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CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES EMERGING FROM THE SYMPOSIUM

Marcel Golding (NUM)

There's an interesting quote by E.H. Carr that says, 'How much of the mountain you see depends on where you stand.' I suppose how much of the mountain I see will no doubt be reflective of the types of issues which I believe were interesting and important at this particular conference.

I've been asked to provide some concluding perspectives, which I think is really inappropriate, because what I can really offer you are some observations as a practitioner in the labour movement, someone engaged with research generated internal to the union movement, and also someone who has experienced interaction with outside researchers.

I've essentially three observations, three points that I want to look at, and which arose out of the discussions over the last two days.

The first one was about the debate about the transformation of institutions - universities, parastatals and so forth. The second issue I want to look at is about the question of participatory research and the whole question and the limitations of participatory research, notwithstanding that I work in a mass organisation. And thirdly, what I call the intellectual or researcher angst that seems to have pervaded this particular conference. I think that may have to be looked at a bit carefully.

The first thing about the parastatals, universities, and those organisations that have generated research over a long period. I think the discussion is very interesting, but I think it seems to have been obsessive with the idea that one either has to get rid of those institutions and/or build something new. It seems to me that this dichotomy of trying to say that either this organisation is totally useless and we need to get something else in its place, or the idea that we should capture them and hope that they will change, is far too simplistic a notion. I think the whole process depends on capacity; the process depends on what our objectives are; and I think it also depends on the specific focus and demands that we do have.

But more importantly, I think, given the history of such organisations, both universities and organisations such as the CSIR and so on, there has been a history of patronage that's been built up over a long period of time, and I think the prospect of changing that is going to be extremely difficult.

Nevertheless, I think there is space that does exist that needs to be challenged and changed. I suppose that that can be done in a number of ways. One could I suppose, be legislative reform when you have a democratic government. Or changes even now; there could be personnel changes, etc. But I think it is itself a terrain of ongoing struggle, and I think the idea that we should leave those organisations or smash them is, I think, utopian. We've got to think about how we can achieve our objectives that we have identified in those organisations as necessary, and at the same time be
making research agendas and research priorities which will not be able to be reflected in those organisations. And then we’ll have to consider building something else. And once again, those new institutions or agencies or research projects will have to be directly linked to our own research agenda. 

I think the whole process of change itself and the question of transformation is about organisation. It is about capacity. It is about will. It is about a purpose and a possibility. I think that all those elements - Adrienne called them the big four - certainly in mass organisations are the elements which direct our work and our organisation's attention.

But no doubt when we are trying to change those organisations - we are not acting independently. We are acting against other competing interests that may have their own agendas. I think one mustn’t get the impression that whilst we are struggling on one track, other organisations also wish to change them for their particular purposes and are operating on other tracks.

And no doubt the transformation will at least be on three levels, I think. In universities, by changing composition of students - both gender and racial - and teaching staff - again gender and racial - and no doubt the research agendas and priorities. And I think the same thing will apply to these established organisations: personnel, the gender composition, the research priorities.

But I think the important thing in fashioning transformation, it’s got to be linked to the perspective that we are having, in particular the socio-economic growth path and the socio-political transformation that you wish to effect. I think we’ve got to learn from the experience of Africa in directing our research priorities to our particular needs (the Zimbabwean example where the emphasis was placed on social sciences, where we are now trying to break into a very competitive economic world). I think the emphasis should be seen, both at the primary and tertiary level, on how we can begin to direct our activity at our technical skills, both at the workplace and research organisations.

The interesting thing that I think was also raised, was the whole question of the relation between research organisations, and the ANC and other political parties or unions. I think there’s a constructive relationship, and I think that constructive and creative relationship has to continue. But I think political changes are inevitable. And today we have a situation where the ANC is in opposition; tomorrow the ANC may be in power. The dynamics may change. The dynamics would be different, and today’s solutions and answers may have to be reconsidered tomorrow. But certainly our priority must be to achieve our main political objective, building organisation, and certainly to try to facilitate that process as researchers and people operating in areas of policy making.

