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Interrogating Discursive Constructions of African Political History: From the Precolonial to the Postcolonial

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Whither is fled the visionary gleam,
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Oh for that historian who, with open pen of truth
Will bring to Africa's claim the strength of written proof.

– Pixley Seme, 'The Regeneration of Africa' (1906)

This chapter focuses on the constellation of idioms, ideas, and questions that scholars and practitioners have brought to the expanding literature on African political history. The present dialogue that is encapsulated in the quest for modernity has been as old as the rise of Black western-educated intelligentsia beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Through their writings, speeches and actions, the emergent generation of Black thinkers like Edward W. Blyden (1888), James Africanus Horton (1868:17-30), W.E.B. Du Bois, and others assumed the burden of advancing ideas for Africa's progress. The debate grew exponentially from the 1940s through the 1960s as the succeeding generations of African educated elite and leaders of opinion, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon, Cheik Anta Diop, and their peers continued the discussion.

Across time and space, the same questions originally raised among the inhabitants of the coastal enclaves of 'Victorian' Freetown, Lagos, Banjul, Monrovia, and Accra have been re-echoed by such writers as Chinua Achebe (1983; 2010b), Achille Mbembe (2001; 2010), and Toyin Falola (2001:19-20). How can Africa develop? Can Africa be self-sustaining? Can capitalism, liberal democracy, socialism and other socio-political 'isms' be redefined so that they can grow on African soil? The responses to these questions have crisscrossed a

wide range of issues, including the crisis of tradition (confusions over what is indigenous or alien culture), inherited political cultures such as western-style democracy and socialism, and the structures of power, ethnicity, corruption of leadership and failure. Other themes mirror widespread anxiety over democratic instability, dictatorships, and human rights abuse. As the discussion expands, the brand of ethnicity and ethno-nationalist consciousness engendered by colonial contacts has also been analyzed. There is further the contentious idea that African unity, in the form of mega statehood, holds the key to Africa's future. The quest for a 'United States of Africa' was originally pursued by the pioneers of modern African political thought, as represented by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana from the late 1950s through the 1960s (NAK FO 371/108193 1954; NAK DO 195/ 212 1963-1965). The movement was somehow revived and supported by Muammar Gaddafi (1942-2011) of Libya. In a 2007 African Union Summit in Accra, Ghana, Gadaffi called for 'an immediate formation of United States of Africa' (Accra Mail 2010).

The point is not necessarily that such visions as those held by Gaddafi were right or wrong. Rather, the problem is that by trying to mimic the European Union, the designs for Africa betray the lack of originality, while underestimating the resilient nature of the indigenous culture of decentralization and liberalization. At best, the quest for a single union brings to the debate nothing but an emotional endorsement of an alien system for African issues. As Achille Mbembe counsels in an insightful commentary on the 'postcolony', such views betray 'a tremendous labour of bad faith that social science discourse does not know how to deal with' (see Christian Hoeller 2001; 2010). W.E.B. Du Bois, in 1965, warned Africans, as a people, not to believe 'without an argument or reflection that the cultural status of the people of Europe and North America represented … the best civilization which the world has ever known' (Du Bois 1965:1-2). In other words, those engaged in the production of knowledge must consider synergies of Western/colonial practices that gave birth to the Leviathan state in Africa. Only when this caution is applied can thinkers offer practical steps for a more stable political order.

The approach to this chapter is to first take a quick look at pre-colonial political developments and leadership as a platform for elucidating and analysing the hybridized nature of contemporary African political systems. This will illuminate an understanding on the disorders and complications brought about by colonialism - and more importantly - allow us to reflect carefully on whether Africa has truly arrived at the end of the 'colony' or not. In the popular idiom of Chinua Achebe's picturesque writing, a grasp of the changes brought about by colonialism on the political culture of Black Africa will throw some light on when and how the rain of crisis began to beat the continent in the current order of things (*The Sun Newspaper* 2010; *The Standard Newspaper* 2010).

Epistemology and Genetic Code of Political Culture

African societies are marked by different patterns of cultural dynamics evolving over several centuries. One of the institutions that has continued to attract profound interest is the precolonial pattern of politics, which at present is encountered in diverse forms within village communal politics. In his pioneering study of the indigenous political systems in 1868, Horton identified three principal forms of governmental systems in west Africa, which also applies to other parts of precolonial Africa (Horton 1868).

