

Abdul Rahman Mohamed Babu: Politician, Scholar and Revolutionary

by

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Abstract

Abdul Rahman Babu was one of Africa's foremost thinkers and analysts. A leader of the anti-colonial struggle in Zanzibar and of the Zanzibar revolution, Babu was seen as a threat by the US government who feared that Zanzibar might become the 'Cuba of Africa' and spread revolution across East and Central Africa. With the help of the CIA and various 'sources' it had established in the countries of East Africa, the US succeeded in 'neutralizing' Zanzibar by engineering its union with Tanganyika which was known to have a pro-western government. After the union, Babu became a cabinet minister in Tanzania where he came into conflict with the policies of 'African socialism' espoused by President Julius Nyerere. Imprisoned for six years under the Nyerere regime, Babu was released after an international campaign. He continued to write and lecture and support progressive struggles in Africa and elsewhere. Babu was a Pan Africanist and a Marxist. His ideas on economic development, Pan Africanism, and imperialist strategies of control (including, most recently, the war against Iraq) are of enormous relevance today. Thus, this article traces Babu's political life and discusses his ideas using extracts from his writings.

Abdul Rahman Mohamed Babu (1924-1996) was a politician, scholar and writer, but above all he was a revolutionary who for nearly forty years was at the frontline of struggles against oppression, always seeking to create a progressive politics of the future. He was a Pan Africanist and a Marxist, an anti-imperialist and a fighter for democracy and these categories were not separable in much of his work, because there was for him, an underlying dialectic between theory and active engagement. Analysis was therefore not simply an academic exercise but to help find a way forward. In the contemporary phase of aggressive US imperialism when the ideology of The World Bank and US-led globalization seeks to present itself as the new consensus, when colonialism is being glorified (1) and when Africa is facing new and ever harsher forms of attack and exploitation, his ideas are needed more than ever.

The Epoch of Revolution

Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, or Babu as he was widely known, was born in 1924 in Zanzibar in East Africa and grew up there. Zanzibar at the time was a British protectorate. It was ruled officially by a Sultan whose family had been the rulers of the island for generations. But under the British protectorate, the Sultan was only a constitutional monarch on a salary from the British. It was the British who controlled the markets and trade routes and pocketed the profits from Zanzibar's famous products – cloves and coconuts. Its history of trade and maritime links across the world, which made Zanzibar a unique place to grow up in, as Babu wrote in a brief autobiographical sketch which was to have been the basis of his memoirs (1):

“It was for all practical purposes a British colony with all the complexities of a racially stratified society. Zanzibar had a rich and dynamic culture peculiar to its situation. During World War 2 many young Zanzibaris were drafted to fight in British armies, mostly in Africa and Asia...in the post-war period they returned from the war zones bringing back the reality and scale of imperialist violence. Their stories of meeting recruits from other colonies (especially those from the 'Gold Coast' now Ghana, in the Burma campaign) helped make us in Zanzibar aware of the possibilities of solidarity and revolution. Meanwhile, East Africa itself was entering the epoch of rebellion. The youth of Zanzibar were engulfed in the mood of that epoch”.

After his early years of schooling and his first job working as a clerk in the clove plantations Babu went to Britain in 1951 to study Philosophy and English Literature. He was exposed to a variety of political philosophies and was drawn first to Anarchism and then to Marxism. London was at the time a centre for anti-colonial movements and Babu played a key role as Secretary of the East and Central Africa Committee of the well-known left-led Movement for Colonial Freedom. It was in London too that he and two colleagues, a Nigerian and a Sierra Leonean launched what was probably one of the earliest Pan-African monthlies – the African Outlook.

It was, as Babu recalled, an era of African-Asian liberation and revolution. 1949 saw the Chinese revolution, 1954 the Viet Minh victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu and then in 1956 came Nkrumah's victory in Ghana. These events brought home to Babu and others of his generation, the crucial importance and effectiveness of the 'mass political party' in the struggle against colonialism.

Zanzibar, the Struggle Against Colonialism and Pan Africanism

An anti-colonial ferment was engulfing Africa and Babu returned to Zanzibar in 1957. He became the Secretary General of Zanzibar's first political party, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP).

Under Babu's leadership the party organized urban workers, rural workers and seafaring workers and mobilized the urban petty bourgeoisie. The party developed a consistent anti-colonialist political line; a grassroots organization of party branches at local level; and links with the worldwide, and especially African, anti-imperialist struggles.

This was also the period when the movement for Pan African Unity was emerging, and Babu participated in the historic All African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana in 1958 along with Nkrumah, Franz Fanon and Patrice Lumumba, whom Babu and his comrades 'discovered' when traveling through the Congo on the way to the conference, and took with them to Accra. Years later, describing that meeting in an out of the way nightclub in the 'African quarter' of Leopoldville, now Kinshasha, Babu analyzed the international relations of the time and the reasons behind the targeting and assassination of Lumumba:

“at the time of Lumumba’s advent to power the world was witnessing a most dangerous period of East/West global confrontation. The US was just emerging from the anti-communism hysteria of McCarthyism. The ‘Cold War’ was raging and US power was being challenged internationally. The Soviet Union had just made unprecedented diplomatic and psychological gains with her dramatic advance in space technology...In Asia, colonialism and imperialism were being challenged by China and Vietnam both of whom were identified with the Soviet Union. And in Algeria, the revolutionary war was teaching Africa that French colonialism was only a ‘paper tiger’....At the same time the US was being challenged by her own allies in Europe as de Gaulle of France was warning the whole of Europe against the emerging ‘menace of US colonization of Europe’. ...

