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**Title**

Colonialism and African Political Thought

**Permalink**

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**Journal**

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 19(2-3)

**ISSN**

0041-5715

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**Publication Date**

1991

**DOI**

10.5070/F7192-3016787

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## COLONIALISM AND AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Eghosa E. Osaghae

## Introduction

My task in this paper is a straightforward one. I want to argue that the body of ideas which is collectively labelled African political thought is essentially a product of the colonial process and the anti-colonial reactions to it by the first-order African elites who have today become African political "thinkers." This argument does not in any way appear to be novel, particularly from the point of view of those colonial apologists and their cohorts, mostly of a racial variety, who are quick to deny the existence of any autochthonous African system of thought before the advent of European colonization.<sup>1</sup> One immediately recognizes that it is the very fact of this denial that has led most Africanists to argue that colonialism did not bring forth Africa or its systems of thought. The result is that, in the general euphoria of establishing an Africanness, Africanists deny colonialism its proper place and create a veil over the actual contributions of the colonial situation to the development of what may aptly be called modern African political thought. As Richard Sklar puts it:

The veil of [anticolonial] radicalism enchants, mystifies, and ultimately deceives the unwary beholder. At this juncture in the development of African political thought, it hides the awful evidence of colonial descent.<sup>2</sup>

The point must be made at this stage that most Africanists who point to original African initiatives and autochtheneity of thought in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times glorify the African past and pretend, as it were, that the roots of modern African thought are to be found in the glorious past.<sup>3</sup> In such a scheme, colonialism becomes just one of those other experiences like the rise and fall of old empires, ageless inter-group relations, religious beliefs, indigenous socio-political organizations, etc. As such, it is argued, its contribution to the development of African thought must, indeed, be seen as part of an overarching whole which is essentially African, rather than a prime factor in the development of African thought. It is this observed haste by Africanist historians and thinkers alike to dismiss or undermine the

role of colonialism in African political thought that I examine in this essay.

#### A Lead: Is Colonialism an Episode or an Epoch?

A convenient starting point in considering the place of colonialism in African political thought is to examine the issue of whether colonialism in Africa was an "episode" or an "epoch." This intellectual debate has been instigated by Peter Ekeh's dismissal of the popular Africanist view, represented by the Ibadan school of social history and other pioneer African historians,<sup>4</sup> that colonialism was a mere episode in African historical experience, as an inadequate conception of the colonial imprint in Africa. To fully understand the issues involved in the contending paradigms, I shall examine in some detail the positions of the two schools of thought.

The episodic school, championed by pioneer African historians like Dike, Ade Ajayi, and Ogot, and given institutional representation by the Ibadan school of African history, emerged in the first-order generation of Africanist historians (in the early fifties) who had, as it were, to "re-write" and recreate African history, emphasizing in the process that Africa, contrary to what the colonizers made us believe, had a glorious pre-colonial past.<sup>5</sup> Before this time, the racial argument that the whites were the master race which had come to shoulder the responsibility of "civilizing" a barbaric and unknown Africa, peopled for the most part by an inferior black race, had been advanced to justify the colonialization of Africa. It was argued that until the advent of the Europeans, the Africans had no history of note, were preliterate and, indeed, were in a "dark continent." Even as recently as 1830/31, the celebrated philosopher, Hegel, had dismissed Africa as an irrelevant part of the world:

At this point, we leave Africa not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world: it has no movement or development to exhibit. . . what we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Underdeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the world's history.<sup>6</sup>

Colonial anthropologists based their studies on this kind of unsavory and degrading assertions. These anthropologists did well to assert that African history did not predate the African contact with the Europeans. Basically descriptive in their method, they ignored African initiative before and during colonialism, particularly the spate of

resistance movements against European colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Whatever concern was given at all to the African past emphasized the barbaric nature of inter-group relations (the so-called tribal wars), paganism, and human sacrifice, etc. Besides, where notice was taken of African civilizations like those of Egypt, Ethiopia, and even the empire-building in Western Sudan, these were attributed to the Hamites and the Semites of European or Asian stock who had supposedly brought "civilization" to Africa.<sup>8</sup> As colonial education was informed by the necessity of justifying the evils of colonialism, African history taught in schools was replete with European "discoveries" of Africa.

