

Obituary:

Emmanuel Hansen 1937 - 1987

Emmanuel Hansen, AAPS Vice-President (1976-1983; 1985-1987), and AAPS Director of Research and Publications until his death on 13th November 1987 was in many ways a remarkable, kind and decent man. He was an erudite scholar and intellectual who strove tirelessly and relentlessly to bring the influence and impact of radical but progressive African social science to bear on the international social science community. He was an effective teacher, fair-minded but uncompromising in his insistence on high standards. He was a model friend, a sympathetic colleague who could always be relied upon for wise and informed counsel; a fine and seasoned comrade who generously placed his services and rich vein of experience at the disposal of friends and colleagues, even when doing so was bound to result in some loss or discomfort to himself and his family.

This is to say that he had a passionate and insatiable sense of duty and service to African social science community and beyond and through it to humanity. He also had a strong and incomparable empathy which enabled him to understand the plight of others and to make allowance for what less empathetic and less tolerant individuals would regard as insufferable weaknesses. He was above all, a devoted and dedicated family man who was acutely conscious of his familial responsibilities to his wife and daughters and to his extended family.

Born in Accra, Ghana (then the Gold Coast) on July 27th, 1937, Emmanuel received his bachelor's from the University of Ghana in 1964; a master's degree from Makerere University in Uganda in 1969; another master's degree in 1970 and a Ph.D in 1973, both from Indiana University in the USA.

He began his university teaching career in 1964 at the University of Ghana as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Political Science. He was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1967. It was while teaching at Dar es Salaam that he met and married his wife, Elaine. He also taught at the following universities: Ohio State University in the USA., 1973; University of Ghana., 1973-

1979; University of Durham in the UK, 1979-1982; and the Open University in London, UK from 1983 until his death. He was an external examiner in Political Science at the University of Lagos 1979-1982, and the University of Dar es Salaam.

He travelled widely in Africa, North America, Europe, the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America, concretely building, nurturing and consolidating intellectual networks, making us all the richer in our intellectual horizons in the process, and establishing himself beyond doubt a worthy and inimitable ambassador of the best in progressive African social science.

Yet, as those close to him knew, especially in the last few years of his life, those intellectual peregrinations, this "nomadic" life as he self-effaciously used to refer to it, exerted a painful, debilitating toll on his health. Yet he trudged along, as he had to, given his commitment to intellectual networking and the decolonization of teaching and research in African social science.

Emmanuel was a cosmopolitan and a Pan-Africanist. This much is clear from his background and experience. This helps explain to a large extent his large vision, his humane and humanistic disposition and the depth and sweep of his intellect and intellectual concerns. He was no doubt preoccupied with Africa and with scholarship in and about Africa. But this preoccupation must not be narrowly or parochially construed. For it was part of a larger and more substantial preoccupation with the human condition as such, with men in general as social beings.

This, above all, was what attracted him to, what he found fascinating in Rousseau, Marx, Fanon and Cabral. For he shared with them their focus and perspectives on the debilitating, constraining and pathological effects of pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations, and the mode of production underlying them, on human development. This concern, this preoccupation in fact defined and shaped his intellectual agenda, providing a unifying theme in all his numerous published and unpublished work. Africa or rather Africa in the wider context of the capitalist world system provided the substantive focus for his exploration of this universal problem.

The influence, particularly of Fanon and Cabral was no less evident in his conceptualization of the intellectual vocation, of the social responsibility of committed but progressive intellectuals as they confront and studiously work to transcend the contradictions of extant society. He shared with them a faith in the power of reason to transform and restructure society. But this requires social praxis, a commitment to democratic values and the democratization of social processes and structures. Hence Emmanuel's concern with the underclass and the eradication of poverty and kindred social ills.

To find means of doing this was his enduring concern, the social purpose that informed his political and professional/intellectual work. This was for

him a first-order principle which should never be fundamentally compromised either for personal gain or for political expediency.