But I think my attitude as a pragmatist is that I don’t build bridges where there are no rivers. If there are problems that we have, we have to identify those problems. We have to build the bridges where there are rivers so that we know exactly where we are going. It’s part of a vision. I think in the beginning the vision may be very narrow but I think there is a long term perspective. But it has to be linked to what we are doing today, because what we do today will no doubt fashion how tomorrow
The second aspect was participatory research. I think it was Ari Sitas who said something, 'Who speaks for the silent?' Now, that was an interesting observation. Today, many of the silent are organised. They have leadership that they have elected to represent them. And even those that are silent today do have organisations. They may not be very strong organisations, but they do have organisations to represent their interests.

But I think there is a romanticism about the whole question of participatory research. It's important to be clear as to what extent one can engage in participatory research. The other idea and perspective that was put yesterday about developing education technology to facilitate this transmission of ideas, evaluation of research policy, is really critical.

But at each level of one's organisation, it gets mediated in different ways. For example with leadership, you can discuss it in all its complexity. Maybe with shop stewards you can discuss it with less of its nuances. With the mass of workers you may have to discuss it in the form of slogans that capture all the complexity that you are arguing about. That is not to be condescending; it is not to be taking the masses for granted; but involve them in a coordinated programme of action around specific goals and specific objectives. But it's because there are objective limitations. In some industries literacy levels prohibit one from circulating material. You might use other forms to convey your particular message.

The last question, about the researcher's angst... It seems to me that - (I may have a debate with some of my colleagues here about this whole question) - what I got was the impression that there is an absolute unconfidence on the part of researchers, of not quite knowing where they want to go, of constantly seeking the support and/or recognition from mass organisations. Maybe that is good in some ways. I think the angst is important. But I think it shouldn't lead to paranoia and paralysis. If it does lead to paralysis we have a problem.

The tension of how intellectuals, how researchers, interact with democratic organisations, mass organisations - again, the mass organisations are internally differentiated; there are competing interests there. But the way they interact has to be one which is constructive.

I suppose the angst which exists is generated largely by the manner in which researchers and intellectuals work: they work as individuals or in small groups; where in mass organisations there are usually big numbers, different priorities, different pressures. The process of activity that researchers engage in must be to enhance and empower working people. No doubt some of them make the struggles we are engaged in - whilst they are very materialistic struggles, they are also struggles about making people more confident about their ability, restoring their dignity, as an on-going struggle to change conditions.

The discussion that we had late this afternoon about the politics of power and the politics of resistance is also incorrect, because the politics of power contains the politics of resistance. And the politics of resistance builds up a capacity to take hold of power. And who is in power today may be resisting tomorrow. Not resisting in a
destructive sense but resisting in a constructive and vigilant sense.

I suppose throughout the conference there was always this either/or type of mentality, either/or type of vision. I was perturbed by that, and I think we have to begin to develop a more integrative perspective.

So what do researchers do? I think the type of discussion which Dave Cooper mentioned and is an interesting area. The terrain in which academics and researchers operate are particular areas of struggle that have to be changed. The type of change they can expect will depend on their capacity as organised researchers. It’s going to be limited but I think it opens up space. Where they need that assistance, it’s there where I think one begins to feed into democratic organisations, to see to what extent the type of struggle you’re waging in those things can be assisted by organisations.

Togbah nah Tipoteh

In examining social change in Africa, particularly post-war Africa, the dominant theme continues to be the struggle for democracy. This theme can well be seen in the popular statement by the Kenyan leader, Odinga Oginga, when he said, ‘There is not yet Uhuru.’ Or the taxi driver in Accra, Ghana, who said, ‘We have a new driver but the same engine.’

This tells us that the very base, the very fundamental situation with social change continues to be the masses of the people, particularly the student segment of the mass of the people. Our working class, by and large, remains relatively small, fragile and weak. And so the student movement, in relative terms, continues to have primacy within the context of this struggle.

In more recent times, particularly against the background of the events in eastern Europe, analysts have come out, as a general case, to say that what’s happening in eastern Europe is producing a second wave over Africa. That’s why we are seeing all these national conferences taking place in Africa.

What I would like to suggest here is that this is part of the continuously wrong analysis with respect to political involvement in Africa. It forms the intellectual basis fully justifying the neo-colonial reality which we have in Africa as a general case. Because against this background we find a push for multi-party democracy. These analysts would not recognise, or refuse to recognise, the long historical struggle of various segments of masses, especially during the colonial period. Even before then, there are instances before the colonial period; people have been struggling for democracy. So it’s not just the situation in eastern Europe that has all of a sudden got African people interested in democracy.