This was the unfortunate state which pioneer African historians encountered. At the time they emerged in the early fifties, however, strong anticolonial sentiments and ideologies had been instrumental in shaping such concepts as "Pan Africanism," "Nationalism," "African personality," and "Negritude." The period marked the dawn of an emergent Africanism. As products of this era, Africanists at the time turned inward to glorify the African past. They reminded us that in the pre-colonial times, the famous empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Benin, and Oyo, among others, flourished and that warriors like Chaka of Zululand, Jaja of Opobo, and others waged fierce wars against European domination. These, and many more, were resurrected to counteract the "denying" effects of colonialism. Based essentially on oral historiography, African history and civilization, including the emergence of empires and centralized authorities, was traced back many centuries predating colonialism.

Taking dates and periodization as strong virtues in historiography, the proponents of the Ibadan school of history reasonably reckoned that if colonialism lasted for only about seventy-five years (from 1885, the year of the partition, to 1960, the general year of independence for most of Africa), then, of course, in the context of Africa's long history, it would count for far less than is commonly claimed for it. It would suffice, proponents of this school argue, to say that while colonialism lasted, the Europeans were generally masters of the situation which brought about the loss of African political sovereignty, the transformation of their economies from those of subsistence to monetization, and in the profound social changes which attended the introduction of Christianity. But in spite of these far-reaching effects, the episodic scholars deny that colonialism marked an epochal watershed in African history. As Ade Ajayi, a foremost proponent of this school puts it,

. . . although the Europeans were generally masters of the colonial situation and had political sovereignty and cultural and economic dominance, they did not possess a monopoly of

initiative during the colonial period. To the extent to which Africans retained initiative, the ability of Europeans to make entirely new departures in African history was limited.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently,

in any long term view of African history, European rule becomes just another episode. In relation to wars and conflicts of people, the rise and fall of empires, linguistic, cultural, and religious change and the cultivation of new ideas and new ways of life, new economic orientation . . . in relation to all these, colonialism must be seen not as a complete departure from the African past, but as one episode in the continuous flow of African history.<sup>10</sup>

Many criticisms have been levelled against the episodic school. Its emphasis on dates and periods, it is said, distorts the reality of the colonial situation because, as Ekeh has argued, the major developments in colonialism shade across the dates of historiography.<sup>11</sup> For example, to take 1855 as the effective date of colonization is to undermine the profound effects of earlier Euro-African contacts, particularly in the slave trade and evangelization. With specific regard to the slave trade, it is not generally recognized (or the point is underplayed) that the trade accounted for the emergence of new power groups in pre-colonial African states, as new opportunities for status and wealth offered themselves; these emergent power variables in part account for the glories claimed for some of the old African empires.<sup>12</sup> From a purely theoretical point of view, the postulates of African historiography, particularly its emphasis on oral traditions, have been questioned.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, its anticolonial combative position has been said to be its central poverty:

. . . the poverty of our contemporary historiography is that its dominantly combative spirit has tended to divert it from the need to seek or distill the central meaning for us today of the African experience so far constructed. This preoccupation with defending the African image has diverted it from the need to contribute something to the explanation of "the condition of Africa question. . ."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most damaging criticism of the episodic school is that short of representing an ambitious anticolonial African perspective which emphasizes the restoration of a glory lost under colonialism, its

proponents have not progressed beyond this anticolonial position because, as Ekeh pungently remarks,

the school shows clear signs of exhaustion borne out of limited theoretical premises. At least its paradigm of colonialism has imposed severe limitation on its potential for further expansion and renewal.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding these far-reaching criticisms, however, we must accept that whether in terms of resistance movements to colonial conquest which finally culminated in independence movements, or in terms of colonial partnership as in British/African dyarchy under indirect rule, or even French and Portuguese assimilationist policies which required African participation, colonialism in Africa was not a case of total European domination. To this extent, we cannot but agree with Sklar that

at no time . . . were the colonial, or pre-colonial European agendas for Africa passively accepted by African leaders without protest, counter-proposals or initiatives intended to enhance the autonomy, power or security of indigenous African peoples.<sup>16</sup>