We gain a better picture of his intellectual development and of his contribution to scholarship if we remember that Emmanuel's nascent intellectual growth coincided with the first decade or so of African re-colonization in the 1960s and the popularization of African area studies in the USA during that period. His matured work and the intellectual and political networks he helped to spawn must be seen in the context of unresolved issues and agenda sprung up by Africa's neo-colonial political history.

His sojourn in East Africa in the mid-1960's and the intellectual circles he cultivated while there left a lasting imprint on his intellectual development, contributing in no small measure to his critique of the dominant paradigmatic modernization-cum-pluralist perspectives on African politics and development. These perspectives, basically reflecting a structural-functional methodology, had been unable to explain the underlying contradictions of neo-colonial Africa and the dim prospects for democracy foreshadowed by the rise of the one-party state and military intervention in African politics. Moreover, these perspectives were precisely intended to further deepen Africa's re-colonization.

Dialectical materialism provided Emmanuel with a potentially powerful methodological and theoretical alternative. A Marxist-Leninist framework was unavoidable if an adequate explanation of Africa's underdevelopment and politico-economic crisis was to be provided. But this required the Africanisation of Marxism-Leninism. How was this to be done? Emmanuel found part of the answer in Fanon and Cabral and to some extent in Nkrumah. His own experience principally within the *Journal of African Marxists* but also in other forums, served to underscore the need for a distinctly African Marxism. Part of this was his reaction against the paternalism of the left in Western Europe broadly conceived, and specifically the tendency of Africanist Western European Marxist scholars to want to impose their own intellectual agenda, priorities and interpretations on their African colleagues.

This is not the place to elaborate upon the use Emmanuel made of Marxism-Leninism in his political writings and specifically in his analysis of African politics. That would have to await a more opportune occasion. It is, in this respect, unfortunate that, at the time of his death, he was engaged in a number of unfinished major writing projects: on the nature of military rule in Ghana, on the African food crisis, on the peace problematic in Africa and a theoretical exploration of development thinking and practice in Africa. Nevertheless, a brief indication of some of his contribution to scholarship is in order here.

His book, *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought*, (Ohio University

Press, 1975) is a major critical study of Fanon which broke new grounds in utilising what he described as Fanon's "philosophical anthropology" to explore the themes of freedom and liberation in Fanon, and the inter-connections between these themes and Fanon's involvement in social praxis. The significance of the book, which was a revision of his Ph.D dissertation for Indiana University, lies in the fact that it firmly established Fanon as a serious theorist of democracy, whose major concern was to explore the socio-economic and psycho-cultural dimensions of freedom as a democratic value.

Emmanuel's work on Fanon is significant for another reason. It had the iconoclastic effect of powerfully rebutting the ignorant but widely held view in mainstream western intellectual circles that African Political Thought was not, and could not be a substantive field of study in its own right.

It was part of Emmanuel's unfinished intellectual project to follow up the Fanon study with studies on Cabral and Nkrumah. Even then, the basic argument of his interpretation of Cabral, offered in an unpublished paper he read at a seminar on Fanon held in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1978, and which he had hoped to expand into a book length essay, is an original one which deserves much wider circulation; and which for this reason is being reproduced in *AAPS Newsletter*.

Emmanuel was a trail-blazer in another respect. His concern for social praxis, for the concrete, existential conditions of man led him, much more earlier than the rest of us, and long before it became fashionable in Africanist academic circles to do so, to focus on the food crisis in Africa. The food shortages in Ghana, the endless drive around Accra for "essential commodities" posed a problem for his intellectual curiosity and led him to seek the cause in the character of the colonially-inherited political economies of African countries, in the nature of their peripheral location in the world economy and in policy decisions and strategies intended to favour the petit-bourgeois elements in the towns. The result is a corresponding neglect of the peasantry, the producers of the primary commodities which are the major sources of Africa's foreign exchange earnings.