In the first category were systems that vested power in a single individual called *basileus* or king. Such sovereigns as found among the Ashante (Asante), Bini (Benin), Oyo, and Dahomey kingdoms, for instance, enjoyed implicit power over life and property and were as such held in awe by their subjects. The kings were surrounded by a number of headmen, who pledged their loyalty to his power (Horton 1868:19). Horton's account of the exercise of power appears a bit embellished because the indigenous belief system provided astute checks and balances that made absolutism, as practiced in eighteenth century France, for instance, nearly impossible in Africa (NAE ONPROF/8/1/4702 1931; NAE CSE/1/85/4596A 1931; NAE AWDIST/2/2/177 1926; Feierman 1974).

While some governments were centralized, several others remained decentralized, meaning that they were not governed by hierarchical and powerful rulers. Notable among these were the Igbo (*anglicised* Ibo), Ibibio, Birom, and Angas of modern Nigeria, the Nuer, western Dinka, and Mandari (or Mundu) of Sudan, the Nguni of southern Africa, the Tonga of Zambia, the Lugbara of Congo, the Langi of Uganda, the Tallensi of modern Ghana, the Gikuyu (or Kikuyu) of Kenya, the Dogon of modern Mali, the Dan and Kru of the Guinea coast, the Berber of north Africa, the Fulani pastoralists of west Africa and the Mbuti, Efe, Aka or Baka pygmies of central Africa. Each of these groups organized their politics in village units (NAK CO 583/213/19 1936-37; NAK CO 927/158/3 1950). A number of the villages sharing a common history of descent made up a village group or town. In some areas, the towns and villages were typically presided over by a council of elders that in some places worked with a tutelary chief. Among the highly decentralized Mbuti, Efe and Aka (Baka) societies of central Africa, there were no such chiefs or even Headmen.

From the above, one may begin to underline the cultural fabrics of indigenous politics as an organic institution. First is the understanding that Africans were, and still are, politically very conscious or alert. This was also the apt observation made in 1965 by Sir Arthur Lewis (1915-1991), the eminent St. Lucien economist and 1979 Nobel Laureate who resided in Ghana from 1957-1963 as a UN economic adviser to the President of Ghana. Lewis noted that because of the strong interest in how the affairs of the state are conducted, popular participation should be the norm because no one powerful group can successfully dictate terms of political

co-operation for others. He advised the newly independent states to embrace non-majoritarian politics because each of Africa's 'numerous and politically conscious (ethnic) groups' are determined to control their separate destinies. He particularly recommended federalism, multiparty systems, grand coalition cabinets, and autonomy as the pathways to harmony (Lewis 1965:51). While this political wisdom had been tragically ignored by the governing elites, only a handful of scholars engaged in the analysis of postcolonial politics have shown commitment to the consociational/federalist approach to decentralization alluded to by Lewis.

The few exceptions that have attempted to bring this to prominence include works by Arend Lijphart (1998:144-150), Donald Horowitz (1991) and Andrew Reynolds (2002:40-47) – all non-Africans – that focus mostly on South Africa. The present writer has previously offered strategies for consociational building in Nigeria, and Rwanda (Njoku 1999:1-35; 2005:82-101). Recognizing the critical relevance of the consociational model of decentralization, Timothy Sisk, an expert on power sharing in multi-ethnic societies, has called for a 'Complex power-sharing arrangements' – an amalgam of the consociational and integrative approaches to power sharing in the politics of multi-ethnic societies. The system recognizes that at different levels of government, different strategies may be required in engendering peace and stability. It also seeks to underline the importance of all actors (both elite and non-elite) as being potentially instrumental to success (Sisk 1996:vii). This point problematizes the practice of liberal/majoritarian democracy in Africa as anchored in the results of elections. Elizabeth Clark (2003), an expert on democratic transitions, claims that it is time to rethink international norms and standards for democracy in non-western societies, and 'how transitional elections are evaluated'.