The colonial imprint must however be seen beyond the colonial situation. This is where Ekeh's conceptualization of colonialism as an epochal event scores its greatest intellectual victory. Ekeh's approach, to cite Sklar again, "marks a significant breakthrough toward post-colonial freedom in political thought and analysis because it acknowledges that colonialism produced 'enduring social formation.'"<sup>17</sup> Ekeh begins by distinguishing between various conceptions of colonialism. First, colonialism could mean the activities of European colonizers in the process of the conquest and rule of Africa. Properly speaking, he says, this is *colonization* rather than *colonialism*, and insists that it is this conception that informs the episodic school. Secondly, colonialism could mean the reactions of those who were subjected to European domination, to colonization. This clearly underlines the tone and tenor of Africanists. Yet a third conception, deriving from French collectivistic thought, particularly Georges Balandier's conception of the "colonial situation,"<sup>18</sup> is that colonialism is "the complex of the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, between the elements of European culture and of indigenous culture."<sup>19</sup> While this conception appears from a holistic viewpoint to be superior to the other two, its phraseology suggests a kind of systematic stability of colonizer-colonized relationships, attended by little or no recognition of conflict or contradictory realities, in such a

way that colonialism becomes a self-sustaining, stable system. Such a conception characterizes the structural-functionalist tradition for which French sociological thought is well known. This conception of colonialism is inadequate because the process of colonialism, apart from having a conflictual colonizer-colonized relationship, also hinges on the dialectics of capitalist expansion and the oppression of pre-capitalist systems, the imperative of industrial necessity in the colonial metropolises, and the demand for labor from the colonies.

It is in his fourth conception that Ekeh captures the epochal position of colonialism:

. . . in addition to the disparate activities of the colonizers and the colonized, and in addition to the . . . colonial situation, colonialism may be considered as a *social movement* of epochal dimensions whose enduring significance, beyond the life-span of the colonial situation, lies in the *social formations* of supraindividual entities and constructs. These supraindividual formations developed from the volcano-sized social changes provoked into existence by the confrontations, contradictions, and incompatibilities in the colonial situation.<sup>20</sup>

For Ekeh, then, colonialism is an epoch, comparable to such dominant world epoches as the industrial revolution and the French revolution. Like these other much more famous epoches, colonialism produced in Africa profound qualitative and supraindividual social changes, introduced massive and enduring social formations, and consolidated social structures. In addition, the significance of its structures has outlived the colonial epoch itself, and it has integrated Africa into the world system. The point is that since colonialism, "things have fallen apart," and post-colonial Africa bears little or no qualitative resemblance to the pre-colonial past. This certainly has to be the case, because with colonialism came the sacking of empires, segmentary and non-centralized societies, and their replacement by new states which were mostly artificial creations of the colonial masters; with colonialism came the introduction of western institutions and processes of government, Christianity, the one-man-one-wife maxim of western societies, the monetization of the economy and attendant capitalism which emphasizes the exploitation of raw materials for the colonialist metropolises, and, of course, the underdevelopment of Africa in the world capitalist system. Surely, with all these transformations which constitute the realities of post-colonial Africa, colonialism cannot be just one of those other episodes in African history.

Ekeh classifies the social formations resulting from the colonial epoch into three. First, there are what he calls the "transformed

indigenous social structures," "which, though they existed in the pre-colonial past, have taken on new symbolisms and meanings in the changed milieu of colonialism."<sup>21</sup> One important example here is chieftaincy and kingship. Under colonial rule, most traditional authorities had their powers increased, even to dictatorial levels and, in places where centralized authorities did not previously exist, "warrant chiefs" were appointed to foster colonial administration.

The second type of colonial social formations are the "migrated social structures" which were imported wholesale from the mother-colony countries.<sup>22</sup> These include the Western models of democracy, the rule of law, bureaucracy, universities, etc., which, to a very large extent, have developed a unique African feature from colonial times. Of particular importance is the fact that these institutions have lost their moral content which exists in their Western forms. This explains the spate of corruption and other vices which attend migrated political institutions in Africa. Furthermore, devoid of the moral and ethical impetus for self-refinement and expansion which attend them in Europe, these institutions and processes are generally immobile because of the "organizational fixation," as the Africans seek to keep the inherited traditions intact, ostensibly for excellence, at a time when their prototypes in Europe have advanced in positive directions.