What needs emphasis here is that Emmanuel's focus on the food problem was neither a technical nor naive academic preoccupation. It was premised on a strong belief that African intellectuals must increasingly turn their focus and academic search-light on practical problems facing their countries and through it, involve themselves concretely in the struggle of the African masses for economic survival and popular democracy.

This same concern for the intellectual study of concrete practical problems was also evident in his analysis of the relationship between peace and development in Africa. The militarisation of Africa in its various ramifications (military coups, the arms export to Africa, civil wars, interstate conflict, etc) was in his view a basic obstacle to democracy and the achievement of

people's power and hence of peace and development in Africa.

But Emmanuel did not simply view the issue of peace and development in negative or minimalist terms as the avoidance or absence of conflict. Adopting a materialistic perspective, he saw it in the positive sense of creating conditions, structures and institutions to enhance self-fulfillment. In this way creative energies for social and political development should be released and channeled for the common good. He played an important role in bringing this perspective on peace and development in Africa to a prominent place on the agenda of the Peace Research intellectual community, represented by IPRA, especially in Europe.

This African perspective on peace and development, in Emmanuel's own words, "sees peace and development as intimately related: it sees peace not only as the resolution of conflict but as the transformation of extant social systems at both national and international levels. It is a concept which relates peace to the physical, social and existential needs of people." (Emmanuel Hansen (ed), *Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development*, 1987: Zed Press pp. 6-7).

To put it this way is, of course, to relate the peace problematic in Africa to the wider global crisis and its democratic resolution. It requires the articulation of a programme for concerted transnational action by progressive forces to seek a radical transformation of the contemporary international system of unequal exchange.

Emmanuel's work on military rule in West Africa also comes out of this broad materialistic perspective on the peace and development problematic in Africa. He shared the ambivalent attitude of progressive scholars in the sub-region to military rule. For one thing, he viewed military regimes as a necessary, unavoidable evil, given the historical and materialist conjunctures in the sub-region. Military rule, on this view, reflected the deepening and maturing of societal cleavages and contradictions which the political class had been unable to contain or resolve.

For another thing, he took the democratic position that military rule was indefensible on the ethico-theoretical grounds deriving from some theories of political obligation. Military rule is not only unconstitutional rule. It is also usurpation, a form of imposition by force. It is not based on the democratic expression of the people's will, even when legitimacy might be claimed for it on the dubious grounds of political and economic performance. For, to Emmanuel, the question to pose is, who benefits from military rule? Whose interest is served, promoted and protected by it?

In fact his position, reinforced by his experience as Secretary to Jerry Rawlings' Provisional National Defence Council in Ghana, had always been that the military sector of West African societies was inherently incapable of transformative radical initiatives, primarily because it lacked an institutional

base in those societies. It was also structurally incapable of implementing a democratic programme of socialist reconstruction, the rhetoric of some of them notwithstanding. In Emmanuel's view, this is due to the location of the leadership of the military and the social basis for its reproduction within the core of the West African neo-colonial economy.

For these same reasons, the issues of voluntary military disengagement was a ruse, even a pseudo-problem because it was not premised on democratic considerations. According to Emmanuel, it was necessarily contingent on such objective conditions as assurances that the successor civilian regime would not endanger the corporate interest of the army leadership and would neither confiscate their property nor prosecute them for their shortcomings and the offenses they committed while in office. The project was, after all, a class project and they could not be expected to commit class suicide.

What then are the options open to the progressive scholar in West Africa, short of co-optation into the existing power structures and the opportunity to join with others to use access to state power for personal accumulation?

This was a difficult problem that Emmanuel gave serious thought to but for which he never found a satisfactory answer. His reluctant acceptance of public office under Jerry Rawlings was influenced by the expectation, perhaps a naive one, that he might be able to make some difference to policy and help in a modest way to advance the prospects for democracy. About this he was of course wrong and he did the honourable, principled thing by resigning. But all was not lost. He emerged out of it all wiser and better equipped to continue the struggle on other fronts.