The US therefore took it upon herself to fight on all fronts – against the ‘Soviet encroachment’, against European and especially ‘de Gaulle’s meddling’, and against the emerging African nationalism which took the form of anti-imperialism. Although Lumumba symbolized and stood for the latter he was deliberately identified with advancing Soviet encroachment in order to find a pretext for his immediate liquidation.

The Europeans propped up Moise Tchombe to advance their interests in Congo; the US had to make do with Kasavubu while grooming a more ruthless surrogate to take over the country their behalf. It was in this atmosphere that Lumumba was sacrificed by fellow Africans to advance the contending interests of foreign powers” (2).

The year after the PAFMECA conference Babu visited revolutionary China – he was in fact the first liberation fighter from East and Central Africa to do so. He saw China’s socialist revolution as an extension of its own national liberation struggle. Consequently, he noted, there was a very thin dividing line between China’s nationalism and socialism. “This dual loyalty to the two great movements of the period” he wrote “enabled the Chinese to share more intimately the sentiments and aspirations of Africa’s liberation struggles and the struggle for national reconstruction, both of which were Africa’s top priority”.

Back in Zanzibar Babu, with his characteristic humor and optimism, dynamism and clarity of thought, had emerged as one of the most popular leaders of the anti-colonial movement. The British – as declassified documents show – increasingly began to see him as a threat to their plan of post-independence neo-colonial domination and as a source of 'Chinese influence' in the region. And with the collaboration of reactionary elements within the ZNP itself, he was imprisoned for two years on charges of `sedition'.

By the early 1960s another large political party had emerged in Zanzibar. This was the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), created by the merger of two colonial associations – the African Association and the Shirazi association; it comprised a number of essentially right-wing forces, petty traders, and big merchants of the Indian Association and boat-owners of mainland origin. Its principle objective at its inception and during its first few years was to oppose the struggle for independence. The ASP's leader was Abeid Karume, himself a member of the boat-owners syndicate.

When independence was negotiated in 1962, it led to the formation of a right-wing coalition government made up of the right-wing of the ZNP and a right-wing splinter of the ASP. The British however retained control and intensified repression against trade unionists, youth leaders and other progressive elements. It became increasingly clear that the left could no longer play an effective role within the ZNP. Finally, in September 1963, at a pre-election party conference in which the leaders were to seek a mandate for the forth-coming constitutional talks at Lancaster House in London, the left announced that it was quitting the party because it no longer had any effective role to play within it.

That same afternoon under the leadership of Babu, a mass revolutionary party, the Umma (People's) Party, was launched. The effect was electric. It galvanized working class and peasant youth across racial groupings into action. Those who had been demoralized and disenchanted with the political atmosphere were now charged with new enthusiasm. 'The revolutionary situation' as Babu wrote later, 'had arrived and the vehicle to carry it through was in the making'.

The Zanzibar Revolution

The Zanzibar Revolution took place on 11 and 12 January 1964. It was however not engineered by the Umma Party. It was an uprising led by a number of political forces which the Umma Party was able to partially transform into a socialist revolution. On the night of 11 January, ASP Youth league members together with large numbers of angry, frustrated, unemployed youth secured an initial advantage over the local police. But after a few hours the police began to regain control. Acting from behind ambushes they began to shoot and kill hundreds of these inexperienced young people. That was when the Umma Party entered the arena. Some of them had, as ZNP members, received military training and other education in Cuba. They now took charge showing the lumpen youth the tactics and strategy of urban warfare. In this way what started as a lumpen uprising by frustrated urban youths whose ultimate objective was to burn down the city of Zanzibar was transformed by the intervention of these 'professional revolutionaries', the politically and militarily trained cadres of the Umma Party, into a revolutionary insurrection.

It was the Umma youth who took control of the prison, the police station, and Cable and Wireless - the radio station for all external communication. While they entered the revolution primarily to ensure its success, their multi-racial character – they included a large proportion of Arabs but also Africans and Indians – meant that their very presence at the frontline prevented the revolution from taking a racial character i.e. African against Arab. On 12 January 1964, a new revolutionary government was formed. It was an alliance in which Karume was the President and Babu was the Foreign Minister; and the Sultan fled with his entourage and members of his government were detained.

These developments were watched with dismay by the British and greater dismay by the Americans. For some years the US State Department had recognized not only the strategic importance of Zanzibar as a commercial and trade centre but as an island ideally located for the surveillance of central and southern Africa. The revolution made Zanzibar a cause for intense anxiety for the US. In the eyes of State Department, Zanzibar was now the 'Cuba of Africa' from which communism would spread across the continent and, as secret telegrams (now declassified) whizzing back and forth from US personnel in Zanzibar to Washington reveal, Babu was regarded as one of the people primarily responsible.

