phase of decolonization in Francophone Africa, although there is still a long way to go before real independence for any part of Africa is achieved. The sad news is that while Phase II of French decolonization in Africa is part of the happier story of progress towards African independence, French decolonization is simultaneously part of a more sorrowful story about the end of the

Cold War and that is the wider marginalization of Africa in the world. Indeed, perhaps the worst news about the end of the Cold War for Africa is that Africa has been marginalized even more deeply in the following ways:

- (a) Most of Africa has lost its strategic value which motivated the Big Powers to take it seriously;
- (b) Africa has lost its socialist friends in world affairs and in the UN; the former members of the Warsaw Pact are now more eager to please the West than to support Third World causes;
- (c) Africa has lost its one third numerical advantage in the United Nations. Some twenty new members have been admitted to the UN since 1990, only two of which are African (Namibia and Eritrea). The others are former Republics of the USSR, collapsed Yugoslavia, and divided Czechoslovakia;
- (d) The end of the Cold War has turned the West's old adversaries into Africa's rivals for the West's resources. Aid and investment will increasingly give greater priority to former members of the Warsaw Pact than to Africa;
- (e) The triumph of "market Marxism" in China and Vietnam have turned those countries into new magnets for Western resources, partly at the expense of old African friends of the West;
- (f) The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War have contributed to the renewed liberalization of India which in turn is developing into a new magnet for additional Western investment and aid, inevitably at the partial expense of Africa;
- (g) The end of the Cold War has undermined part of the old Western rationale for foreign aid as "enlightened self-interest" and so Western legislatures are allocating less and less money for foreign aid. There is less motivation for foreign aid in the absence of rivalry with the USSR;
- (h) The end of the Cold War has reduced the internationalization of African education. The golden days of diverse scholarships for African students to study in Moscow, Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, and Belgrade seem to be almost over and rival scholarships to study in Western countries have been drastically reduced;
- (i) The golden days of Czech, Hungarian, and Polish professors teaching at African universities are almost over and resources for Western visiting professors have been drastically reduced.
- (j) Just as the end of the Cold War has deprived the West of a cornerstone of its foreign policy, it has also deprived Africa of a cornerstone of its own foreign orientation. Although the nonaligned movement is still alive and well in the post Cold War era, yet is the word "nonalignment" relevant any longer for African policy after the Cold War?

(k) While the West's triumph over Nazism and fascism in World War II helped left wing parties immediately after the war, the West's triumph over communism has helped right wing parties which are less internationalist and less compassionate towards either the domestic poor or poor countries abroad. And such old left wing parties as Labour in Britain have moved to the right.

(l) Finally, the end of the Cold War is eroding French commitment to Africa and reducing the level of France's financial contributions to its former colonies.

The debate between Europeanists and Africanists continues in France; that a US president could visit in 1998 a former French colony (Senegal) is a sign of French withdrawal.

Is there anything that the international community can do to help Africa? At the moment the flesh is weak and the spirit is not even willing. But we need to set goals.

Apart from bilateral aid to individual African countries for economic development, the three long term African oriented goals to be supported should be:

Interim Reparation

(a) Establishing or strengthening region-wide African institutions and promoting regional integration for greater African self-reliance.

(b) Encouraging and helping to institutionalize national trends towards democratization in Africa, with resources for building democratic foundations (free press, election monitors).

(c) Strengthening truly global coalitions for Africa including new funding actors like Japan, Taiwan, China, and South Korea, as well as traditional Western friends of Africa (partners as well as reparationists).

The international community can also help in the long term solution of the problem of Rwanda and Burundi which will require immense resources.

(a) The genocidal behavior of the Hutu and the Tutsi toward each other can only be contained in the context of wider regional integration.

(b) Therefore, persuade Rwanda and Burundi to federate with Tanzania, thus disarming Hutu and Tutsi armies. In the new wider society, the Hutu and the Tutsi would rediscover what they have in common. In the political process of the greater Tanzania, Hutu and Tutsi might even form political coalitions against other Tanzanians in the democratic process.

(c) But what would make today's Tanzania accept federation with Rwanda and Burundi? The international community would have to make it worth Tanzania's while with large injections of funding for development and resettlement in all three countries.

It should also be remembered that all three countries once constituted German East Africa, and all three countries have been substantially Swahilized. In any case, as matters now stand, Tanzania is constantly forced to accept hundreds of thousands of refugees from Burundi and Rwanda every time there is a blow up in those two countries. Disarming the Hutu and Tutsi and making them part of a much larger country under Tanzania's own control might be worth the risk.

A final word as to the choice of title "From Slave Ship to Space Ship". While the slave ship can be regarded as the beginning of globalization, the spaceship is, by definition, a symbol of post- globalization.

The space ship takes us beyond the globe. Do we really want to go beyond the globe? Senator John Glenn has a wander-lust into space. Indeed, do we really want to be globalized ? "To globalize or not to globalize." That is the question for us and for Arusha, a town in Tanzania steeped in symbolism.

APPENDIX: HEGEMONIC GLOBALIZATION

Globalization carries two inter-related consequences whose English words sound similar-- *homogenization* (making all of us look similar) and *hegemonization* (making one of us the boss).

Homogenization (expanding Homogeneity)	Hegemonization (emergence of Hegemonic centre)
Increasing similarities among world societies.	Increasing world domination by a specific power or civilization.
At the end of the 20th century people dress more the same all over the world than they did at the end of the 19th century.	But the dress which is the same is overwhelmingly Western dress code.
At the end of the 20th century the human race is closer to having world languages than it was in the nineteenth century - if by a world language we mean one which has at least 300 million speakers, has been adopted by at least 10 countries as a national language, has spread to more than one continent, and is widely used in four continents for special purposes.	But those world languages at the end of the 20th century are disproportionately European - especially English and French - although Arabic is putting forward a strong challenge as a world language in a different sense.

<p>At the end of the 20th century we are closer to a world economy than we have ever been in human history. A sneeze in Hong Kong or Tokyo can send shock waves around the globe.</p>	<p>But the powers who control that economy are disproportionately Western - especially the G-7 (USA, Germany, Japan Britain, France, Canada and Italy in that order of economic muscle).</p>
<p>At the end of the 20th century the internet has given us instant access to both information and mutual communication across huge distances.</p>	<p>But the nerve center of the global internet system is still located in the United States and has residual links with the US Federal Government.</p>
<p>The educational systems at the end of the 20th century are getting more and more similar across the world - with concepts of "associate professorships" and "twosemester" years; and with paradigms shared across the globe.</p>	<p>But those shared academic ranks, semesters and scholarly paradigms are disproportionately drawn from the United States and Western Europe.</p>
<p>The ideological systems of the world at the end of the 20th century are converging. Market economies are triumphant. Liberalization is being embraced or enforced. Even China has adopted market Marxism. Egypt is pushing the frontiers of <i>Intifada</i>. India is liberalizing.</p>	<p>The people who are orchestrating and sometimes enforcing marketization, liberalization and privatization are Western economic gurus - reinforced by the power of the USA, the World Bank, the IMF and the European Union. Indeed, Europe is the mother of all modern ideologies--good and bad-- Liberalims, Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism, and Nazism. The most triumphant is Euro-liberal Capitalism.</p>

