

58th Anniversary of Kenya's Independence (2021-12-12)

Who Are Organic Intellectuals?

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A Keynote address to launch Kenyan Organic Intellectuals Reflect on the Legacy of Pio Gama Pinto at the Kenya National Theatre (Cheche Gallery).

I salute and thank you comrades for this invitation by this The Organic Intellectuals Network which is a broad-based collective of writer-activists from the Social Justice Movement, Ukombozi Library, and the Revolutionary Socialist League. I salute and thank Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) for hosting this network.

I: Who are Intellectuals?

I like Issa Shivji's answer to this question.

Intellectuals are producers and purveyors of ideas. They produce all kinds of ideas, many ideas: ideas to rationalize and legitimize, ideas to decorate and demonize and ideas to inform and entertain-all kinds of ideas. They may produce ideas gratuitously or for a price-these days, more often than not, for a price.¹

II: Categorizing Intellectuals

Let me start with the category close to our hearts and minds today: Organic intellectuals. The definition given by Jean Ziegler in glorifying Professor Yash Tandon as an organic intellectual has the core ingredients of this category:

¹ *Issa Shivji, "The Metamorphosis of the Revolutionary Intellectual," in Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy 7(3) 2021, 1-7, at 3.*

*Antonio Gramsci was an exemplary revolutionary and an influential philosopher. He spent the last ten years of his short life in the prisons of Mussolini's fascist dictatorship. Arrested in 1926, he died shortly after his release in 1937. In his **Quaderni del carcere (Prison Notebooks)**, he developed, with great finesse and drawing of numerous historical examples, the theory of the organic intellectual, **the intellectual who, through [her] his analyses, his [her] visions, becomes an indispensable auxiliary of social movement.***

Yash Tandon incarnates perfectly this historical function of organic intellectual. Without him, without the power of his analytical reasoning, without his vitality, without his patience in the struggle, planetary civil society would today be far less effective...we owe him a debt of great gratitude.²

Radical social movements, liberation and revolutionary wars, and academic institutions find these intellectuals critical in their intellectual, ideological, and political work. **Comrade Wangui Kimari**, MSJC participatory Action Coordinator, **comrades in the network**, clearly fit this categorization. They live and work with the social movements. Like the other activists they are soldiers of the social justice movements and have become **"indispensable auxiliary"** of these social movements.

III: Revolutionary Organic Intellectuals

In liberation and revolutionary wars we can name Amilcar Cabral, Chris Hani, John Garang, Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba, Felix Moumie',

² **Foreword to Yash Tandon, *TRADE IS WAR: The West's War Against the World* (London: O/R Books, 2015, xx-xxi.**

Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Dedan Kimathi.³ There are other organic intellectual who still reflect the element of this category although not involved in liberation wars and revolutions: Micere Mugo, Wangari Mathai, Nawal El Sadawi, Angela Davis, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Dani Nabudere, Yash Tandon, Karim Hirji, Issa Shivji, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Maina Kinyatti, Shiraz Durrani, Alamin Mazrui, Kamoji Wachiira, Neville Alexander, to name but a few. All these organic intellectuals are connected to the academy and the movements there, but also in other social movements outside the academy. Their research is particularly critical in glorifying work of social movements that would otherwise not be known and amplified. They are also involved in publishing books and articles that call for transformation and revolution. They are auxiliaries to feminist, reproductive health, gay, women, prison, anti-racial, non-sexist, and anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements (the last being the case of Palestine).

Issa Shivji brings in class analysis in the categorization of organic intellectuals. There organic intellectuals who are auxiliaries of the status quo while “organic intellectuals of the oppressed and exploited social classes may be considered the proto-revolutionary intellectuals to the extent they seek to make hegemonic-by word and deed-the ideology of the oppressed.”⁴ The parallel here is when we talk about activism. We are all active and activist for causes, either for the status quo for the overthrow of that status quo.

IV: Public/Academic Intellectuals

Issa Shivji also writes about “metamorphosis” of intellectuals in all categories. He gives the example of President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda. An organic student intellectual who chaired the University Students' African Revolutionary Front (USARF) at the

³ *All these men are rightly categorized by Issa Shivji as “revolutionary intellectuals [who] are organic intellectuals of the dominated classes, who are committed to the transformation of society.” Note 1, Abstract, at page 1.*

⁴ *Note 1 at page 4.*

University of Dar-es-Salaam. USARF was involved in student activism at the University for democratic teaching processes, spearheading study groups by students, and making sure that professors treated students as equals intellectually.⁵ He led an armed struggle against two dictatorships in Uganda and ultimately succeeded. He came to power with creative and radical programme of transforming Uganda. He brought about peace in Uganda except in the North. Museveni has metamorphosed to a ruthless dictator, a comprador who is an agent of imperialism, a violator of human rights, and has used his state machinery of violence against his political opponents and Ugandan citizens. His initial radicalism has served him well over years as an agent of imperialism. He knows and understands imperialism and that knowledge is critical for propping up his comprador bourgeoisie class.

Those of us who have been in human rights and social justice activism in Africa have a lot of stories to tell of consequences of such metamorphosis. Indeed, the academy is littered with such metamorphosis of academic and public intellectuals. I also know of intellectuals who has subverted the status quo and joined the ranks of public, academic, and organic intellectuals. Issa argues that not all organic intellectuals are public intellectuals because “many public intellectuals give up their organic link with the oppressed masses so as not to tarnish their public image.”⁶ There is no reason to rule out a metamorphosis that regains the organic link with the oppressed masses. I believe history must be replete with such examples from social movements, revolutionary wars, and liberations struggles.