And by democracy we mean here, from the level of the people, the building of power of the people to take decisions that affect them. It’s not just going and putting some paper in the ballot box. Because as many of you will recall, the elections of 1985 held in Liberia were considered by Chester Crocker to be free and fair in a multi-party democratic setting. But the evidence will show that the regime at that
time turned out to be one of the worst dictatorships that is known in the post-war period. So it’s quite possible to have a multi-party situation and still have a dictatorial regime.

So the crucial question, then, which certain analysts want to detract from, is the question of power, building up the power of the people. In this regard, we found in our experience, research to be absolutely indispensable, primarily because through scientific research mass organisations continue to acquire the kind of knowledge that will give them the sort of independence that they want.

Certainly we don’t want to get in a situation where some political leader comes and says to some student leader or leader of some workers’ organisation, ‘Well. Did you see this? This is a bag of rice.’ And because the student or worker wants to get something from that leader, he says, ‘Oh yes, it is a bag of rice.’ I think what scientific research has to do then, to give the mass organisation a kind of independence is to say, ‘With all due respect to you, but this is a drinking glass, not a bag of rice.’ I think when you reach that stage, then we are talking about institutions that protect the building of democracy in a country.

The former president of the United States of America, Jimmy Carter, happened to go to Liberia recently, as part of the contribution of the International Negotiation Network in pushing free and fair elections in Liberia. We had an opportunity to interact with him, and we made this point, that while his network did some work in Haiti and they had elections there that were considered to be free and fair, we must bear in mind that a few weeks after that, the military took over. What went wrong? What went wrong essentially is that the mass organisations in Haiti had not developed the capacity to protect what they had set up. We find essentially that scientific research is absolutely important for building up that capacity, given the need to organise and strengthen their organisational capacity.

So in this regard, the implication then is that, one, in our role as intellectuals working for democracy we have to do what we can to build up, within the mass organisations, a research capacity. I don’t think we need to continue the paternalistic situation that has obtained in so many countries and reinforced by fellow intellectuals from other parts of the world. We need to strengthen the capacity within these mass organisations to improve their ability to do research.

Now, there are intellectuals who will be on the outside and stay at the university and do whatever they are doing there, and there are others who will want to work as part of the organisations. Once one commits oneself to work as part of the organisation, as some will do - you have to remember of course that there are certain organisational constraints. But what I am saying in essence is that the building up of a scientific research capacity within a mass organisation turns out to be indispensable to the building and protection of democratic institutions in Africa.

In Liberia as we were struggling to reconstruct the economy after the civil war, there was essentially the work of mass organisations which set up their first policy research seminar, which happened to have been funded in large measure by IDRC, the first and so far only policy research seminar on reconstruction and development in the national economy. So without having the minimal research capacity we would
not have been in a position to provide a leading role in this crucial period of reconstruction.

Let me conclude by saying that in this phase of our development in post-colonial Africa, in the face of much work being done by various scholars around, we tend to fall short - particularly those of us who call ourselves progressive scholars - in coming up with practical measures. For instance, one of the things that one tends to find is that, 'Well, we can do without the World Bank' or 'We can do without the IMF'. I would like to suggest that concrete experience shows that is an anarchistic position; that's really not on.

What is on is that one deals with the World Bank and IMF, but it's a question of how one deals with them. Now, I don't want to put titles around, but I am saying this... having worked with some inside knowledge, having served as Minister for National Economy Reform. I happen to have been spokesperson for the African governments in the Bank and Fund at the board of directors level. I know only too well that the leadership in most African countries - it's a general case - will take the funds from the Bank and Fund and put them in largely non-productive activities so that you cannot begin to see some trend towards improving the productive capacity of the economy. I think this is the key to it. If you have the type of leadership that if given a choice between non-productive and productive activities, will move into non-productive activities - such that in a small country like Liberia, at the end of 1984 we had some 2 billion dollars private bank accounts in Switzerland when the national debt was 1.1 billion dollars. You see. You can have these kinds of situations.

I think it's important for us to come up with very realistic positions and it will tend then to erode the positions coming from the right and also strengthen our own role as far as scientific research is concerned in mass organisations.

I'd just like to stop there. Thank you very much.