Manipulation and Skulduggery – the US Role in the Creation of Tanzania

US strategy through the 50s and 60s had involved the maintenance of a belt of US control across Central Africa which would protect Southern Africa (with its western investments) from the radical and socialist influences of countries like Algeria and Ghana. The US was now horrified at the possibility of a socialist Zanzibar which would not only wreck their belt of control strategy but might even spread socialism to the rest of Central and East Africa. Within three days of the revolution, State Department was already working at fever pitch. Not only was the CIA put on emergency alert but 'sources' and resources available to the US in Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda were sought out and pulled into action in a more systematic crusade against the 'spectre of communism'.

What made matters worse, however, in the eyes of State Department, was that a week after the revolution there was a mutiny in the Colito Barracks in Dar Es Salaam in Tanganyika. Essentially about low pay and the retention of European officers in top army posts, the mutiny reflected the people's anger over the continuation of colonial structures in independent Tanganyika.

Through a panicky flurry of telegrams, US officials started to pressurize Britain to intervene militarily, put down the mutiny and strengthen Nyerere (whom they saw as pro-western). In a secret telegram to State Department US Ambassador in Tanganyika, William Leonhart reported that, 'there was a revolutionary situation in Tanganyika...it was not the military alone but [Nyerere's] entire government which had collapsed' (3). Eventually the British did bombard the Colito barracks at Nyerere's own request. He was seen in this phase as extremely weak politically, 'lacking support inside and outside the government', in the words of the Assistant Secretary of State, G. Mennen Williams he needed 'elements of a new programme to reassert his power'. These were to include not only 'high impact aid' but help in revamping his image as a militant African nationalist (4).

Meanwhile the Zanzibar situation was continuing to cause intense anxiety to State Department and plans formulated included 'development of an independent nationalist government ...built round Karume'; 'containment of Babu'; and 'supporting and strengthening Nyerere in Tanganyika and Kenyatta in Kenya' (5).

There followed a period of intense CIA activity. Frank Carlucci (later National Security Adviser to President Reagan) was appointed as Charge d'Affaires in Zanzibar - drafted in from Congo where he had been deeply involved in the overthrow of Lumumba. In telegrams, now declassified, Carlucci discussed a number of strategies with State Department in the next few days.

They included the ‘elimination of Babu’ (6); the (Zanzibar Action Plan) ZAP, under which Karume would be persuaded to ask for British military intervention (on the basis of Nyerere’s example after the Colito mutiny) and the US would stand by to back the British up; and the possibility of an East African Federation to neutralize Zanzibar.

At the same time Carlucci worked on gaining Karume’s trust. On 30 March he cabled Washington urging them to make Karume an ‘impact offer’ – in plain language a bribe: “...our immediate problem is to break past the radicals surrounding Karume and demonstrate convincingly that we are in favor of his personal leadership. We do not believe long-term, high-cost; low-impact aid projects will accomplish this end. Instead we suggest we should offer Karume a gift of dynamic proportions which would appeal to him personally. One thought that comes to mind is a helicopter with US pilot” (7).

Eventually with the failure to implement ZAP and the idea of the East African Federation running into delays, Leonhart came up with a new plan and cabled State Department on 20 April. The response, highly sanitized, came immediately: “The Department gives its blessing and support to the Tanganyika initiative: Tanganyika-Zanzibar Federation or incorporation...which would exclude Babu and his clique”. Babu was out of the country at the time and the US wished to take advantage of this. As the documents of the time reveal, they moved at top speed.

On 22 April, the articles for the Tanganyika-Zanzibar union were signed by Nyerere and Karume. Like the relationship between Northern Ireland and Britain the union gave Zanzibar limited regional administrative autonomy but ensured that overall power – foreign affairs, defense, trade union matters, and control of foreign exchange was held by the centre at Dar es Salaam. However as Carlucci reported, Karume was ‘still under the impression that he was agreeing to the federation of two autonomous states.’

The Policies of ‘African Socialism’

The months and years which followed the union were a time of chaos and violence in Zanzibar. The CIA continued to keep a close eye on the region. In May 1965 they noted that in Zanzibar, the union was still far from popular... “Karume gave little thought to the consequences of such a union and of ratification of the [union] agreement even though only one third of the island’s Revolutionary Council voted in favor and despite strong opposition from radical labor and youth elements” (8).

In fact the union brought untold suffering to the people of Zanzibar and continues to do so. It was carried out in secret, as it were, without popular consultation. As Babu was to write:

“The aims of the revolutionary government of Zanzibar and those of the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU) government on the mainland were not identical. The aims of the former were necessitated by the revolution itself which led inevitably to a decisive break with colonialism and imperialism...The TANU government was still encumbered by the trappings of an Uhuru government, carefully groomed by the colonialists and the World Bank. It was set firmly on the road to neocolonialism and made no attempt to assert its independence. In other words trying to unite the two countries was like trying to mix oil and water.

The human and social cost of uniting these two disparate entities [Zanzibar and Tanganyika] ... was enormous. In Zanzibar the post-union government of Karume freed from the discipline imposed by the revolution, embarked on an adventurist policy of leveling down to the lowest social denominator. The aims of the revolution had been subverted, vulgarized and reduced to the pettiness and nastiness of racial hatred and prejudice. Several leading members of the revolution were silenced either through physical liquidation or exile, while their executioners, even to this day, are being protected and even honoured by the union”(9).

After the union, Babu was transferred to the mainland and offered a series of fairly insignificant posts in the Tanzanian cabinet. He told me “I was not in charge; there were three Ministers of State. All three of us were under the President. There was nothing we could do...There was a French Director of Planning...I was Minister of Economic Planning but I could not plan policies or implement them” (10).