By way of emphasis, the second point to note, which is directly linked to the first, is that African politics is intricately wired with a micro-level culture of decentralizations as encountered with kinship, village, and town units. The system governed an estimated two-third of precolonial societies. The culture points to the amount of value with which the African cherished his natural freedom, human rights, and participation in the decision-making process of his land. It would amount to an error of romanticism to suggest in any manner that the indigenous politics was devoid of the usual rancour, backbiting, innuendos, and violent struggles that politicians in all human societies use to gain political advantages over rivals. These aspects of exercise of power were dynamic and often expressed more to preserve than to destroy social harmony. Among the Igbo, for instance, the procedure for counselling, gaining political advantage or shaping of public opinion was varied. Sometimes it followed the usual and secretive acts of political lobbying; in other times the elders employed more secretive but illegal forms of intimation, including threats, poisoning, and/or psychological warfare (NAK CO 927/74/5 1940-1947). Yet the most effective form of swerving public opinion depended upon the ability of the elders to deploy the wisdom of sages and

proverbs, a sober and thoughtful deportment of ideas – the kind harnessed by President Barack Obama to claim a historical victory in the 2008 US presidential elections.

Thirdly, African precolonial politics was founded on the principle of accommodation. As Victor Uchendu, the eminent anthropologist, illustrates with the example of his Igbo people, politics was approached as the mutual accommodation of differences; the concept of sovereign power was understood as everybody's business; the need to rotate power and authority among politically competing units was the philosophy of engagement; and the importance of political discourse among individuals was emphasized (Uchendu 1995). While management of diversity has remained a critical issue facing the postcolonial state, the precolonial politics showed how decentralization could moderate diversities with 'minimum consensus' rather than recourse to such strategies as suppression and genocide.

Fourthly, the principle of consensus implicates the concept of sovereign power as a mutual responsibility – a people-centred sovereignty. In this sense, a collective responsibility required that power should be and must be shared. African indigenous politics was concerned about domination, as a solution, rendering public debate among equals in the public square as an arena where open covenants are openly arrived at, and developing speech to pre-eminence over the instruments of power (Uchendu 1995). In contrast, the postcolonial state, like the colonial state, strives on practices of centralization and censorship on local movements for self-determination. This negates not only the established decentralized political culture of precolonial African states, but also promotes majoritarian tyranny. By viewing the development of the postcolonial state only through western lenses – that is the idea that modern statehood must conform to western models –, it appears as if there was no political life in the precolonial era. The retention of the colonial system tends to ignore the fate of those precolonial states like Zulu and the kingdoms of Oyo and Benin that were constituted by imperial force. As evident in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the troubles that plagued these kingdoms, imperial powers claimed control over sovereign minorities at their eternal peril. These empires could neither sustain the minorities' loyalties nor successfully assimilate them into the majority culture. That explains why precolonial boundaries of the state in Africa shifted too often. Such political alignments were a constant part of the dynamism integral to idioms of freedom, collective territorial sovereignty and individual and group rights (Njoku 2010:350-395).

From 1900 onwards when Africa encountered colonial authoritarianism and criminal use of state power, the postcolonial order was programmed for crisis and conflict. These problems that now mitigate efficient management of the postcolonial state began in the colonial period with Belgium's grand theft in the Congo, and Britain's robbery of master artworks from the kingdoms of Benin and Ife, among other examples (NAK WO 107/10 1897; Hochschild 1998).

Since leadership failures and corruption victimizes individuals and groups alike, colonialism further gave birth to postcolonial forms of ethnic nationalism. Politicians with vested interests began to mobilize group identities on the eve of independence. Writing in 1970 on the emergence of 'tribalism', Nkrumah (1970:59) stressed a distinction between 'tribes' (ethnic groups) and 'tribalism' (ethnicity). 'There were tribes in Africa before imperialist penetration, but no tribalism in the modern sense'. Tribalism arose from colonialism, which exploited the anxieties of competing groups to facilitate exploitation and combat the growth of national liberation movements. Differences between groups, therefore, were often deliberately encouraged by the colonial state when it served to strengthen the hands of administrators. This view has been re-echoed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009:16) when he argued that 'the notion of tribe was a colonial creation'.