Abdoule Bathily

I'll start to say first of all that I was particularly pleased to come in to this study tour. I taught some ten years about South African history at Dakar University to make our students aware of what apartheid is, about the atrocities that apartheid represents. I was far from realising really what it meant when I came here to Johannesburg, Cape Town and here in Durban. I would like to thank the organisers for having given me the opportunity.

What struck me most is the similarity between the problems we are dealing with in our part of Africa and the problems you have addressed throughout this symposium. I think that this can be surprising at first glance, but when we think what apartheid is, the specific modality of capitalist deployment just as neocolonialism is, we would realise that our problems might be different in kind, but in content they are identical. When we listen to you talking about the transition process, the education crises, the problem of economic crises, the social injustices, the problem
of urbanisation, the problem of language: all these problems are ours today and we are dealing with them in our context, our thirty years of experience, thirty years of African independence (so-called independence).

This is why it is important to us to make the link between scholars throughout the African continent. To bridge the gap between the African scholars because outsiders tend to look at us as Francophone, Anglophone, Southern Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa. Although these distinctions might be convenient for the sake of identification purposes, in reality they need to represent the identity of our problems, our situation, our conditions. And also the identity of the aspirations of the African masses at this historical conjuncture.

I think today there are a number of professional organisations in Africa with which it is important for our colleagues here to meet and link. I would speak for the African Association of Political Science which I represent. The African Association of Political Science has been launched in 1972 in Dar es Salaam. It is a grouping not only of political scientists in the Anglo Saxon sense of the term, but also historians, economists, dealing with some contemporary issues. It holds general conferences every two years, in different African countries, in different regions, to focus on the problems of that specific region. For instance the last general conference was held in Cairo, in Egypt. The next one will be in Dar es Salaam to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Association. But in between there have been a number of other conferences, seminars, workshops. In March 1989 we organised a workshop on Southern Africa. Lastly, in May we organised a conference in Windhoek on '30 Years of Independence in Africa: Results and Prospects.'

So these are the kinds of activities that we organise, but we have also a research programme. Presently we have three main research projects. One is on urbanisation in Africa, governing African cities. The other one is on democratisation process in Africa.

This question of democratisation is extremely important today. You have experienced oppression, but in our part of Africa also, not the same sort of oppression, not the same dimension in terms of oppression. You will be surprised when I tell you that from 1966 to 1985 I myself went into prison eight times. I experienced torture by electricity. In August 1985 I went in prison for ten days because we demonstrated against the State of Emergency in South Africa. President Diouf was then the chairman of the OAU. It was his action, because then I was the chairman of the Alliance or the opposition party. When we organised this demonstration in August 1985 against the State of Emergency in South Africa, the chairman of the OAU threw us in jail. It created such an uproar that he was obliged to try to offset this situation to tour the frontline states.

This is just to give you an idea of not yet Uhuru, as he said; freedom is not yet won in our country. Therefore we are still struggling, and it is important, this question of democratisation.

It is important also to make the link between the colonial legacy and now. In many African countries they think even democratisation reached a higher level during the colonial days than now. The nationalist coalition, the group or present regime
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power, has been able to create a balance of forces that the colonial regime was no longer able to engage in a certain type of repression. And that is why in the ‘40s and the ‘50s somebody like Sekou Toure' was considered and was labelled the Lenin of French West Africa. And now, would he seize power like many other leaders? They establish one party rule, and crushing... Instead of giving bread and employment to the people they give liquor. At the same time the same government is advocating cuts in the workers' salaries because of the economic and financial crisis of the state.

So all these inconsistencies are important to study and analyse. Not only to fight against them at production level, in the streets, but also to understand how they came about. I think it's important for us as intellectuals to commit ourselves to support the forces of the masses and to do this in solidarity throughout the continent.

I think this trip perhaps will help very much, and I call upon you to join us in our professional organisation which already exists, and then we will think about CODESA which is also an organisation which needs to be watched. And I think from now on, South Africans will link with us in this daunting task of rehabilitating Africa and making Africa a better place to live. Thank you.

Akilagpa Sawyerr

I would like to begin by commenting on the historic occasion which this represents to all of us. I won’t say any more than to simply emphasise that the very idea of our being here with you, talking in this open manner, is for many of us an emotional but also an extremely important occasion in our lives and I hope in the lives of our countries.

