

NATIONALISM AND TRANSFER OF POWER IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

African nationalism is the recognition of the primary and inalienability of Africa's interests, it is also the recognition of the fundamental rights of African nations to control their economic systems in the interests of their own people; in the political sphere the recognition of the sovereign rights of African states in so far as such states do not compromise the independence, unity and integrity of Africa. Throughout the period in which Africans fought for independence, the hope was that with the transfer of power and political freedom it would provide the indigenous people the opportunity to develop their societies. Barely half a century after independence, however all hope of a greater tomorrow has virtually evaporated. Thus the paper examines these deficiencies and also explains why nationalism and transfer of power has failed woefully. It adopts the qualitative methodology and deploys data from secondary sources. The paper argued that the continent's opportunistic urban elites, many of whom had actually served in one way or another in the colonial system, looked forward to replacing the departing Europeans and using the evacuated structures of colonial hegemony for their personal enrichment. The kind of African leaders that power was bequeathed to lack the in-depth understanding, political ingenuity and moral fortitude needed to galvanize the continent away from the looming apocalyptic path of decolonization. It recommends that Africa should look inward and find lasting solutions to their problem and concept of African solution to African problem should be pursued vigorously.

Keywords: Nationalism, Transfer of Power, Africa, Colonialism and Decolonization.

INTRODUCTION

As colonialism took form in the various part of Africa, nationalist agitation arose in the different territory. Nationalism is the agitation by indigenous for movement in, and control of their affairs. It was a consequence of colonialism in Africa because it was colonialism that created the nations in the first place. As such, it can be distinguished from earlier native agitations against European expansion into Africa or those against colonization of the continent.

Nationalism means identifying politically first and foremost with your country. Specifically, nationalism connects through links that are forged when become sentimentally attached to the homeland. Nationalism is an ideology. Like all other ideologies, nationalism is a set of related ideas that established values that is good or bad, direct adherents on how to act (patriotism), link together those who adhere to the ideology and distinguish them from those who do not (Rourke, 2008: 104).

Nationalism is such a pervasive mindset in the world today that it is difficult to believe that it has not always existed. Certainly, there have always been cultures that define people. It is also true that people have lived in one or another type of political unit as far back as we can see in history.

The triumph of nationalist movement led to many African countries gaining her independence from late 1950s to 1960s that now heralded to what is now been referred as the postcolonial state in Africa. What is the current state in Africa after the nationalist struggle? Is Africa still going through another recolonization process? What has been the fate of African countries in the post colonial state? These questions are begging for answer. It is against this background that this paper will exclusively look at nationalism and transfer of power in Africa.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT

Less than a decade after most African countries got their flag independence, some of their leaders became acutely aware of the corrosive effects of neo-colonialism. To counter this problem, they attempted a cocktail of cultural, economic and political policies to neutralize the negative effect of colonialism as far back as the cause of Berlin conference of 1884-85. Leaders of African's independence movement knew, and to some extent accepted, their limitations in trying to redraw the debilitating maps drawn arbitrarily in the Berlin conferences, but they didn't entirely give up. They were not only passionate about their countries; they were also largely well-educated, cerebral and innovative. To supplant the destructive impact of colonialism on the African mind, these leaders promoted the ideals of Pan-Africanism in order to give the continent an identity, instill confidence in young Africans, and give them a reason to look forward to a greater tomorrow where they could stand tall and equal with the young of any other continent, especially Europe and America. Barely half a century after independence, however all hope of a greater tomorrow has virtually evaporated. Not only are the continent's current leader half-educated daydreamers

and cannot, therefore, tell the difference between colonialism on one hand and neo-colonialism on the other hand, they are simply too desensitized to dangers of harmful external influences to care what happens to the continent or how its people are regarded by the rest of the world.

The joyful moment of independence was cut short after African countries were faced with the issue of paucity of funds and nations building shortly after independence, they have no option rather to fall back to their colonial masters to bail them out. The crops of African leaders we have could not look inward to see how we can drive that concept of African solution to African problem.

It should be stated clearly that coming of globalization which is the new imperialism in disguise also truncated African state, it equally made African state very weak in political, economic, social and cultural terms.

NATIONS AND NATION – STATE

In the world today political division rest in great part on three concepts: nation, nationalism and nation – state.

Nations: a nation is a people who share demographic and cultural similarities, possess a feeling of community (mutually identify as a group distinct from other groups), and want to control themselves politically. A nation is a soul, a spiritual quality (Renan, 1995: 7). Such a nation is intangible; it exists because its members think it does. Examples of some nations in Nigeria are the Igbo nations, the Yoruba, the Ijaw, Hausa – Fulani, Edo, Urhobo nation etc.