Such arguments that blame colonialism for ethnic politics in Africa have remained as ever controversial especially in light of the contemporary debates among African leaders who have refused to recognize the crucial importance of addressing the issue in a positive rather than dismissive and uncompromising manner. Most instructive is the unwavering belief held by Samora Machel (former Mozambican freedom fighter) that 'For the nation to live, the tribe must die' (Mamdani 1996:135). This form of strong-headed dictum informed the treatment of ethnicity by both African leaders and intellectuals as an evil spirit that 'refuses to obey laws of social and political change' (Vail 1989:1-3).

The overriding analysis on ethnicity corroborates the primordialist/essentialist perspective on nationalism and separatist movements. In the popular 'tribal' idiom the primordialists claim that ethnic groups are givens; a sort of an 'archaic reality underlying modernity, resurfacing when modernization fails or cracks' (Pierterse 1996:27). Here is a good case of an attempt to obfuscate a social reality; the tragic continuation of the colonial state system of centralization rather than decentralization; the stubborn resolution to crush rather than respect the rights of minority groups like the Berber in Morocco, the Ogoni in Nigeria, and the Baka in the entire Central African region.

So far an attempt has been made to understand the livewire or what might be referred to here as the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of African politics and the context in which 'bad water entered into the coconut' (Igbo Proverb). Originally the indigenous society strived on political consciousness, popular participation in the decision-making process, decentralization, consensus and accommodation. While the precolonial order shared some characteristics of hot politics in other societies, it was however operated in a manner that primarily placed a premium on respect, accountability and social justice. Under colonial rule, things began to go awry following the introduction of the new dynamics of a political culture of intimidation, and criminal abuse of state power.

The challenge now is to highlight and interpret some of the diverse ideas scholars and commentators have brought to our conception of postcolonial

African political history. This exercise requires three main tasks: hermeneutic (a method or principle of interpretation), analytical (interpretative diagnostic), and critical inventory (factual deduction) (Hensbroek 1999:2-4). Observing these tasks will enable discourses in their proper families in order to grasp their inherent lessons. The implication for scholars is to note that although thinkers may be separated by decades or centuries, yet they share common ideological kinships. Three models of discourses can be identified: (1) the Contemporary Africa discourse, (2) the Liberated Africa discourse, and (3) Authentic/Regenerative Africa discourse (Hensbroek 1999:2-6). While each discourse may stride across two or more families of discourses, grouping them is necessary to enforce some measure of order.

Modern Africa Discourse

The discourse on 'modernity', which has become synonymous with remaking non-Western societies after western systems, as it applies to African people, has roots in the mid-nineteenth century Victorian optimism of intellectual figures like Africanus Beale Horton (1835-1882), who was one of the African émigrés and a pioneer in west African nationalism of Igbo parentage. Residing in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Horton was the first medical doctor of African descent employed in the services of the British army. Contrary to the claims of colonial anthropologists and the mainstream literature, Horton pioneered a study of West African indigenous political systems in the 1860s. With a degree in medicine from the University of Edinburgh in 1859, Horton shaped his ideas on the possibility of African progress – therefore integral to his thoughts for Africa was modernity. His detailed study, *West African Countries and Peoples*, outlined possible political arrangements for new states in West Africa as a blueprint for the Select Committee of British House of Commons appointed in 1865 to draw a report on the future of British West African settlements (Horton 1868).

While Horton, a Universalist thinker, disputed the idea of a separate identity for the African in the comity of human civilization, more to his credit is the submission that 'On historical, cultural and economic grounds, Africans are capable of self-government and national independence' (Horton 1868:24). In another essay, 'Refutation of the Alleged Inferiority of the Negro Race', he asserted that the 'Negro backwardness was not an intrinsic (problem) but the result of adverse circumstances and lack of opportunity (Horton 1868:17-18)' The 'opportunity' sought by Horton was for expansion of western-style education for the Negro. Yet historians counsel that a civilization is not tied to one specific way of life. Nor is it completely comprehensive through one specific method of analysis. This was predominant in the mind of Du Bois in 1919 when he wondered aloud whether 'a civilization is naturally backward because it is different?' (Du Bois 1971).

Speaking at the 2001 Ahiajoku lecture festivals, E. N. Emenanjo, a distinguished Igbo language icon and apparently a student of the modernization theory, described illiteracy as a deadly sin and a capital crime. Emenanjo then branded illiterate people 'liabilities with neither dreams, nor theoretical thinking, nor strategic planning' (Emenanjo 2001). He further maintained that illiterate people have neither focus nor durable ideals and they cannot use language to articulate ideas. 'They cannot engage in geometric reasoning and can neither be proactive nor synergize. They lack the effectiveness, and the desirable virtues needed to steer (Africa) into modernity and economic prosperity' (Emenanjo 2001).