However, in this period, as Minister of Economic Planning, Babu wrote a series of articles in the country’s main daily paper, ‘The Nationalist’. Titled ‘The Meaning of Self Reliance’, and written not under his name but simply as Pressman’s Commentary, these seminal essays, traced most of Africa’s problems to the economic and political structures inherited from colonialism. He argued that colonial structures had been put in place for the benefit of metropolitan capital and were held in place by repressive laws and policies, now, they must now be rejected.

He laid out clearly and in painstaking detail the policies which would meet the needs of Tanzania’s own people. He believed that for a country which had been a colony, reconstructing its economy and becoming self-reliant –economic nationalism – was the central strategy of a socialist struggle. (While this was true in the colonial and immediately post-colonial eras it is, of course, even more the case in the contemporary phase of the globalization of capital). Babu, as we have seen, was never to implement his plans for economic transformation of Tanzania, but his approach brought him into sharp contradiction with Nyerere’s policies of so-called African Socialism.

Nyerere, by this time, had consolidated power in his own hands. By 1967, he and his ruling party were supreme. The constitution had been changed and all mass organizations brought under the party – the trade union movement, the cooperative movement, women’s and youth organizations and even religious organizations.

The centralization of power meant also that there was no arena for debate or criticism and that those who tried to criticize were branded subversives or enemies of the state.

At the same time, focusing on welfarism, Nyerere neglected the crucial task of restructuring the colonial economy and Tanzania began to face serious economic problems.

In search of a populist strategy Nyerere started a programme of indiscriminate nationalization – often targeting small businesses. Babu opposed this. He predicted (correctly) that it would damage the economy, raise the cost of distribution and dislocate the business system. In his view socialist priorities should rather entail the development of productive forces by integrating private and government resources.

The state, he told me in an interview in 1988, “must not become a seller of bread and butter, we should be creating new areas of development, either large-scale farming or industries. This is where government resources should go instead of tying them to the distributive trade”. Sadly, his advice was ignored.

Another of Nyerere’s populist moves was the Arusha declaration. It was essentially about three things: self-reliance and austerity; a return to what was seen as Africa’s pre-colonial ‘classless’ society; and villagisation or the reorganization of the population into planned villages.

The villagisation policy did not in fact depart fundamentally from earlier Village Settlement Programmes which had been introduced by the colonialists as far back as 1922 and later picked up by the World Bank in 1959.

The ideology of Nyerere’s Ujamaa policies was that co-operation and collective advancement are the rationale of every individual’s existence. However the Ujamaa village settlement programme were in practice no different from earlier settlement programmes except that they were not confined it to specific areas - all rural areas were brought under the scheme. And whereas the World Bank had invested \$300,000 per village as initial capital for economic and social infrastructure and mechanical instruments, envisaged as essential for the transformation, now villagers had to raise the finance themselves at their own risk. As for food production, Tanzania went from being self-sufficient in food before the scheme to having to import food.

Having launched Tanzania firmly on a neocolonial path of development, Nyerere maintained his image by calling for a New Economic Order to give countries like Tanzania a better chance to compete. Imperialism is not to be overthrown by such requests, however eloquent, but Nyerere’s rhetoric contributed to his image as a militant leader of the Third World.

Nyerere’s image in Africa was helped also by Babu’s presence in the Tanzanian cabinet, as Gora Ebrahim, a leader of the South African liberation movement the Pan African Congress(PAC) told me: “The Zanzibari comrades gave Tanzania and Nyerere himself a progressive image and this was useful...Nyerere was always a liberal but he had realized that to remain in power, given what was happening around him - the overthrow of Nkrumah for example – he had to consolidate power and at the same time while remaining dependent on the West, not appear to be the vassal of this or that foreign country. In this sense, he was different from Kenyatta who prior to independence had a much bigger, more militant profile and after independence succumbed completely. Nyerere had a much lower profile but developed a progressive cult” (11) (12).

Babu’s relationship with the Chinese leadership made it possible to negotiate the construction by China of the historic Tanzania/Zambia Railways (TAZARA). This was a project which had been discussed by the Tanzanian and Zambian governments for some months in 1964/65. It was intended to reduce Zambia’s dependence on white dominated regimes. The rail link would provide Zambia with an outlet to the sea at Dar es Salaam for its major export, Copper which would otherwise have had to go via the Portuguese dominated territories of Angola and Mozambique, and Rhodesia and South Africa. It would also obviously expand Tanzania’s infrastructure and facilitate the development of its countryside.

On a trade delegation preceding Nyerere's visit to China, Babu had thought of asking for Chinese help with the railway and it mentioned to Chou En-Lai. When Nyerere arrived in Beijing, he however never raised the question of the railway as expected by the Chinese leadership. Finally he was asked directly about it by Chou En-Lai.