How can I use my ten minutes most efficiently? I have sat through the last two days very quietly, and have a range of matters to discuss with you. But I will not do that; I will leave that to others to follow up. I will just take one small issue and I hope by discussing that issue I will be able to indicate my comments on your seminar as I've heard in the last two days.

This relates to the whole question of how you propose to deal with the question of the universities in this country. There hasn’t been much discussion of this at this session, and I suppose the theme of the symposium doesn’t invite discussion of it. But I believe it is a central question which has to be addressed at some point.

I am discussing it now because we have for the past week been in the country discussing with various segments of the society, and it has come across very clearly that none of these groups appear to have a coherent position on the question of the university of the future. That emerged in the discussion on the role of research on the role of research in the universities where again we were dealing with the university as a given, and seeing what can be done with the institution.

So I would like to raise that question as a matter which calls for some discussion, and soon: the question of the university system and its role in the transformation process. Let me first mention very quickly the role of our universities in our part of the

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Africa. Universities in black Africa are a fairly novel institution. They were created largely as part of the independence project. They were seen, therefore, as part of the institutional arrangement which Africa will make in order to ensure its development and success in the economy, and culture, and other ways. It must be said that, as a matter of record, the African universities have performed the basic functions very effectively indeed, of training, teaching and researching.

But what I want to talk about this evening is the negative effect of our experience. In sum, what are the drawbacks in our university system of being the origin of it as part of another project? What it has meant has been that the universities have not been venues of struggle. They have therefore not been driven to take part in the transformation of our society. In sum, therefore, this failure of the universities to take part in transformation accounts for the phenomenon which Bathily mentioned, that is the continuation of the colonial system into independence.

So, it is quite clear that because our universities were not appropriated by any mass movement, did not form part of any social reform process, they have a very weak, fragile social base.

Against this observation, one must assess the recent onslaught on the higher education system by interests led by the World Bank and IMF. I won't spend a lot of time discussing this matter. Let me just say that the central effect of this onslaught has been to divert the attention of African governments from sustaining and supporting the universities to the pre-university level, under the guise of pushing a more efficient system of education. It is said that the pre-university level is more cost-effective than a higher level.

Now this argument, we have shown to be technically spurious. But unfortunately effective. Because it comes with a number of things. One is money from the Bank to support governments which do as they are told. And secondly it uses the idea of equity: if we can get education at a lower level, why spend money at a higher level? A very attractive combination of money and equity. And therefore many governments have been sold on this.

But the effect has been to move towards decimating, or indeed more accurately, decapitating our societies by removing the heads of the education system.

Now let me move quickly to this country. Question: what is the lesson that you control from this experience that we have had, because as South Africans here you are still somewhat safe from this particular onslaught. But it is coming. And I think you should address the question of how to handle it when it comes.

Clearly, events here are different in important aspects from those up north. First of all, the pre-eminent issue here seems to be the restoration of the pre-university system which collapsed since Soweto. And I believe that that is a justifiable focus of attention. Secondly, the role of colour in the way which the universities are regarded. Thirdly, the history of mass struggle around a number of things, including education. Fourthly, the existence of a militant left linked to mass movements. I think these are important factors which exist here which did not exist when we began the struggle for university education in our country.

Therefore, I would like to caution about the danger of leaving until too late
fundamental thinking about the handling of your tertiary system in the post-apartheid period.

It is the case that the social and political role of the white universities will continue. They will still continue to dominate culture, education, finance and economics in this country. The role they have played in apartheid and the role they are likely to play in class society post-apartheid, I think, has to be addressed: their role and how they relate to the so-called black universities and black students generally, how they socialise those blacks who do go to the black universities. These are very important questions which need to be addressed now.

In sum, therefore, I am saying that it will be important for this country not to leave till tomorrow, but to pick up now, the question of defining, working towards, and defending your perception of the university system against attack from within and from without. And to do so before the debate is distorted by the intrusion of external interests.