Emenanjo overstated his point since western education is not, and cannot be, the only yardstick for measuring human wisdom and intelligence. Without Western education, precolonial Africans 'made and unmade gods and achieved accommodation with those they could not control' (Emenanjo 2001; NAK CO 583/213/19 1936-1937). This understanding explains the 'otherness' of African customs, its strength and contributions to the pool of human civilization. Emenanjo's error of words, however, should not be allowed to diminish the good intentions of that lecture, which included the point that this generation must recognize education as a tool for development (Emenanjo 2001). Civilization transcends large empires and monarchies, military campaigns and conquests, big feats and the subjugation of others. R. O. Ohuche, an eminent educationist hit the point with his contention that:

> Civilization for us is a mental construct populated by ideals, fired by ideas which are …. respect for traditional authority in age and in other institutions including constituted authority; the inscrutability and fear of God, reverence for life and the awe and usefulness of death; wisdom to appreciate that man, nations and civilizations are not great by the virtue of their wealth but by the wealth of their virtues; wisdom to distinguish between appearance and reality, and the ephemeral from the wastrel; from the permanent (Ohuche 1991).

In fact, the philosophy of modernity behind this model of discourse should be analyzed against the background of hope for advancement, prosperity, and independence. As Hensbroek (1999:34) aptly noted, 'it exemplifies in all its aspects the fiery and self-conscious discourse of a people who perceive themselves at the threshold of a new and better world'. African thinkers no doubt see society at the threshold of a new and better advancement. It is in light of this that scholars like Achebe (1983, 2010a); Ngugi (1993) and Wole Soyinka (1997) have called for the liberation of African, if possible by revolutionary means, from bad leadership, dictatorships and human rights abuse.

Liberated Africa Discourse

In the family of liberated Africa discourse models are those aimed at weaning ideas and thought processes from alien clouds. The liberated discourse is most

pervasive in the intellectual dialogue, given the resentment brought about by colonial domination and its erosion and reordering of every aspect of African life. Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah perhaps represent both symbols and spokesmen of the African liberated discourse, although each of them approached the question of African liberation from slightly different positions. While Fanon (1963:37-38, 41, 45, 51-52) saw the colonial world as a Manichean space of separation, compartments and alienation, and thus recommended a psychological method of cure through violence against the system, Nkrumah (NAK DO 195/212 1965) observed that underdevelopment and alienation are only symptoms of Africa's real problem, which is subjugation. Ngugi (1993:60-77) argues passionately that for the expected African renaissance to come, the writer in a neo-colonial state must align himself with the people through conformity to the language spoken by the people. If one relates the idioms of alienation, violence and subjugation to the burden of deprivations then we clearly begin to understand the need to also liberate the masses from unending practices of socioeconomic violence dating back to the 1900s.

With a strong passion for African progress, Achebe submits that the question of leadership is 'pre-eminent, in my view, among Nigeria's numerous problems' (*The Sun Newspaper* 2010). He thus charges that the youth should rise and bring about a new order through revolution. In a similar tone, Soyinka has condemned the succeeding dictatorial and undemocratic regimes in Africa in general and Nigeria particularly (Soyinka 2007). While neither Achebe nor Soyinka could be faulted from the standpoint of their Universalist discourse, they did not fully acknowledge the nuances of disconnection between precolonial political culture and the postcolonial hiatus brought about by colonialism.