Thirdly, there are the "emergent social structures" which were neither indigenous to Africa nor migrated from the colonial centers.<sup>23</sup> Rather, they emerged and developed, as it were, with colonialism "to meet societal needs which indigenous social structures and the migrated social structures could not fulfil in the new colonial environment."<sup>24</sup> These emergent structures have further distinctions: while the indigenous and migrated structures are mostly formal, emergent structures are informal and, secondly, they have an imprint of both tradition and modernity. The best examples of such structures are the ethnic groups and ethnicity which have since emerged as "modern" forms of tribe and tribalism. As Raymond Apthorpoe tells us, "what happened was that the colonial regimes administratively created tribes as we think of them today. . . ."<sup>25</sup> For example, he points out, the Baluhya of Western Kenya emerged between 1935 and 1945 as a "tribe" in the form of a colonial administrative unit. Similarly, Thomas Hodgkin has pointed out that "everyone recognizes that the notion of 'being a Nigerian' is a new kind of conception. But it would seem that the notion of 'being a Yoruba' is not very much older."<sup>26</sup> Obviously then, the present states of Africa and the loyalties claimed for them are, like the new ethnic realities, emergent social structures.

What all these point to is that colonialism in Africa was an epoch rather than an episode. There are some who even claim that "Africa," "Africanness," and "Africans" are all products of colonialism. This



means that colonialism *fostered* and *created* an African "sentiment of oneness,"<sup>27</sup> to use Nyerere's terms. He further observes that,

Africans all over the continent, without a word being spoken either from one individual to another or from one African country to another, looked at the European, looked at one another and knew that, in relation to the European, they were one.<sup>28</sup>

Mazrui rightly contends that the logical conclusion of Nyerere's view is that "it took colonialism to inform Africans that they were Africans."<sup>29</sup> While this may sound unsavory, it is nevertheless true that colonialism offered diverse peoples of the continent a rallying point for unity, a unity that has ever since come to clearly demarcate Africa and Africans from others. As Onigu puts it, "the humiliating and provoking exposure of subject peoples to European colonialism created a common set of attitudes and a system of reactive anticolonial thought characteristic of the African."<sup>30</sup> Of course, efforts have not been spared to prove that there existed enormous intergroup relations, particularly in the area of trade, amongst African peoples in the pre-colonial era. But this does not detract from the fact that, in terms of present world realities—of continents, peoples, and nation-states—Africa assumed a pan-continental (unity) outlook largely as a result of colonialism and the concerted efforts to end it throughout the continent. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), for example, was established

to counteract and contradict those who said that there was no Africa or who had divided Africa. . . . It is an attempt to work together for the pursuit of shared interests. Africa insists that it has the right to define its identity just as others do.<sup>31</sup>

In the final analysis, we must accept that colonialism is an epoch not only because this way it is easy to establish the colonial imprint on Africa, but more importantly because it provides an insight into an understanding of post-colonial political thought in Africa. It marks an important paradigm in the search for the roots of "modern," i. e., post-colonial, African thought because, as Sklar puts it:

Until the centrality of colonialism, its "epochal" nature and transformative influences have been deeply and objectively investigated by African scholars, the demon of colonialism—the psychology of dependence—cannot be exorcised from African political thought.<sup>32</sup>

### Colonialism and African Political Thought

Thus far, we have agreed that colonialism in Africa was an epoch. In this section, I want to examine more closely the colonial imprint on African political thought, with a view to finding out whether it can be divorced from the colonial milieu. Before doing so however, it is crucial to define African political thought. By African political thought, I mean the ideas propounded by leading African statesmen like Nyerere, Nkrumah, Senghor, Azikiwe, and Sekou Toure, who constitute what I consider the first-order generation of post-colonial African thinkers, and those propounded by Africans in the diaspora like Du Bois, Garvey, and Blyden. Obviously then, while recognizing that African political thought predated the emergence of these modern thinkers, my concern is with contemporary thinkers. Were I to justify this contemporary bent, I would argue that pre-colonial African thought was not manifestly political, as in the diffused milieu of precolonial African society, systems of thought were mostly amalgams of social, economic, cultural, and religious elements. In addition, modern African thought has the advantage of documentation which precolonial thought generally lacked. This clarification provides a necessary guide to the analysis which follows.