Nation – State: A third element of our traditional way of defining and organizing ourselves politically is the nation – state. It is a combination of nation with that of state. A state is a country, a tangible institution, a sovereign (independent) political organization with certain characteristics, such as territory, a population, and a government. Nigeria and Ghana, for example, are states. Ideally, a nation – state is one in which virtually all of a nation is united within the boundaries of its own state, and the people of that state overwhelmingly identify with the nation (Rourke, 2008: 105).

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECT OF NATIONALISM

Nationalism has been a positive force, but it has also brought despair and destruction to the third world nations which African countries are part of.

Positive Nationalism: Most scholars agree that in its philosophical and historical genesis, nationalism was a positive force. It continues to have a number of possible beneficial effects and many defenders (Conway, 2004). Nationalism promotes democracy in the sense that it is the major form in which democratic consciousness expresses itself in the modern world (O’Leary, 1997: 222). The logic is that nationalism, at least in so far as it is rooted in the

nation of popular sovereignty, promotes the idea that political power legitimacy resides with the people and the governors exercise that power only as the agent of the people.

Nationalism discourages imperialism in that it strengthened the resolve of other countries and their nations to resist foreign domination. A century ago, the establishment of a colonial government controlled by the victorious power might have followed a conflict such as the apartheid in South Africa which was dismantled through radical nationalism in 1994.

Negative Nationalism: For all its contributions, nationalism also has a dark side.” Militant nationalism is on the rise”, Bill Clinton cautioned early in his presidency in 1994. He warned that “it is transforming the healthy pride of nations, tribes, religious and ethnic groups into cancerous prejudice, eating away of States and leaving their people addicted to the political painkillers of violent and demagoguery” (Nye, 2008: 117 – 118).

Clinton’s statement is a true picture of what is happening today in most African and Middle East nations, Nigeria inclusive. Each year, millions of people are forced or seek to flee their homes due to political and religious violence, poverty, and other forces beyond control.

AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND TRANSFER OF POWER

African nationalism is the recognition of the primary and inalienability of Africa’s interests. In the economic sphere, African nationalism is the recognition of the fundamental rights of African nations to control their economic systems in the interests of their own people; in the political sphere, the recognition of the sovereign rights of African states in so far as such states do not compromise the independence, unity and integrity of Africa. Culturally, African nationalism recognizes the primacy of African cultural formations without, at the same time, denying itself the right to draw on the utilized creativity, the cultural achievements of non – Africans. In other words African nationalism implies the existence of well-defined African interests, as well as of a level of consciousness sufficiently developed to recognize these interests, their primary and inalienability (Wilmot, 1972: 149).

The activist of the 1950s plunged into their chosen road of nationalism, seeing this as the only available guarantee of a source open to progress. They accepted the aim of building nation – states on the British model (or, later, on the French) because, as it seemed to them and as they were strongly advised, there could exist no other useful objective. Nkrumah’s advice that they should seek the political kingdom, and all would be added to them, expressed a colonial maxim of which the truth appeared self – evident: once sovereignty was seized by Africans no matter what conditions, the road to freedom and development would be theirs to follow (Davidson, 1992: 162).

No doubt, it was inevitable that such warnings fell on deaf ears. Along with the nation – states as necessary aim and achievement, the legacy of partition was transferred practically intact, partly because it seemed impossible to reject any significant part of the legacy and partly as one is bound to think in retrospect, because there was as yet no sufficient understanding of what the legacy implied. There were political thinkers, true enough, who

understood that the colonial partition had inserted the continent into a framework of purely artificial and positively harmful frontiers. There were others who perceived that a petty – bourgeois nationalism was bound to remain a nationalism subordinate to external powers organized a capital owning and capital commanding basis (Davidson, 1992: 163). But the later group was few, and their voices feeble in the great resounding chorus of anti colonial agitations that were now heard on every side.

In its essence, this 1950s and 1960s nationalism had far less to do with any national cause than with demands of a social nature and content. According to Jacques Rabemananjaram, the Malagasy nationalist (1958);

“In today’s political vocabulary the word Nationalism means, generally, the unanimous Movement of coloured people against Western domination”.

What fired African nationalists, in short, was never an imagined spectacle of the beauties of the sovereign nation – state, but the promise that the coming of the nation – state would strike away the chains of foreign rule and all that these had meant in social and moral deprivation. In the sense, the language of the Europeans concerning nationalism, as applied to Africa is faulty and misleading.