His decision to return to England at this time was no easy choice. It was due as much to the desire to be closer to his family as to the circumstances surrounding his resignation from the PNDC and his earlier forced resignation of his appointment at the University of Ghana when his request for an extension of his sabbatical leave in 1980 was rejected, contrary to what was up till then, and now still is the practice.

The issue of the options open to the progressive scholar was for Emmanuel compounded and complicated by some salient features of West Africa's political economy: the embourgeoisement of the trade union movement, reflected in its obsessive concentration on opportunistic demands for wage increases and fringe benefits; and the absence of well established, coherent and cohesive socialist groupings to direct societal contradictions along revolutionary paths.

For him, the classic illustration of the political irresponsibility of the left in West Africa from this point of view was its inability in Ghana to take political advantage of the effective and devastating challenge posed to the Acheampong regime by the professional groups and to harness it as part of a wider revolutionary movement for system change. The powerlessness of the left

was also, according to Emmanuel, due to its failure to establish, nurture and sustain durable links with the masses of African peoples, especially the rural or peasant poor.

What then is to be done? Are there still any credible, viable options? It seems to me that Emmanuel placed a high premium in this respect on the liberating role which the consolidation of intellectual networks created by progressive African intellectuals can play in the long run. It was to this task that he enthusiastically devoted the last few years of his life after leaving the PNDC. He was in this respect advantageously placed to do so from London which is at the cross-roads of the intellectual networks he was helping to sustain and consolidate.

This faith in the liberating role of these networks might seem like a self-serving intellectual cop-out. But those of us engaged in this networking process can attest to its vitality. We are seeing already some of its positive liberating effects, especially on a new generation of secondary school and university students, and also among ourselves, in our writings and in our cooperation in research and other intellectual efforts. This was why Emmanuel devoted the last five years or so of his life to this networking project, especially in AAPS, helping to raise political and revolutionary consciousness, engaging in endless dialogues on problems of development in Africa with like minded colleagues. It was a cause he championed, passionately believed in and religiously pursued. His death could not have come to those engaged in this project with him at a worse time.

His contribution to AAPS in the 1985-1987 biannum needs a little elaboration. Emmanuel worked closely with the Secretary-General, who had increasingly come to rely on him, drawing upon and strengthening in the process the close personal and family relationship they had built for over 17 years.

It was a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, with no hang-ups, no jealousies on either side. He was instrumental in raising funds for the support of AAPS activities at this critical period and in working to build AAPS relationship with the donor agencies on a more concrete, structured basis. The idea of AAPS regional workshop and of the AAPS Book Project came out of discussions he held with the Secretary-General in October 1985, when they sought to give their shared conception of AAPS mission a concrete, programmatic direction. They were encouraged in this respect by the ready reception this agenda received from the critical core of AAPS executive.

As we mourn the death of Emmanuel and celebrate the rich, purposeful and socially directed life he lived, we must not forget to express our appreciation of the immense contribution that Elaine, his wife and his extended family made to it, even as we express our heartfelt condolences to them. Elaine's contribution in particular is incalculable, providing Emmanuel with

the peaceful setting within which he always retired to reflect on the elusiveness of peace in the outside world. Theirs was a democratic relationship, reflecting the beauty of love and passion, and in which both found self-fulfillment and satisfaction.

What lessons? What strengths can we draw from the life of Emmanuel? He has left us a rich legacy of dedication and of faith in the power of reason, directed to the cause of the laboring poor and the democratization of social structures and processes. We must continue to pursue this noble, democratic cause. This we must do to keep Emmanuel's memory alive and living. For his life indeed epitomizes the epigrammatic quotation from Fanon which is reproduced in the frontispiece to his own book on Fanon:

*"We are nothing on earth if we are not,
first of all, slaves of a cause,
the cause of the people,
the cause of justice,
the cause of liberty."*