I shall take as a point of departure the issue of whether it is more appropriate to talk of African political thought or of political thought in Africa. Of course, as I have pointed out above, there is autochthonous African political thought, though, for the most part, it is very diffused and overlaps with economic, cultural, religious, and social systems of thought. Be that as it may, to the extent that my concern is with modern African political thought, the relevant question to ask is how African or original is African political thought? One view holds that the ideas which constitute African political thought are merely adaptations of universal ideas whose origins lie outside Africa.<sup>33</sup> This explains why it is almost always necessary to add the prefix "African" to these ideas—African socialism, African democracy, African personality, etc. Proponents of this view argue that we should talk of political thought in Africa because, as Minogue and Molloy persuasively argue, "African ideals have little originality. . . they are original in the sense that established ideas have to be adapted to an original environment and so may take on distinctive and chameleon-like quality."<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, there are those who argue that African political thought is essentially African and that although colonialism led to some changes, there was a continuous flow of Africanness because, as Olisa Awogu has argued,

continuity relates to the fact that political institutions and thought have, from their inception, retained basically their traditional roots, even though they may appear "new" as a result of their development over the years. On the other hand, "change" represents the "new" in this evolutionary process.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, most African thinkers insist that the roots of virtually every conception of thought in Africa is to be found in the indigenous pre-colonial African society. The most common postulation of this Africanism is the argument that the indigenous African society is communocratic and is based on the "we" group feeling which makes every man his brother's keeper rather than the "I" individualist feeling which is said to be the hallmark of Western capitalism. This communocratic character which is based on the extended family has been advanced to support the contention that African society is self-reliant, primarily classless, and socialist. Most conceptions of African socialism are informed by this premise. For Nyerere, African socialism is "rooted in our own past—in the traditional society which produced us. Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of 'society' as an extension of the family unit."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Senghor contends that "in the working out of our African mode of socialism, the problem is not how to put an end to exploitation of man by his fellow, but to prevent it ever happening, by bringing political and economic democracy back to life. . . ."<sup>37</sup> In this respect, the Kenyan Government Sessional Paper of 1965 is most assertive:

In the phrase "African socialism," the word "African" is not introduced to describe a continent to which a foreign ideology is to be transplanted. It is meant to convey the African roots of a system that is itself African in its characteristics. African socialism is a term describing an African political and economic system that is positively African, not being imported from any country or being a blueprint of any foreign ideology. . . .<sup>38</sup>

This theme of Africanness, of asserting that African ideas are autochthonous, is also to be found in the arguments preferred by proponents of the one party system. As Kwesi Armah puts it,

the one party system democratic state is not a subject of controversy in Africa. It is a matter of fact. It is a political expression of our African history and traditions, both of which are based upon a common allegiance to accepted purposes of society and to the basic principles of democratic centralism.<sup>39</sup>

One has however to look beyond the facade of autochtheneity to discover the real reasons for the insistence on Africanness because, even if we say that African ideas are original, the universality and non-African origins of most of the themes make such a claim controvertible. To be properly understood, most of the ideas in African political thought should be situated in the colonial milieu. Basically, these ideas are generally anticolonial and possess what I call a "replacement syndrome," a tendency to replace, as it were, European ideas with "authentic" African ideas. This is done, first, with a view to capturing and justifying the anti-colonial mood, a carry-over of the independence movements, and secondly, to justify the claims of the first-order African rulers to come to power. As Ekeh puts it, the African ruling class "accepts the principles implicit in colonialism but it rejects the foreign personnel that ruled Africa. . . In order to *replace* the colonizer and rule its own people, it has invented a number of self-interest begotten theories to justify that rule."<sup>40</sup> It is these "theories" that today form the major substance of African political thought.

What are the implications of this replacement syndrome? First, it means that while African thinkers accept the Western postulates, they have to employ them both to fight the colonialists and neocolonialists (paying them back in their own coins) and to adapt them to the African situation (at least, because Africa has become an indelible part of the world system). But in this scheme, the Africanists insist on their African personality. This explains why, as I have already pointed out, it is necessary to add the prefix "African" to most of the ideas postulated. We shall however take the example of nationalism. A product of Western political thought, nationalism recognizes the right of every people to self-determination. As such, it quickly became the ideology of independence movements in Africa as African thinkers exploited the contradiction in the concept in the colonial situation. While, on the one hand the Europeans reaffirmed their belief in the right to self-determination in the course of the Second World War, on the other hand they denied the Africans this universal right. The ideology of nationalism also informed Pan-Africanism which aimed not only at African unity but also at the total liberation of the African continent from colonial rule. In the immediate post-colonial period, however, nationalism became an ideology for unity for the emerging nation-states aimed at making nationals out of the disparate peoples who made up the new "artificial" states. This post-colonial use easily served the African leaders' claims to power as they became master nation-builders. Consequently, any challenge by institutionalized opposition to national unity came to be seen as inimical to the all-important task of holding the

nation together. Nationalism therefore became a subtle justification for one-party systems.