What the nationalists of the 1950s and 1960s inherited was thus a crisis of social disintegration. By 1955, it was already palpable. ”There is no social disintegration”. Davidson (1993) wrote in *The African Awakening*: It is patent in a thousand ways, in the breakdown of tribal customs, in the astonishing inflation of bride price, in the vast spread of prostitution. It has painful Results for African agriculture. It speeds the ruins of Village life.

These observations were really an understatement, but the major consequence came clearer a little later. By the early 1960s, there had appeared on the scene a deepening structural malfunction – between an impoverished Countryside and indignant “Urbanism” that was to bulk ever more largely on the agenda of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Davidson, 1992: 191). Accepting the nation-state that was offered them, the pioneering nationalists saw no useful alternative and asked no further questions about its credentials or potentials.

One needs to bear in mind, furthermore, the general sterility and helplessness of imperial attitudes concerning the issue raised by winding up colonial empires. The British in West Africa brought a handful of the “educated elite” into legislative councils, but avoided as far as they could any who spoke in the language of the new nationalism, preferring “reasonable men” who could not rock the colonial boat. This indulgence in “advisory democracy” had almost no influence on the upheavals that were about to take place (Davidson, 1992:105-6). Eager to rid colonial rule along the only route now open to them – the route of nation- statism on European model – the new nationalists were in any case left to conduct their struggle on their own. Some of the best of them, during the 1950s saw the dangers of this “neo-colonialist” nation-statism. They argued and press for interterritorial federalism. They tried to

devise ways of rejecting the carapace of the colonial frontiers. They formed ambitious interterritorial movements – for example, the multi territorial Rassemblement Democratique Africain in French West and Equatorial territories, the Pan-African Freedom Movement in the British East and Central territories – but they formed them in vain. Neither the imperial powers nor ambitions unleashed among the new nationalists themselves were ready for such visionary initiatives, while the imperial powers, just in case the vision might become real, positively worked for their destruction (Davidson, 1992).

COLONIALISM AND THE AGITATIONS OF TRANSFER OF POWER

While one may argue that colonialism sought to civilize Africa and bring the continent into the modern global system, the evidence points to trade and commerce as the primary objective of the European countries that decided to partition the continent among themselves in the late 1800s. As argued by Lord Lugard (1926), a British colonial officer of great distinction and influence;

“African colonies were expected to serve as a critical source of raw materials for industries in Britain, as well as markets for excess outputs from their factories (Quoted in Inhovbere, 2003:2)”.

With their comparative advantage in military technology and thus in the employment of force, the Europeans were able to impose on the citizens of each colonial institutional arrangements that allowed them to exploit the territory’s environmental resources for export to the metropole. Peaceful co-existence in each colony was achieved not through the development (with the partition of all relevant stakeholders group) and the adoption of locally focused and socially beneficial laws and institutions but by force. Colonial institutional arrangement then, was not democratic, nor were they participatory, accountable to the people, or transparent (Ihovbere, 2003).

Throughout the period in which Africans fought for independence, the hope was that with the transfer of power and political freedom and the departure of Europeans would provide the indigenous people the opportunity to rid their societies of European laws and institutions and that in their place, the people would develop, through indigenous democratic constitution making, governance and economic structures based on their values, and aspirations.

Mbaku (1998: 3) posit that, the belief of the people was that with the transfer of power from the colonialists, the state would be reconstructed through democratic processes and new dispensation created. The new post-independence dispensation would be one that was locally focused, on indigenous structures, and design to generally enhance the ability of Africans to govern themselves and deal effectively with their collective choice, problems, live together peacefully, and generate the wealth needed to confront poverty and deprivation.

The view that the postcolonial state would be a people – oriented structure that place the welfare of the people ahead of all other considerations was not shared by all Africans, as evidenced by the relatively high levels of political opportunism that have pervaded public policy in most of the continent during the last 40 years.

EUROPEAN TRANSFER OF POWER TO AFRICAN LEADERS: THE AFTERMATH

Many Africans, especially those who had suffered the most and benefited the least from colonialism, saw independence as an opportunity to dismantled what had been the source of most of their exploitation and replace them with locally focused laws and institutions that enhance their ability to engage in wealth creating activities. The continent’s opportunistic urban elites, many of whom had actually served in one way or another in the colonial system, looked forward to replacing the departing Europeans and using the evacuated structures of colonial hegemony for their personal enrichment. Contrary to the expectations of popular forces immediately power was transfer, these elites failed to engage the people in democratic constitutionalism to reconstruct the state inherited from the colonialists and provide the new countries with relevant and more development – enhancing institutions (see Ihonvbere, 1994; Mbaku, 1997).

