

A Rejoinder to Shivji's 'Dialectics of Maguphilia and Maguphobia'

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The late, renowned Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui wrote in his famous article on Tanzania, *Tanzaphilia*, that '(i)ntellectuals everywhere in the world have a weakness for fellow intellectuals'. This maxim is vivid in Issa Shivji's recent essay, 'The Dialectics of Maguphilia and Maguphobia'. The author, in his wide-ranging historical account of the actions that laid the foundation for the rise of a person that he has described as a 'messianic' Bonaparte, highlights a range of controversial measures that were taken by the country's first president Julius Kambarage Nyerere as he sought to consolidate power and pursue a nation-building agenda.

These measures included the abolition of the multi-party system; the dissolution and re-establishment of the army, and its integration into the party; and the evisceration of trade unions, as well as other civil society bodies. Yet, Shivji exudes compassion towards these measures by subtly expressing doubt as to whether Nyerere's actions were authoritarian. It is as if grand ambitions such as nation-building and the pursuit of national unity have an inherent value that casts doubt on the definition of authoritarianism.

As a critical, leftist scholar who came of age during Nyerere's long tenure of office, a time when the nation experimented with the ideals of socialism, the author's compassion is understandable. Shivji was

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able to choose his career trajectory and publish his notable book during this period without any significant (negative) consequences. Also, as the co-author of one of Nyerere's biographies and former holder of a professorial chair in Nyerere's name, he definitely has a stake in Nyerere's legacy. This is to say that, when reading the author, one has to understand that his background and intellectual orientation have had the effect of moderating his views on first-phase government.

Shivji's description of the fifth-phase president – John Pombe Magufuli – as a messianic Bonaparte is based on the circumstances underpinning Magufuli's ascent to power. In his essay, the author writes: 'When classes are weak, or have been disarmed ideologically and organisationally over a generation, politics suffer from Bonapartist effects.' He notes elsewhere that 'Bonapartism has arisen in historical situations where the struggling classes have either exhausted themselves and there is an apparent vacuum in the body politic or reign of the previous ruler has been so laissez faire that "law and order" has broken down'.

These two quotations shed some light on what, according to the author, constitutes Bonapartism. The problem is that Shivji presents Bonapartism as if it is an influential framework that has a unified theory behind it, ignoring all contestations in literature, and assuming its full applicability to the Tanzanian context. A reader wonders what value the framework brings to the essay, given its narrow origin. The author's constant efforts, throughout the essay, to anchor it to populism point to a sense of awareness as to its superficiality.

The author's core argument is that the state's weakening of other centres of power, which started during the first-phase government, and the subsequent organisational and ideological deterioration of the ruling party, created the conditions necessary for the rise of a Bonapartist leader. This was especially due to the establishment's failure to mitigate the effects of neoliberalism on the 'struggling' classes. He contends that Benjamin William Mkapa, the third-phase president, 'can easily be described as the father of neo-liberalism in Tanzania' and that, by the end of his rule, it 'was a full-blown neo-liberal state.' Shivji also observes that the regime of the fourth-phase president – Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete – was the most laissez faire in the country's history, but does not explain why the tenure of the second-phase president Ali Hassan Mwi-

nyi, which was fairly laissez faire, did not produce a similar outcome. As for sixth-phase president Samia Suluhu Hassan he cautiously asserts: ‘It is too early to say the direction that the new regime will take’ though ‘it is likely to be a little more liberal politically and economically and a little less heavy on invoking rhetorical invectives against western governments’.

In my view, the emboldened opposition under Kikwete, especially as it benefited from the growing support of the struggling classes, and the alignment of forces with the civil society (especially NGOs), explains the difference between the Kikwete presidency and that of Mwinyi. But Shivji writes dismissively about NGOs, regurgitating his old, standard argument that they lack both constituency, and an agenda of their own, mainly due to the predominant nature of their foreign funding. The uncertainty surrounding the sustainability, and even the legitimacy of NGO operations is a well-known issue. However, the author’s consistent failure to acknowledge a sense of agency among those that take part in NGO operations amounts to a form of intellectual rigidity. If the unqualified funding logic is extended to Shivji’s own activities, one would be justified in questioning whether *Kavazi* (Nyerere Resource Centre), which is now defunct, came close to having its own agenda, given that a significant portion of its funding came from foreign benefactors.

The author indicates that President Magufuli had many firsts and suggests the country experienced kidnappings and disappearances for the first time during his administration. To be fair, the country saw

extreme violations of rights, and disappearances in Zanzibar during Abeid Amani Karume’s tenure as the first President of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar and First Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania, to the extent of attracting protest from the international community. Nyerere is on record as arguing that it would take a while for Zanzibar to be brought fully under the union, indicating that he wasn’t comfortably in charge of the situation. In the mainland, lengthy detentions without trial weren’t unheard of under Nyerere. I personally remember a neighbour’s son who ‘disappeared’ in the early 1970s, and only re-appeared many years later – sometime in the late 1990s. Disappearance, both actual and figurative, did not start with Magufuli.

Of initiatives that were undertaken by President Magufuli, the author writes quite positively about reforms in the extractives sector. He describes the Permanent Sovereignty Act (2017) as a progressive piece of legislation, and commends the (initial) ban on international arbitration (which has been technically rescinded) as a great ‘advance’. As a person who has spent nearly a decade specialising in extractives sector governance, I understand that ownership is often not a matter of contention. After all, it is a norm that the state owns the resources on behalf of its populace. What is of paramount importance is the state’s capacity to manage concessions granted to multi-national corporations (MNCs). Tanzania’s problem has not been ownership, but limited capacity. The ownership question is an agenda that has been popularised by politicians, for it is easy to sell.

In terms of international arbitration, Shivji must be aware, as a qualified lawyer, that MNCs avoid seeking adjudication in local (especially Third World) courts due to the judiciary’s lack of independence, and competence challenges. The author’s essay points to this phenomenon when he describes a situation where the head of the judiciary would receive orders, in public, from the president. In short, the provision for local arbitration wasn’t in line with industry standards, and was bound to fail.

The author’s reflection on the legacy of the previous regime in Tanzania is detailed, provocative, and fascinating. My rejoinder has only focused on a few angles that stood out for me, but the essay will remain a key reference document for years to come. One wonders whether there is a memoir, full of personal anecdotes, from Shivji’s ‘progressive’ former student and the late Magufuli’s ‘last’ Chief Secretary Bashiru Ally Kakurwa on the way!

Note

1. This term was coined from the standard Swahili term *Makavazi* to symbolize the uniqueness of Nyerere’s place in Tanzania’s history, and thus his records as preserved by the resource centre.

References

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