Secondly, the replacement syndrome suggests that African political thought has little significance outside the colonial milieu. Consequently, most of the themes of African thought have had to be reviewed to be relevant in the post-colonial period. As Minogue and Molloy put it, "many of the . . . ideas were expressed in a context in which they were divorced from political responsibility; they were ideas which could only be implemented in the future, when political power came."<sup>41</sup> Sklar is even more precise:

[Contemporary African theorists have] pursued the goals of racial emancipation, cultural development, and political independence to the end of the colonial era. Now the historic framework of colonial and anticolonial theorizing has become an impediment that exerts negative pressures on the process of creative thought. It is largely irrelevant to the issues and problems of the post-colonial world, and restricts the scope of moral and scientific enquiry. For a conceptual breakthrough, it has become necessary to break away from the colonial/neocolonial fixation.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, African political thought is marked by a wide gulf between form and reality or between theory and practice. The unfortunate result of this is that much of the thought has a fluid and changing nature.<sup>43</sup> The point, of course, is that as most of the theories are propounded by individual statesmen, the scope for contradictions and discontinuities in thought is quite large, especially as these statesmen move from the colonial to the post-colonial periods where the realities are markedly different. Soon after becoming independent, African statesmen found, to their chagrin, that the necessities of their new states—economic development, political stability, and national unity—could hardly be met by the theories of anticolonialism. In the wake of the stark realities, most advocates of democracy quickly became disciples of the one-party system, stifling all forms of opposition. The argument was that the new states had to remain united to harness available resources for economic development, and that, anyway, since traditional African society was conformist, institutionalized dissent or opposition was alien to Africa. Then, ambitious blueprints like Tanzania's "*Ujamaa*" and Uganda's "Common Man's Charter" were drawn up to emphasize the facts that development has to be inward looking, has to be everyone's responsibility, and that there is an authentic African approach. The call everywhere was for mass mobilization of the populace, discipline, sacrifice, and self reliance, all

of which amounted to no more than legitimizing the claims to power of the emergent ruling class.

Fourthly, the replacement syndrome has led to the denial of whatever was alien and, therefore, European. Such denials were usually in proportion to the immediate needs of the ruling class. First, the likes of Senghor, Nyerere, Armah, and Keita have denied that classes ever existed in Africa. The inherent class struggle in capitalist societies, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, is said to be absent from Africa. The argument obviously is that the indigenous African society is communitarian and that, therefore, there is no talk of ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, of surplus value, or of profit. It was in the effort to prevent such divisions that most African leaders frowned at trade union movements. Even such a professed "scientific" socialist as Nkrumah, who has produced a treatise entitled *Class Struggle in Africa*,<sup>44</sup> stultified trade unionism in Ghana. Apart from rejecting the capitalist model, African leaders, in spite of the "socialist" programs of many of them, have also rejected doctrinaire socialism which rests on the inevitability of conflict. The rejection of the capitalist and socialist models is an anticolonial hangover which, in order to reiterate the African personality, makes the African leaders seek to be neutral of, or non-aligned to, either of the two dominant world ideologies. This same attitude has been manifest in the cultural revivalist programs which have sometimes taken on continental, even global, dimensions.<sup>45</sup> Everywhere, the craving is for an African identity.

Finally, the obvious discontinuities in African political thought can be attributed to the fact that as ideas were individualized by statesmen, given the replacement syndrome, the major ideas tended to die natural deaths with the demise of the first-order thinkers. The fire of Pan-Africanism, for example, has tended to burn out with the death of Nkrumah who was a radical advocate of political union for African states. Taking root in the last years of the 19th century, Pan-Africanism was a major theme of African thought from about 1900 to the early 1960s and was championed by such eminent thinkers as Marcus Garvey, Edward Blyden, William Du Bois, and Kwame Nkrumah. But since the formation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963, Pan-Africanism continues to exist only to the extent that the organization symbolizes African unity, in spite of its incipient weaknesses which result from the divergent and almost irreconcilable positions of different African states. Remarkably, not much theorizing of Pan-Africanism exists today, probably because, as Elenga M'buyinga points out "it set out to provide a set of political and philosophical ideas for the guidance of African peoples in their struggle for liberation, independence and unity, a struggle for independence within the unity of Africa."<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, this is another case of colonial immobilism. Like Pan-Africanism, the theories of African socialism, Negritude, and nationalism have become stagnant largely because the Kenyattas, Senghors, Nkrumahs, and Azikiwes have either died, been thrown out of office, or have relinquished their offices. The successors to these first-order thinkers have been so heavily saddled with the harsh realities of underdevelopment that they have had little room for unrealistic theories. This is the unfortunate development in African political thought.