The Chinese loan was unique in being interest free. The project was worth \$400 million of which one tenth was local costs to be paid by the local government. But Tanzania could not afford this – the entire Tanzanian Five Year Plan was worth less. The Chinese solved the problem by sending goods to Tanzania which would be sold to pay local costs. “Chinese workers” Babu reminisced twenty years later, “lived to like the people. They did not want air-conditioned houses like the Americans. For the railway they chose routes which would go close to natural resources – like iron ore and coal deposits. And close to the iron deposits they built a workshop, in the middle of nowhere - in the bush! It was to become part of a future industrial complex and give a boost to the truck industry... But Nyerere thought Tanzania would remain an agricultural country forever. If you talked about industry he thought you were talking about going to the moon. The Chinese trained 3000 technicians. When they left they told me – why don't you use them and our machinery to build another project. Nyerere said, no, what would the West say? I said what does it matter what the West says – what do Tanzanians say? Would they like to get water? I don't know what happened to the equipment, soon after I was locked up” (13).

In February 1972, while he was in Addis Ababa leading the Tanzanian delegation to the OAU Council of Ministers meeting, Babu was suddenly fired from the cabinet.

Two months later, on April 7, Karume was killed in Zanzibar by a man whose father he had murdered. Babu, together with more than forty members of the Umma Party of Zanzibar, were arrested and detained in prison without explanation.

Three years later while they were still in detention in mainland prisons, they were tried for treason in Zanzibar, in absentia. Babu together with some of his comrades was sentenced to death by firing squad. He and his comrades were never convicted. They were released after an international campaign. Nyerere's prisons had taken away ten years of his life.

Transforming Colonial Economic and Political Structures

While Tanzania never followed the policies he had formulated, those early experiences and the articles he wrote in *The Nationalist* formed a core of Babu's thinking. He expanded on them in his well-known book *African Socialism or Socialist Africa* which was written in prison and had to be smuggled out and published in London.

In the years after his release he developed these ideas further. In a paper delivered at a Conference to mark 20 years since the Arusha declaration, he pointed out: ‘All development strategies of neo-colonies have been founded on the well-known World Bank premise, namely that growth in underdeveloped countries is hampered by inadequate growth in exports and inadequate financial resources (aggravated by population explosion) and the prescribed solution is to step up exports, step up aid and loans from developed countries and arrest population growth. What has really grown out of this hopeless strategy... is aid addicted countries, aid pushers and aid dealers. This has been Tanzania's experience too’ (14).

In this situation, where productive forces had not developed adequately, he felt that even welfare programmes which in any case the state can ill-afford and which therefore have to be shored up with foreign aid must be seen as merely palliatives; and negotiations with international agencies and representatives of global capital from a position of weakness must necessarily be also futile. Instead of this, Babu argued, forcefully and always with an underlying optimism, that Africa must focus on internal causes which are the basis of change, because:

“an economy must have internal material basis for it to develop and then, and only then, can external causes create conditions for such development. ...like an egg, it must have an internal basis before the incubator can turn it into a chicken. No amount of external conditions can in this situation transform a stone into a chicken. But we do the opposite. We say once the external conditions are right - for example, the New International Economic Order - then our development will follow irrespective of the internal basis. It is this topsy-turvy way of looking at things that we must combat if we are to utilise our resources to our maximum advantage. No amount of UN resolutions can achieve that for us. The solution is within our own reach” (15)

While discussing this internal basis - the material reality of Africa - he argued that the contradiction between the need to develop productive forces on the one hand, and class struggle on the other, must be clearly understood.

In his Open Letter to Prime Minister Mugabe written at the time of Zimbabwe's independence, he urged him to regard the development of productive forces as top priority, even over that of the relations of production:

“Zimbabwe has a fairly solid industrial base most of which was made possible thanks to the "sanctions" which forced the country to look inward. It was what you might call a blessing in disguise... Your agricultural base, too, is fairly healthy. From this level Zimbabwe has an excellent chance to move rapidly to a self-sustaining development. As a Socialist you will no doubt want this development to be accompanied with social justice...It cannot be over emphasised that people are our most precious capital and, therefore, they must eat well, be housed and clothed well.”

At the same time he emphasised the need for a proportional development of the economy following Mao's 'Ten relationships of development' (16) maintaining a balance between heavy industry on the one hand, and light industry and agriculture on the other.

He also discussed the question of the white settlers:

“Experience elsewhere has taught us that the taking over of ongoing viable farms has invariably led to almost total collapse of agricultural production and has forced the countries concerned to incur heavy foreign debt to import food...It is a painful historical fact that in Zimbabwe such large-scale farms are owned by White settlers, some of whom are liberal and others incorrigibly reactionary. To expropriate them will amount to economic disaster, at least in the short run. To allow them to continue as before will amount to perpetuating a national injustice. This is a serious dilemma. Probably you and your party have already made up your minds on how tackle it.

To an outsider it will seem possible to avoid both of these undesirable consequences -where possible, surrounding all these settler farms by producer agricultural cooperatives; making obligatory for the settler farms, as a condition for their existence to share their facilities (farm implements, expertise, marketing, dispensary service etc.) with the newly-established cooperatives.

This will help; first, to develop viable cooperative farms at a minimum cost and make maximum use of the existing stock of agricultural implements in the country. Secondly, it will help diminish the imbalance between settlers' and people's production and thereby correct the existing situation in which the settler farms are isolated like prosperous islands in the midst of mass poverty. Thirdly, it will help distinguish between good elements among the settlers who are genuinely willing to work with the new government in improving the living conditions of the people, and the diehards. It will then be possible to win over the first group and isolate and eventually ease out the latter. Fourthly, and this is most important it will help consolidate people's as opposed to individual production without any large-scale economic dislocation (and its attendant consequences) during the transition.