In this connection, I would like to add to the point by Abdoule about the existence of institutions in Africa north of the Limpopo which have been engaged in some of these matters. Apart from the AAPS which he mentioned and CODESRIA which Mahmood will talk about, there is the Association of African Universities, which is the body which brings together all African universities in a regular meeting session; it organises studies; it organises workshops and seminars; and has been very actively engaged in combatting the World Bank onslaught on higher education. I am sure that if you were to pick up this matter of how to handle this problem, you would find very willing allies in other universities in Africa through this association. We have done studies on university financing, university management, all of these, in order to enable us to prepare positions which can be then used to counterpose against the World Bank positions. Because the problem is that, when the World Bank brings their blueprints, you say they are no good. Unless you have got your alternative worked out and ready, the debate seems to get lost by default.

So I would urge that you, through your universities, pick up this matter of linking with us very actively, in order to have foresight in defining positions and defending them before it is too late.

Thank you very much.

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba

I would like also to start by saying that I am very glad to be here, and unlike my colleagues who spent a few days touring the country, the only South African experience I have had was to follow very carefully this symposium.

This country has always represented something very important for us. By the way, I come from Tanzania, but I am a native of Zaire. People are saying that Mobutu is buying maybe a villa here, which means that we increasingly seem to be becoming closer.

The relationships from above have always been close, but relationships from below
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and from research cadres have not necessarily been so close. So I really appreciate participating in this symposium. I was particularly pleased to notice that some of our worries, maybe even difficulties, seem to be here. You may have richer experience to address those problems. Maybe even better facilities to address those problems. Nevertheless, we do share some of the same problems.

I spent two months recently in Zaire, around the national conference. The national conference has been one of the forms of organisation for the democratisation process in the rest of the continent. Now here, in Zaire in particular, we were faced with a paradox. A democratic organisation struggling for democratisation. This is an extremely serious matter. A lot of parties, a lot of organisations, but in the main these organisations are undemocratic. And there is fighting, principally for access to state apparatuses, and not necessarily to democratise the power relationship based in such a way that people can finally control their own government, their own leadership. So it found that the knowledge question becomes very crucial indeed. Clever people who can have some information may end up becoming the leaders.

Issues about what I call political intellectuality used to clarify the options, the aspirations within the democratisation process, become very difficult. The tendency is to rely on external experts. So politics becomes a technical matter instead of essentially a people's political forum.

I remember having been asked to be a historian of one of the mass organisations. You find that the very notion of what history to activate in the process, what documents to look for and where to find them, what network to put in place... These are extremely serious problems, and I found that some of the issues dealt with in terms of research in organisations seemed to reflect some of the difficulties we had. But you probably have a much better chance here, because there you find that, in many organisations like the one I was in, there is no real historical basis of the necessity of archives for example in the organisation, the necessity of keeping records. So that very soon the democratisation process within the organisation sees knowledge as only linked to particular individuals sought from the outside. It does not help advance the democratisation process. I felt interested in those questions discussed here.

I have also been involved in university discussions. There's this question of the structure of the university. We have been working on what we call academic freedom and some kind of autonomy from the university, and how that could be organised. When you're dealing with the universities which are linked to the state, then such freedom and such autonomy are indispensible for researchers to advance and proceed along the basis of what was described here as academic excellence. Otherwise there is a lot of tampering, not only the question of resources per se, but also the question of how the goals of research can be set.

This is just to emphasise that indeed it is indispensible that the sort of linkages which we can build may prove to very important in our exchange of information, of data, and maybe of experiences insofar as these can be of use to all of us.

Thank you very much.
Mahmood Mamdani

I also want to join my colleagues in thanking you and thanking the organisers of this conference for bringing us here. I have been dying to come here for months. When Linda sent me a fax saying would I like to come, I said of course. When she sent a fax saying would I like to come four days before and go to Johannesburg and Cape Town I said, but of course!

I speak with humility because I feel that nowhere else in Africa have I witnessed intellectual culture like what I have seen here. So what I have to say should be interpreted in context. Because while I have sat over the last two days, I have been asking myself, what useful contribution can one make in a situation that is more advanced than ours? You have much more to teach us. But there is never an experience which doesn’t have some lessons. Maybe ours can teach you by negative example.

I would like to just discuss a few issues. You are going through a period which most of the world describes as a democratic transition. Maybe it’s interesting to look back at what was supposed to be our democratic transition. Not even the period of independence, but the period after the Second World War, the period of the great colonial reforms, which was in response to mass movements. And from which was important, no less than a decade, a single party state, a state party with their own mass organisation, no autonomy for any mass organisation, no ideological pluralism. It’s perhaps interesting to revisit that period somehow.