What all this means is that, unoriginal as most of the ideas in African political thought are, they have suffered from the immobilism of conquering the colonial situation. As such, although the immediate problem is that of economic underdevelopment, the African thinkers still heap the blame on neocolonialism, a subtle form of colonialism which does not require the colonizing power to physically occupy the colonized territories. To be sure, however, neocolonialism is a continuation of the colonial phenomenon. This aptly demonstrates the ineptitude of modern African political thought.

#### Post-colonial Freedom of Thought: Towards New Horizons

The failure of the theories of African thinkers to come to grips with present realities and necessities has reinforced the need to look beyond the replacement syndrome which summarizes the colonial imprint on these theories. Fortunately, the new breed of Africanists has sought new grounds in a radical perspective which leans heavily on Marxist-Leninist postulations. The language of these theorists—Samir Amin, Okwudiba Nnoli, Mahmood Mamdani, Bernard Magubane, Claude Ake, Omafume Onoge, and others<sup>47</sup>—is much more universal, and consists of the application of Marxian dialectical materialism to the African situation. Simply put, they argue that the capitalist forces have permeated Africa, that class contradictions exist in Africa, that African underdevelopment is produced and engendered by its dependent status in the world capitalist system which itself is a product of colonialism, and that only a resolution of the contradictory forces, within Africa and between it and the world capitalist system, can lead to development. So attractive is this perspective that some African states adopted Marxist-Leninist ideologies—Ethiopia, Benin, and Angola, for example. But these states have yet to make remarkable progress presumably because their economies remain tied to the capitalist metropolises of the world, a situation which started under colonialism.

In spite of the radical stance of African Marxists, they also suffer from a certain kind of intellectual dogmatism which renders most of their tools for analysis sterile in the African situation. As it were, these theorists religiously apply the "scientific truths" of Marxism to Africa and seek to make them applicable. This way, they shade over the peculiarities of African development, like the fact that various forms of pre-capitalist modes of production continue to exist in Africa, that the peasantry is the dominant oppressed class, that the "international" bourgeoisie rather than the national bourgeoisie, which is actually a "comprador" one, actually controls the economies of the new states. Even where they recognize this, as many of them undoubtedly have, they continue to heap the blame on colonialism. To a large extent, African Marxism has not also moved beyond the replacement syndrome.

It would seem, then, that colonialism has implanted an indelible mark on African political thought. It should be clear by now that whether we talk of African political thought or of political thought in Africa, the colonial epoch reveals that most African ideas are far from being original. It only remains to add that, until the replacement syndrome is overcome, African political thought will remain heavily dependent on the colonial and neocolonial experiences of the African peoples. As long as this remains the case, the form and reality of modern African thought will continue to be widely divergent and contradictory.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Fortes and Evans-Pritchard have, for example, argued that "Africans. . .do not analyse their social system; they live it. They think and feel about it in terms of values which reflect in doctrine and symbol, but do not explain, the forces that really control their social behaviour." See M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political System* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>R. Sklar, "The Colonial Imprint on African Political Thought," in G. M. Carter and P. O'Meara, *African Independence: The First Twenty-five Years* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and Hutchinson, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>This is the argument of the episodic school of thought which I consider shortly.

<sup>4</sup>The Ibadan school of history emerged in the fifties and sixties to defend the Africanist view of a glorious past. Its champions included Professors Kenneth Dike and Jacob Ade Ajayi. Other pioneer African historians like Alan Ogot had the same inclination.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); J. F. Ade Ajayi, "The Continuity of African Institutions Under Colonialism," in T. O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes of African History* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968); B. A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo* 1, Nairobi, 1967, 3 etc.

<sup>6</sup>This was part of Hegel's 1830-31 Jena Lectures. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1944), p. 99.