Taking a look at the last paragraph, one will see that the analysis perfectly fits the Nigerian situation. Oluwajuyitan (2013), in his comments on the Nation Newspaper Thursday, February 7, quoting British Prime Minister David Cameron speaking in Davos ahead of the G8 meeting, had complained about Nigerian squandered oil wealth;

“Oil Nigerian exports worth almost a hundred billion dollars, an amount more than the total budget of sub-Saharan Africa”.

Also making reference to Nigeria where a few years back “\$800 million discrepancy between what companies were paying and what the government was receiving for oil”, was discovered.

The evidence from the last 50 years in Africa points to extremely high levels of exploitation by opportunistic Politicians and Civil Servants. Both Military and Civilian regimes have devoted most of their efforts to economic plunder; suffocation of the masses, denigration of the popular forces, destruction of the environment, abuse of human right and impoverishment of minority ethnic nationalities (Mbaku, 1997).

RETROGRESSION AFTER THE EXIT OF THE NATIONALIST

The retrogression after the demise of the nationalist in Africa is so numbing and so nearly completes that that whispers are beginning to be heard in many European capitals that what is needed is a complete take over, decolonization. The consequence of the massive retrogression

is that future generations of Africans will become humiliatingly less globally competitive than their Europeans, Americans and Asian counterparts.

It wasn't too long ago that great minds worked on the continent, minds like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Tom Mboya, Amilaca Cabra, Kenneth Kaunda, Obafemi Awolowo et al, but their work was both too brief and sometimes inexpert to help create enduring ideological and institutional legacies for Africa's freedom and economic independence. Yet, for all their faults, it was never said of them that they were too stupid not to comprehend the denigrating impact of foreign influences.

In contrast today, there is hardly any African leader with the depth of understanding, political ingenuity and moral fortitude needed to galvanize the continent away from the looming apocalyptic path of decolonization. West Africa has become a barren landscape of short sighted leaders who can't tell the difference between leadership and feudalism. Even when few honest leaders come along, they lack the rigour to reclaim and promote the visions of past continental leaders. Ghana's present leaders, for instance, are the beacon for the sub-region but beyond offering their country technocratic competence, there is precious little else. Whatever they call vision today can't hold the candle to Nkrumah's vision. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia fought senseless civil wars, in spite of their poverty and Cote D'voire and Mali needed their former colonial master, France, to restore stability and order. And self-destructive Nigeria is, of course, boiling with largely self-inflicted and man-made sectarian cum social economic revolt.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

At this juncture, we think Africa has not come of age, rather we need recolonisation. From Central Africa to West Africa and even the Horn of Africa and the Magreb France has sustained its military presence and bases, and intervenes when the need arises. The relationship between France and its former colonies goes beyond military, however. In foreign policy and economy, the former colonies still look up to France. What else if not recolonisation. Thus, if the creeping recolonisation of Africa is not to become a fate accomplishment, Nigeria must experience revolutionary changes in order to offer the leadership necessary to reclaim Africa from its local and foreign oppressors and reposition its people for greater competitiveness in the coming decades.

Africa should look inward and find lasting solutions to their problem. The concept of African solution to African problem should be taken seriously. Civilization started with us and we have our own unique system which was very effective before it was distorted by colonialism.

For how long are we going to be recycling this blaming philosophy that African would have been better if we never experienced colonialism, it is a reality that we must face. We agreed that colonialism distorted the system but what of the crops of leaders that we have produced after independence? It is high time we hold our leaders accountable and ensure that good governance should be the order of the day.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is true that if we examine the experiences of Africa after the transfer of power during the last 60 years, we come with disappointment. The pioneering nationalists of the 1950's and the 1960's should have better considered where they were heading and should have understood that nation-states fashioned from the relationships and structures of colonial states, and thereby produced from outside the shores of Africa (Europe) and not from African history, were bound to be heading for trouble. Rather than generate ideas that would move the new states forward, the nationalists were busy generating ideas to exploit the state for their personal aggrandizement.

Thus, it is a misreading of the history of those years to suppose that the nationalists, or at any rate best of them, nourished any great idea (Positive) to the obstructive nature of the colonial legacy they were going to accept. They forgot the economic implications, just as it escaped their imperial powers. But they thoroughly understood its political and moral implications, for it was from those implications that they, as the object of colonial rule, had suffered. In attempting to resolve the contradiction between the requirements of Africa nationalism and the contemporary triangular super-power global relationship, Africa States should recognize from the outset that the issue is power: how to get it, how to hold it, how to increase it, how to use it.

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