I would underline two significant issues in explaining the abortion that took place. What was the very nature of the transition? The transition was dubbed as a liberation, and it was in part, because it introduced political pluralism, it introduced multi parties. But the same reform which introduced multi parties also undermined the autonomy of social movements, political movements. Whilst multi parties were introduced, trade unions, cooperative societies, friendly societies were being asked to register themselves and were coming under the supervision of the state. Sedition laws were being introduced. Newspapers were asked to register themselves. The wilting of social movements and the flowering of political parties took us to the period after independence, where national movements which had been broad umbrella movements under which workers, peasants, various groups had marched, turned into political machines.

Fanon says that the militants of yesterday have become the informers of today. They informed on popular movements, whereas yesterday they were comrades.

Now that’s one. But the second issue: I think the intelligentsia has to take blame, responsibility, for what happened, because we were intoxicated. We celebrated. We had arrived. We read off the social history of the national movement, as a national history of the social movement. We reduced social history to political history and political history sometimes to political biography of national leaders. We articulated a state nationalism.

Even in our moments of opposition we were eager in the camp of dependency theory. We wrote the political economy of education, the political economy of
industry, political economy of agriculture, political economy of imperialism -
everything but popular struggle. We did not touch the question of popular struggle.

We were Marxists. We believed in Marxism and we understood Marxism as a
technique for growth and development, for the development of productive forces,
Marxism without class struggle. Marxism where democracy became a reactionary
project.

Of course popular struggles took place, even if intellectuals couldn’t see them. But
we were not there to underline their common meaning. The regimes in power could
point struggles in one place as a threat to people in another place. We were not there
to weave together as intellectuals sometimes do. We wrote about these struggles but
we caricatured them as tribalism, as fundamentalism, as whatever. We couldn’t see.

Well, there are echoes of this today in Africa. The pro-democracy movement today,
by and large, understands democracy as political pluralism. That’s all. Not social
pluralism, not ideological pluralism. Democracy is multi-partyism, full stop. And
sometimes I felt maybe there were echoes of this here. I sense a great celebration.
You have reason to celebrate, of course. You can hope for the best, but you shouldn’t
prepare for the best. You have to prepare for the worst.

I have never been in an assembly where so many people denounced technicism,
and yet technicism was so widespread. Such a widespread feeling that the great social
issues have been solved and what has come to the fore are technical issues. That
suddenly policy-making has ceased to be an act of choice and now it’s an accumula-
tion of facts by experts. That’s all.

Of course, as a visitor, I have the liberty to be wrong.

There are many other things I want to say: Let me introduce CODESRIA: Council
for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa. It’s one of the
longest existing pan-African social science organisations, 17-18 years, based in
Dakar. It is funded mainly by donors from outside but partly by contributions from
some African governments, two or three; partly by contributions of social science
faculties and research institutes which are members of CODESRIA, membership
fees.

About five, six years ago, there was a demand in CODESRIA by a number of
intellectual researchers that existing heads of faculties and research institutes, which
tend to be bureaucratic in many parts of Africa, were actually a block to creative
work. And so CODESRIA decided to add to its membership something they called
national working groups, which was a forum where any number of researchers -
three, five, seven, ten - in any African country could come together, put together a
research project, send it to CODESRIA, which if it found it coherent and competent
and relevant would finance it. Something like US$10,000 for the group to work and
publish its results.

CODESRIA functions through the national working groups and through multi-
national working groups which are coordinated, usually by one coordinator working
with the French and another working with the English.

The general assembly which meets every three years sets the scene, and then begins
the process of selecting coordinators and constituting the groups. I am saying this
for the following reasons: The next general assembly is in ten days from the 11th to the 14th of February. 150 African researchers will come. African and Africa has a different meaning there from African here. I am African there. Here I’m not African.

150 people will come together and research teams will be agreed upon. Our executive secretary is going to come to South Africa in March. I am sure he will come here, but I’m sure unlike us he will go to black universities also. We didn’t go to any black universities, unfortunately, but I am sure he will go to the University of the North, Fort Hare, different places. But he will come and speak to you himself, but I would simply like people to be encouraged to join our work, to join various multinational working groups, and to set up national working groups around issues that you find relevant.