The rising rural incomes entailed in this strategy will expand the home market for industrial consumer products as well as broaden the tax base. It will then be possible to accumulate from the latter to pay for further development of the former. Which means not only the development of nationally integrated, independent industrialization but also the rapid rise of the proletariat? All this, of course, is based on the assumption of a planned and proportional development of the national economy” (17).

As we know, Mugabe, unfortunately, did not take his advice or heed his warnings.

Democracy and Human Rights

In the years following his release from prison, when he was living and teaching in the US, Babu wrote a number of articles about democracy. They appeared mainly in the *New African* magazine for which he was a correspondent. Their focus was human rights. “Unlimited power in the hands of the State” he commented, thinking perhaps of his own experience at the hands of the Tanzanian state, “which cannot be subjected to people’s supervision and intrusion, inexorably leads to repression irrespective of the will of the holders who wield such powers” (18).

However, Babu soon began a deeper analysis of democracy and the liberal state which provides us with a way of understanding the ideologies which have arrived in the current phase of globalization. “Democracy” he wrote “is about freedom but not unconditional freedom. It recognizes the necessity to safeguard the security of the nation and the state; to safeguard public order, the rights of citizens and public morals but such restrictions are only allowed within limits.

In 1992, he discussed this further, “the model of western democracy, in the form of universal franchise came long after the liberal state had been firmly established. Only on demand from the people...Such a democracy therefore had to accommodate itself to the cultural ground of an already established competitive market society and to the operation of the already established liberal state...the liberal state was democratized and democracy was liberalized.”

He demystified the term in its present political context:

“Democracy is not a new thing in colonial and post-colonial Africa. Throughout the colonial struggle the principal demand of the anti-colonial movements was for the restoration of the right of the majority to rule themselves. This was a uniquely democratic demand....

Practically all Western governments, as well as the Soviet bloc, and the multilateral institutions, not only tolerated but in many cases actually collaborated with the local ruling elites in instituting authoritarian systems which denied hundreds of millions of African citizens their basic human democratic rights. They all encouraged “strong, decisive and authoritative” governments in Africa with whom they could “do business”. They even alleged, and were supported by academic justifications from their sycophantic institutions of learning, that democracy was “culturally alien to Africa”; that the one-party states was the most suitable system for this “tribally divided” continent, and so on, and so forth...

Many Africans now wonder why is it that these same forces have suddenly turned into ardent advocates of democracy for Africa. Is it because of their love for the Africans? If it is, why now, and so belatedly? Where were they when the Bandas, the Mobutus, the Moises, and the military dictators of all brands, were killing, maiming, imprisoning and banishing millions of innocent Africans? ...It is the lack of democracy which has enabled Africa’s elites to accumulate millions of dollars in personal wealth by exploiting people and appropriate their national wealth in conjunction with the IMF, the World Bank and international money lenders...

[Africa] must not confuse democracy and the free market. Democracy does not necessary mean a free market economy...All of Latin America, except Cuba, is operating on the basis of a free-market economy, but is far from being democratic. Nor is a planned economy necessarily a negation of democracy” (19).

For Babu, the people were the motive force which would transform society; victory belonged to them, of that he had no doubt. Their needs and their revolutionary creative energy were central to all his hopes and strategies in this context he saw the relationship between the people and their leaders as being of crucial importance. He began to look also at the relationship between the people and their leaders in the context of liberation movements.

After a visit to Sri Lanka to commemorate the death of Rajani Thiranagama a civil liberties activist murdered by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), he noted the way people actually feared the fighters. This, he said was the clearest sign that the LTTE had lost its sense of direction.

His internationalism was not some separate aspect of his politics but inherent to his thinking and his personal experience of violence and tyranny had made him sensitive to people’s responses to oppressive power structures of a variety of kinds. Babu was at home everywhere, despite his sadness at his enforced absence from Africa and particularly from Zanzibar, he never saw himself as an exile.

Demystifying Imperialist Strategies of Control

The depth of his knowledge of international relations, his clarity and the warmth of personality made Babu a unique and enormously popular lecturer and interpreter of events. In the 80s and 90s he taught first in the US (at San Francisco State University and later at Amherst College) and then in Britain at Birkbeck College in London. Throughout this period he identified issues which have now become the key ones for progressive people world wide. Writing about Somalia, for example, he warned about US 'humanitarian' interventions and their consequences for the Third World.

In a speech in 1990 in the run up to the first Gulf War he discussed the way that right from the time of the Cold War every American President - had to have a Third World leader as a villain:

“They never fought the Russians. Truman had Kim Il Sung, the North Korean leader, as the villain and he mobilized American forces and international forces to fight this villain. Eisenhower had Mao Tse Tung as the villain, not the Russians but Mao Tse Tung. Kennedy had Castro as the villain, not the Russians but Castro. Then came Johnson - he had Ho Chi Minh as the villain, not the Russians but Ho Chi Minh as the villain. Then came Nixon. His villain was Sihanouk of Cambodia. He had to destroy that country in order to prove Sihanouk was his villain. Then came Carter. He chose Khomeini as villain. He was followed by Reagan and he chose Ghaddafi as his villain. And now we have Bush with Saddam Hussein as his villain” (20).