This is where thinkers like Pixley Seme (1881-1951), and Casely J.E. Hayford (1866-1930), the famed Gold Coast lawyer, distinguished their thoughts as both students of the African Liberated Discourse as well as the Authentic African Discourse. For instance, Seme had argued in 1906 that it was completely wrong to compare Africa with Europe or any other place, asking whether Africa must be like Europe (Document 20 1906). Similarly, Hayford had decried this fetish act of 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others; of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (Hayford 1911:180). Such ideas are laudable and are set apart from the others because thinkers like Seme and Hayford are not ashamed to acknowledge their African identity, and thus tie the quest for progress with the historical realities of their local society. When people are unenthusiastic to acknowledge who they are, it implies among other things that they are ashamed of their past, their history, and their heritage. This tendency leads to a crisis of identity which ultimately leads to a crisis of institution. The point here is the angle on tradition, adaptation and continuity which by implication honours the ancestry of ideas. This reminds us of Emmanuel Obiechina's (1994) lecture on 'Nchetaka: The Story, Memory and

Continuity in Igbo Culture'. Given the focus on memory and continuity, this lecture could have fitted into the Authentic/Regenerative Africa Discourse. The relevance here is found in Obiechina's unshaken belief in the 'ancestry of ideas' and disbelief that there is a tree of universal civilization upon which one may graft an individual or group future at any stage or time. Such a narrow and idealistic notion of universalism, according to Obiechina, is mistaken.

There is no tree of universal civilization. What there is a universal garden where every people bring their own seed to plant and tend. The soil is indifferent. Every seed planted there will germinate and grow. How it fares will depend on how much skill, industry and conscious labour the group bring with them to tend and husband their tree. Some people will forget altogether that they have a tree of their own and will labour assiduously and sleepless tending other people's trees (Obiechina 1994).

Indeed, African scholars engaged in the political discourse have tended to tend political models nurtured in alien lands. Thus, a discourse of this nature framed by Obiechina to assert a 'We' and 'They' context is reminiscent of Fanon's perception of the colonial situation as a world of opposites. It is in this understanding that Fanon had offered his liberation discourse from the degradations of the alien culture and the psychological impact on the colonized people, offering violence as a medicine for overcoming the problem of African disunity and the attendant psychological ravages of alien oppression.

Authentic/Regenerative Africa Discourse

This model is a family of ideas designed to remind Africans who they are. Authentic discourse is intrinsically a discourse on identity, and as the example of Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in Apartheid South Africa, teaches, this genre of thoughts is intended to bring about a cultural renewal, to breathe new life into empty shells whose humanity have been degraded through racism, oppression and violence (Biko 1978:87-98). This was the true spirit behind the thoughts of Edward W. Blyden (1832-1912), the pioneer of authentic/regenerative African discourse, who laboured assiduously to create an African-centred or African renaissance discourse, a cultural self-consciousness that was aimed to counter the racialist abolitionist-humanitarian 'civilizers' discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While calling for efforts to improve conditions in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Africa in the face of the new impetus from Europe, Blyden was also an out-and-out cultural nationalist who extolled the indigenous culture for its authenticity, and thus he advocated for a program of progress that would be nurtured on African culture (Blyden 1878; 1908).

The wisdom inherent in Blyden's discourse stands out as an antithesis to the polemics of George Ayittey (1998), a Washington DC publicist who often blames the African political elite solely for the ills that have befallen the continent. While a portion of the blame for Africa's failures may as well be heaped on the feet of

postcolonial leaders, it is also true that visions held by postcolonial leaders like Nkrumah and Nyerere, to mention but two, have been imperilled by neocolonial and hegemonic practices of Britain, France, the United States of America, Belgium, Italy and Portugal (NAK DO 195/6 1961-1962; NAK DO 195/7 1961-1962; NAK DO 195/222 1965). In the postcolony, each of these western powers remains an ethnic group in their areas of influence. And woe betides any African leader who fails to acknowledge their vested interests in the economic, social and political lives of the emergent nations. Ayittey's error of judgment falls within what Stefan Andreasson (2005:971-986) has aptly described as the 'reductive repetition motif' in theories of African underdevelopment.

Indeed, African thinkers must strive to establish their knowledge on a sound historical foundation while avoiding the mainstream discourses produced with the neo-colonialist agenda of obfuscation and confusion. In this context, ethnicity, especially as it relates to Africa, remains one of the most abused concepts in politics in the postcolony. The common view on ethnicity has generally tended to follow a rather conformist notion that it is a bad omen, and an impediment to development and to political stability. Yet ethnic forms of mobilization and family-centric values are social capital that could be harnessed for socio-political advancement in Africa.

