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Walter Rodney and the Dar es Salaam School

Walter Rodney devoted his life to the struggles of the oppressed, especially those considered *The Wretched of the Earth*. Throughout the continent of Africa, young scholars and those seeking alternative interpretations of the world turned to his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Inside East Africa, the University students were more fortunate to have access to the numerous journal articles and speeches of the period of the struggles for liberation in Southern Africa. Walter Rodney taught at the University of Dar Es Salaam from 1969-1974. He was not simply a philosopher who remained in the academy. He was active in the University Students' African Revolutionary Front (USARF), an organization that embraced revolutionary students from across Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. Among those who were associated with USARF were Issa Shivji of Tanzania, Yoweri Museveni, Mwakasungura of Malawi and John Garang of the Sudan.

When Rodney arrived in Dar es Salaam the dominant thinking within the University related to the modernization ideas of Europe and North America. In the hot house of the various intellectual traditions (the Chicago School, Frankfurt School, London School, Lumumba School [publications of progress publishers} and the underdevelopment school from Latin America) that were being offered to young students, there was an attempt to develop a brand of scholarship consistent with the decolonization process. Freedom fighters from all parts of Africa participated in the discussions of this USARF and drew in the workers, youth, teachers, students and government officials. In this way, the University of Dar Es Salaam developed a reputation as a center for rigorous debates and scholarship on the challenges of Africa. The books and papers from this period established a tradition that brought respect to African Scholarship. It was a period when the varying schools of thought in Africa flourished: the Ibadan school, the Legon School, Makerere, the Cairo branch of nationalism and liberation along with the Cheik Anta Diop and Samir Amin contributions from Dakar, Senegal.

This period inspired a new kind of philosophical approach and scholars from all parts of Africa published in African journals in the above mentioned locations. The journals from the University of Dar es Salaam were many and it was not by accident that all major African Political Scientists

spent a period at the University of Dar es Salaam. Walter Rodney was one of the original founders of African Association of Political Scientists (AAPS) in 1973. While AAPS was not a revolutionary organization, the debates within the Dar es salaam school had such ramifications across the continent that AAPS became the space for a major break with the ideas of western modernization and the US brand of positivist political science. It was in this period where the debates in the small Marxist group organized around (*Cheche*) influenced all aspects of intellectual work: literature, history, law, the natural sciences and medicine. *Cheche* was the official organ of the radical student movement, USARF. This movement took itself seriously as a revolutionary movement. Future research into the history of the Dar es Salaam school will reveal that imperialism also took this group seriously. In the pages of *Cheche* and in the meetings across Dar Es Salaam the members of USARF and their supporters debated the questions of liberation, the nature of the neo colonial state, Ujamaa, and the challenges of transformation. The *Cheche* was banned by the Tanzanian government but the authors regrouped and the ideas reappeared in the Maji Maji, the official journal of the Youth League of the ruling party in Tanzania, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Nyerere had banned *Cheche* on the grounds that it was inspired by foreign (meaning communist) ideas. The paper took its name from the Spark of Kwame Nkrumah and Iskra of Lenin.

Walter Rodney had been concerned not only with the revolution in Africa, but with the issues of revolutionary change throughout the world. The vibrant African optimism of Walter Rodney influenced a generation of teachers and students who passed through Dar es Salaam. The experiences of neo-liberalism and the most recent exposure of the limitations of US imperial arrogance in the wake of global financial implosion reinforce the position of Walter Rodney that,

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“I believe that our young people.... Are beginning to be repoliticised...In other words, they are coming back to thinking out things for themselves. For a long time we were hiding from thinking. Hiding because we have certain fears that somebody else might get in or we might rock the boat and so on. But there is no boat left to rock, Just a sinking ship...”