In 1991 after the first Gulf war had started, Babu participated in the protests and also provided a path-breaking analysis of the reasons for the war:

“The real and underlying motive of the war” he wrote in a detailed analysis “was to preserve the dollar hegemony in the world economy which is being threatened by Iraqi nationalism. It was US imperialism itself which was at stake here, and the US would do anything including the nuclear bombardment of Iraq to ensure its survival. US imperialism has been facilitated not by physical conquest of colonies but by the dominance of the dollar as the international medium of exchange since the end of World War II....

When Bush talks about the New World Order he really means the preservation of the old order dominated by the almighty dollar, and the institutions which have sustained it mostly at the expense of the Third World - the World Bank, IMF, and GATT etc. The threat to imperialism posed by Saddam Hussein lay in his challenge to the old order in the Middle East. This imminent threat of Arab radicalism lies in the financial and monetary spheres of imperialism. Production and exchange are two aspects of the struggle for changing relations of production and the establishment of socialist relations. Proponents of Arab radicalism in the Middle East unlike in Asia or Africa can harm dollar hegemony, initially even without changing their own internal relations. They can do this simply by withdrawing their financial and monetary backing to the dollar and sterling and sharpening the contradictions between imperialist countries e.g. Britain and America vs Europe or vs Germany or Japan.

If radical Arabism takes over control of the vast petro dollar reserves from the docile and reactionary Sheikhs and transforms it into Petro- Dinar or Petro-Riyal, liberated from the dollar hegemony, US imperialism will face its most direct and immediate threat much more imminent than that posed simply by ideological challenge” (21).

Events have moved on but in the context of the destruction of Iraq, the execution of Saddam Hussein and the attacks on Iraqi nationalism, Babu’s analysis is sorely missed.

The Cherished Goal of a Socialist and United Africa

Throughout his political life Babu remained a communist, for whom Marxism was most crucially a method of analysis - a dialectical approach which enabled him to identify without dogma or sectarianism the forces of progress and change within any situation, while at the same time never losing his commitment to the socialist future of Africa and of the world.

The path to his cherished goal of a socialist and united Africa was based on a Pan Africanism shaped by “the united will and solidarity of the revolutionary people of Africa” (22). It encompassed many battles on many fronts in many different periods of time and across continents. Babu stood as a bridge between these struggles linking, through his own experiences, the Pan Africanism of anti-colonialism (23) with that of today and the struggle for a united Africa with the African-American struggle.

He had been close to the African American experience since the 60s after he met Malcolm X in the wake of the Zanzibar revolution, and during Malcolm’s visits to Africa they had become close friends. Later Babu had spoken with him at mass rallies in Harlem. They had discussions on the burning question of the time – what was the primary contradiction, race or class? Some ten years later after Malcolm was dead and Babu incarcerated in prison, the poet Imamu Baraka who was also part of these discussions was to recollect those times in his poem ‘Class War’:

“Years ago, we both swore oaths, with one another, of revolution. You, Malcolm and I, one night in a room at the Waldorf. Where you had come as ambassador from New Afrika, when the fumes of revolution first opened our nose We still had not made the motion towards science, had not yet tracked the long distance to reality” (24).

There can be no doubt that Babu had been a powerful influence leading Malcolm towards a more explicitly anti-imperialist world view.

At the same time he frequently emphasized the role and significance of the African-American struggle for Africa. Pan Africanism, he wrote, is “the most popular political concept which in many ways reflects the true aspiration of the young generation of Africa ... is a wholly African-American ideal stemming from their long experience of struggle and from the self-confidence that struggle engenders.....However, to this day African leaders do not seem to have grasped the significance of the African-American contribution to Africa’s future” (25).

For Babu, because Pan Africanism was a tool of struggle, it had to be reshaped with the changes in the nature of western dominance. In the early 90s, in the face of the intensifying economic stranglehold and ideological hegemony of international agencies he spoke and wrote of the need for a second liberation of Africa. He did not leave this at the level of theory. He was the driving force behind the 7th Pan African Congress held at Kampala in April 1994. It was he who coined its slogan “Don’t agonise! Organise!” The Congress united all strands of the contemporary movement. His authoritative and visionary contribution to that Congress was an economic blueprint titled ‘The Africa We Need’ (26)

From 1984 on, Babu had based himself in London and become a close adviser and mentor to a range of progressive movements - in Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia and Rwanda. Unlike earlier struggles for liberation which were fought against settlerism and colonialism and which were supported by the OAU and even the United Nation’s Decolonisation Committee, these movements were seen as separatists.

Always looking for sparks of hope and ready to fan them, he took up their causes. In the case of Eritrea he travelled to the liberated zones and battlefield, living and talking with the fighters. Everyone, even people in remote villages, knew him in this country during the liberation struggle.

As these movements surged forward to victory, Babu was hopeful about a new phase of African unity. And in this context, he emphasised once again the need to restructure economies because otherwise “there was no basis for ‘objective economic complementarity’ (27) ... a precondition for any meaningful economic cooperation

Babu recognized the value of optimism in the context of a dominant discourse which continually designated Africa as a ‘lost cause’. But in his encouragement of the new generation of leaders of the 1980s and 1990s, he was careful to make explicit the conditions for their future success. Many that Babu had hopes for have now not only failed to fulfill these conditions but given up any pretence of either Pan Africanism or socialism - but the conditions Babu had identified remain a valuable guide to action.