The road forward is to manage ethnicity with a high level of decentralization in the form of a village-based federal system. This paradigm will involve a combination of power-sharing principles with a high degree of decentralization and constitutional autonomy built on structures of African village networks. In the system, each village government will have the right to democratically elect its leaders and enjoy certain constitutionally guaranteed prerogatives as obtained in some federal systems. In other words, the existing structures of the state constituted in forms of sub-states or regional governments will be abrogated and replaced with village governments. Consequently, city capitals will be governed by municipal authorities of elected mayors. The form of grassroots decentralization advocated here will further the development of democracy by improving the quality of political participation which was an important element of social organization in precolonial Africa. This will create multiple centres of power that will involve a greater number of people in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Considering the resilience of kinship loyalties, this model holds one of the best prospects for a more peaceful political future in sub-Saharan Africa. While the envisaged peace will not be automatic, it is one of the most viable models that could provide the arena in which competing groups – ethnic, religious, professional, political parties, and so on – could seek accommodation in the decision-making process of their countries. The failure to explore the potential benefits of ethnicity and familism, and integrate these into policies and developmental programs substantially explains part of the reasons why the postcolonial state has been trapped in an unending spiral of crisis.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to examine the discursive constructions of African political history in order to highlight their inherent idioms for the continent's future. The major argument is that unless practitioners and thinkers fully grasp the tangled web of historical factors underlying the current order of things, thinkers may neither be able to appreciate nor provide a viable solution to Africa's problems no matter how sophisticated the logic they bring to the debate. For the purpose of analysis, it has identified the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of African politics – namely, that Africans are very alert politically and watchful of who pilots their political affairs and how well s/he performs; they cherish their inherited freedom, democratic culture, and accommodative and participatory politics. In light of this, the argument has been made that colonial rule badly damaged this track record of cultural evolution by enthroning criminal and corrupt use of power. This observation corroborates Crawford Young's comprehensive study which showed that the current crisis in African development could be traced directly to the legacies of colonial rule (Young 1997).

Furthermore, the chapter has analyzed the constellation of idioms and ideas scholars have brought to the debate into three families of discourses: Modern, Liberated and Authentic/Regenerative. Obviously each discourse could fit into more than one model given the range of issues covered. Altogether, the African/ Black intellectuals and educated elite share a common concern and purpose for the progress of Africa and people of African descent. However, this aspiration may be difficult to attain unless it is harnessed within the historical realities of Africa's social milieu.

To usher in a new spirit in African politics, caution must be exercised in the ways leaders of opinion read and interpret analysis inspired by alien culture. An example of such analysis that has proved disastrous in both motivation and inspiration is Chika Onyeani's (2000:17-26) *Capitalist Nigger*. An explosive and daring indictment of the entire Black race, the author challenges Africans and people of African descent to wake up from their slumber. Indeed, as Fanon (1963:47-48) reminds us in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'self-criticism has been much talked about of late but few people realize that it is an African institution'. While the author declares with apparent anger that he is tired of Africans' complaints, unfortunately, what Onyeani does not seem to appreciate is that the crisis of the African world is largely a product of colonial mutilations, which has left the masses to mock at the values the colonial order bequeathed, 'insult them, and vomit them up' (Fanon 1963:43). No society has achieved its aspirations of development without a sound cultural base. This point has been strongly stressed by Osabu-Kle (2000) with the contention that only a culture-sensitive political model will bring peace and harmony to African politics.

Secondly, African politics needs a better sense of leadership, civility, and followership. This will come with a reinvigorated sense of consciousness/identity and a clear sense of direction and purpose. The identity question has become a priority in the modern world of globalism. 'Think globally while acting locally', a popular slogan goes.

Thirdly, one of the crucial tasks for the contemporary generation would be to develop new institutional frameworks of group action built on knowledge, and not on the meaningless parade of irrelevant and extinct cultural forms. Modernity and development both call for the need to question cultural practices in order to find their relevance within the context of change (Njoku 2008:67-86). It is the mission of this generation of Africans to rebuild the 'centre' of African life, according to the logic of the new times.

Overall, one may conclude, after Fanon, that each generation has the burden of discovering its mission and then either fulfilling it or betraying it. This overview of Africa's political history should be a reminder that Africans are the inheritors of a unique political culture that flourished with great success before colonial rule. That culture must be rediscovered, reinvented and rebuilt into the practice of contemporary politics. One idea is that a village-based consociational federalism holds a lot of promise for the future.

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