IV: Honest Intellectuals

This a category Issa Shivji credits Fidel Castro with. Castro categorized honest intellectuals paraphrased by Shivji as follows:

⁵ ***Ed; Cheche: Reminiscences of a Radical Magazine (Dar-es-Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2010).***

⁶ ***Note 1 at page 5.***

Honest intellectuals do not want to tell lies. They want to pursue truth and stick to truth. But they do not want to speak truth to power. They do not want to take sides. That is not the job of intellectuals. They plead objectivity and neutrality. They desire change but do not want to do anything about it. They are fence sitters. As fence sitters, they are vulnerable; inevitably, they roll over to the side of domination, their neutrality notwithstanding.⁷

These are intellectuals who run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Inevitably, they get shunned by hare (the masses) and get devoured by the hounds (the ruling classes). Honesty in intellectual, ideological, and political work must rest on taking sides.

V: Self-educated organic intellectuals

There is always this assumption that when we talk about intellectuals we mean those who are products of the academy. There self-educated intellectuals who are public/academic, revolutionary organic, organic intellectuals, and honest intellectuals. They are not immune from metamorphosis we have discussed above. Few example come to mind, Kimathi, Mao Zedong and Malcolm X. Self-taught and engaged in radical and revolutionary work they are beacons of this category of intellectuals. Some of the comrades in the Organic Intellectuals Network are self-taught and educated. Self-teaching and education has one great pillar: It results in rescuing the weaknesses of the bookish education and its biases unless interrogated. Self-educated comrades are critical thinkers who interrogate everything believing as Hegel said that the truth is in the whole. Our formal education can a mix-up of truths, half-truths, and lies. It requires self-criticism and reflection, and above all extensive reading, research, and investigation.

VI: This Discussion Does not Exist in a Vacuum

⁷ Note 5 at page 6.

I believe the 2022 elections is about politics of issues and not politics of division. The elections are a great opportunity for alternative and authentic leadership (alternative to the compradors and believable by the citizens). ***All organic intellectuals must raise the following issues during the year of elections:***

- What are we doing in Somalia? Why are we wasting reasons there in a “War on Terror” that is not ours? Somalis are our sisters and brothers and we must solve our issues politically and not through war. Is war the best way for Kenya to help in the building of Somalia? Should the money spent there be put to a good use for both Somalia and Kenya? It is now time to suggest a strong East, DRC, and the Horn of Africa community. It will a community of DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Uganda and Rwanda cannot continue their militarism in DRC. The war in Ethiopia must end. That community must be in the fore-front of resurrecting radical Pan-Africanism
- Muammar Gaddafi is remembered for not only suggesting African unity, African government, but also African currency. He also suggested the bailing out of the former French colonies from their bondage by the French. Horace Campbell has documented clearly that all these issues were the causes of the bombing of Libya by NATO and the murder of Muammar Gaddafi.⁸
- We must implement our Constitution and protect those pillars in the Constitution that are progressive. This can only be done by a leadership that is anti-imperialist and anti-compradors (barons, cartels, warlords) and creates a new Kenya and new politics
- A New Kenya will be built on the pillars of equitable distribution of land and resources, a Kenya that is free, just, gender just, non-sexist, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-gendered, and non-homophobic. There is much homophobia among African leaders. Although many of them go to places of worship I urge them

⁸ ***Global Nato and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya: Lessons for Africa in the Forging of African Unity (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013).***

to read Desmond Tutu's book.⁹ A new Kenya must have its core the concerns of the youth and women

- A New Kenya has to seek solidarities with the Global South and support such causes as the one of reparations in the Caribbean. Kenyan relationship with the US and Britain cannot be important than the struggles of our sisters and brothers in the Caribbean
- Why are East African capitalists not discussing our East African currency? Is a larger East African community not good for their business? Or they are stuck to laundering their ill-gotten wealth through the construction of buildings?
- On the political front I am happy with the political developments among the Kenyan elite. They have exposed their political bankruptcy and the inability to change Kenya from 58 years of Not Yet Uhuru. Let us pay attention to the United Progressive Front of CPK, UGM, and Ukweli Party as the only political formation that has refused links with the elite factions. Let us join the UPF. I am honoured to convene the UPF. I am sure you have noticed our struggles in support of the Rule of Law, Independence of the Judiciary, Obedience of Court Orders in cases of Miguna Miguna and reparations to political prisoners and detainees. We are also resisting the developments in Uhuru Park that did not involve our participation. UPF the People's Opposition now. UPF has started a long journey of digging political graves for decadent, unpatriotic, and compradorial politics of the Kenyan elite. The 2022 elections offer the UPF great political opportunity to capture the imagination of Kenyans that a New Kenya is Possible.
- It is also encouraging that organic intellectuals at the grassroots and activists are seeking to contest political power as MCAs. That is how Kenya is to be revolutionized by building on the grassroots equitable distribution of land and resources, sharing of state power, and full participation of Kenyans at the grassroots in all societal matters. Let the grassroots be the beacons of change and transformation, and the New Kenya and New Alternative and Authentic leadership.

⁹ ***God Is Not a Christian And Other Provocations (New York: HarperOne, 2011).***

***I wish you all Comrades a Revolutionary Jamhuri Day
Aluta Continua? A Vitoria e C'erta***

***It is now my greatest honour to launch Kenyan Organic
Intellectuals Reflect on the Legacy of Pio Gama Pinto
May the Revolutionary Spirit of Pio incite and excite us in our
struggles for a New Kenya and New Politics.***

VII: Postscript

We need to put the contributions that made in this launch into a bulletin. This is because in my view all these contributions were remarkable.