Tanzania Three Decades After the Union

In 1992, after 30 years of one party rule, the Tanzanian government reluctantly caved in to national and international pressures (not least from the donor countries whose financial assistance to Tanzania amounted to 90% of the development budget). The government conceded the popular demand for the right to freedom of association and expression and Tanzania saw the emergence of a number of political parties which challenged the dominance of the ruling party, the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) which had been formed in 1974 by a merger of the ASP and TANU. Many, though not all, of these parties were right-wing - eager for ‘free market’ and neo-liberal ‘reforms’, which perhaps was not surprising given their experience of socialism Ujamaa-style.

Babu was approached by the NCCR Mageuzi to stand as a Vice Presidential candidate. The NCCR was an eclectic collection of groups including right-wingers, human rights lawyers and activists, disgruntled workers and peasants, radical youth and *Machingas* or street hawkers. Babu had long been committed to multi-party democracy; he felt he could not turn down the request.

In August 1995 Babu returned to Tanzania to a massive and ecstatic welcome from the people. However he was eventually prevented from standing for election by the legal manipulations of the ruling party. As always putting political commitment before personal ego, Babu remained in the country tirelessly campaigning for the party.

When the NCCR lost after massive rigging by the ruling party, Babu wrote two seminal pamphlets - 'Tanzania's first multi-party elections' and 'Wanted: a Third Force in Zanzibar Politics' - analyzing the situation and suggesting a way forward.

In Zanzibar the rigging had been even more blatant, faced with the widespread popularity of the opposition Civic United Front – the then President of Zanzibar, Salmin Amour, was recorded as saying that whatever the results he would not give up the seat of power anyway.

Today, ten years on, the CCM still holds sway in Zanzibar despite the out and out popularity of CUF and the evidence of serious and widespread violation of human rights, before and during every election. Violence, torture and repression have become commonplace. (28) (29).

In 2012 The Zanzibar is likely to be pushed against the wishes of its people into an East African Federation – not in the interests of Pan Africanism but as in the earlier US plan to make control and economic exploitation easier.

Progressive people, Babu had written, in *Wanted a Third Force in Zanzibar Politics*, must learn from history, free themselves of the divisive baggage of the past, and unite across racial and party backgrounds – only then can Zanzibar be truly liberated. In the present climate many feel that this is an impossibly difficult task. But Babu's revolutionary and optimistic message was – it can and must be done!

As an Eritrean fighter put it in a message at Babu's memorial meeting in 1996, "*He had the courage to say what he thought, the foresight to be optimistic about Africa's potential and the integrity to live in accordance with the dictates of his conscience when doing all this was neither fashionable nor expedient*".

Notes and References

(1) This was to have been the basis of the memoirs which he had been commissioned to write, but which were always postponed by more immediate work relating to contemporary struggles

(2) Babu, Salma and Amrit Wilson (eds) (2002) *The Future that works – selected writings of A.M.Babu*, Africa World Press, New Jersey. pp 63-67

(3) Wilson, Amrit (1989) *US foreign policy and revolution – the creation of Tanzania*, Pluto Press, London p 26

(4) *Ibid* p26

(5) *Ibid* pp38-39

- (6) Ibid p70
- (7) Ibid
- (8) Ibid
- (9) Ibid p5
- (10) Interview with Babu 1988
- (11) Interview with Gora Ebrahim (1988)
- (12) However from time to time Nyerere genuine solidarity with African liberation movements would alarm State Department.
- (13) Interview with Babu (1988)
- (14) Babu's papers (unpublished)
- (15) Babu, Salma and Amrit Wilson (eds) (2002) *The Future that works – selected writings of A.M.Babu*, Africa World Press, New Jersey.p39
- (16) These relationships are explained in detail in Counter Punch an article which appeared in Africa Events in June 1985, reproduced in Babu, Salma and Amrit Wilson (eds) (2002) *The Future that works – selected writings of A.M.Babu*, Africa World Press, New Jersey.p40-45
- (17) Babu, Salma and Amrit Wilson (eds) (2002) *The Future that works – selected writings of A.Babu*, Africa World Press, New Jersey.p10-16
- (18) Ibid p 199-208
- (19) Ibid p 224- 231
- (20) Ibid p 84
- (20) Ibid 123-135
- (21) This was how Babu described Augustino Neto's Pan Africanism but it was equally his own approach
- (22) Babu described the role of Nkrumah, Padmore and others at the first All African People's Conference in Accra in creating unity in the struggle for independence in Zanzibar – see Appendix 1, Wilson, Amrit (1989) *US Foreign Policy and Revolution: the creation of Zanzibar*, Pluto Press, London
- (23) Poem by Imamu Baraka in Babu's papers

(24) Babu, Salma and Amrit Wilson (eds) (2002) *The Future that works – selected writings of A.M.Babu*, Africa World Press, New Jersey.

(25) Ibid

(26) Ibid. p301-344

(27) Ibid

(28) Submission on human rights violations, during and after the October 30, 2005 election by an 8 member team, November 2005, Zanzibar

(29) *Betrayal of Popular Hopes – Report on the General Election in Zanzibar, October 30, 2005*, Civic United Front

(30) Andebrhan Weldegiorgis's message to the memorial meeting for Babu, September 22, 1996, London