<sup>7</sup>The best examples of such anthropological studies are to be found in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems*. The only exception, perhaps, was Raymond Buell's study in which he gave attention to early anticolonial movements. See R. Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1928).

<sup>8</sup>For origins of racist attitudes toward Africa, see E. R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1969.

<sup>9</sup>Ade Ajayi, "Colonialism: An Episode in African History," in J. G. Roland and P. College (eds.), *Africa: The Heritage and the Challenge* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publication, 1974), p. 230.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Peter Ekeh, *Colonialism and Social Structure*, University of Ibadan Inaugural Lecture, 1980 (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>This was particularly true of the forest kingdoms like Benin and the coastal city states like Opobo.

<sup>13</sup>See A. E. Afigbo, *The Poverty of African Historiography* (Lagos: Afrografika Publishers, 1977).

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>Ekeh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup>Sklar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>18</sup>According to Georges Blandier, the colonial situation refers to "the domination imposed by a foreign minority, racially (or ethnically) and culturally different, acting in the name of a racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority dogmatically affirmed, and imposing itself on an indigenous population constituting a numerical majority but inferior to the dominant group from a material point of view." See Blandier, "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach," in I. Wallerstein (ed.), *Social Change: The Colonial Situation* (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 34-57.

<sup>19</sup>Ekeh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 12-17.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>R. Apthorpe, "Does Tribalism Really Matter?" *Transition*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 1968, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup>T. Hodgkin, "Letter to Biobakuw," *Odu*, No. 4, 1957, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>Julius Nyerere, "Africa's Place in the World," in *Symposium on Africa* (London: Wellesly College, 1960), p. 149.

<sup>28</sup>*Loc. Cit.*

<sup>29</sup>A. Mazrui, "On the Concept of We are all African," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LVII, No. 1, March 1963, p. 90.

- <sup>30</sup>O. Otite, "Introduction: The Study of Social Thought in Africa" in O. Otite (ed.), *Themes in African Social and Political Thought* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978), pp. 11-12.
- <sup>31</sup>L. Rubin and B. Weinstein, *Introduction to African Politics: A Continental Approach* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 5.
- <sup>32</sup>Sklar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24.
- <sup>33</sup>See, for example, M. Minogue and J. Molloy "Introduction" in Minogue and Molloy (eds.), *African Aims and Attitudes: Selected Documents* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974). See also R. W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- <sup>34</sup>Minogue and Molloy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.
- <sup>35</sup>Awogu, *Political Institutions and Thought in Africa: An Introduction* (New York: Vantage Press, 1975), p. 9. This argument dominates most of the speeches and writings of most African leaders. For a collection of these see Minogue and Molloy, *Op. Cit.* Also see G. M. Mutiso and S. W. Rohio (eds.), *Readings in African Political Thought* (London: Heinemann, 1975).
- <sup>36</sup>J. Nyerere, "Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism," in W. Friedland and C. Rosberg, Jr. (eds.), *African Socialism* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 238-47.
- <sup>37</sup>L. S. Senghor, *On African Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 36.
- <sup>38</sup>See "Documents on Kenya," in Minogue and Molloy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.
- <sup>39</sup>K. Armah, *Africa's Golden Road* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 63.
- <sup>40</sup>P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Development of Citizenship in Africa: A Study of Ideologies of Legitimation," in O. Otite (ed.), *Op. Cit.* pp. 305-6.
- <sup>41</sup>Minogue and Molloy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.
- <sup>42</sup>Sklar, *Op. Cit.* p. 22.
- <sup>43</sup>For this same view, see Otite, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.
- <sup>44</sup>Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa* (London: Panaf, 1970).
- <sup>45</sup>To date, two world black and African festivals of arts and culture have been held. The first took place in Dakar, Senegal, in 1965, and the second, in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1977.
- <sup>46</sup>E. M'buyinga, *Pan Africanism or Neo-Colonialism: The Bankruptcy of the OAU* (London: Zed Press, 1982). p. 34.
- <sup>47</sup>See, among others, C. Ake, *Social Science as Imperialism* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1979); also see his *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa* (London: Zed Press, 1978); Njongola-Ntalaja, *Class Struggles and National Liberation in Africa* (Roxbury, Mass.: Omenana, 1983); Y. Barongo, *Neocolonialism and African Politics* (New York: Vantage Press, 1980).