

NATIONALISM IN AFRICA: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE***Samuel Mojom**

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Abstract

The nature of colonial administration introduced by the European trading activities led to the agitations of the African elites for inclusion. The refusal of the administrators to grant this request, amidst other reasons such as the exploitation and economic hardships, invited the radicalism and quest for self-rule. The paper thus sought to review the relationship that existed between the Africans and the Europeans before and after the World War II. It will highlight the events that took effect before the WWII, in which the Africans sought to protest against the White dominated system for inclusion. It will again discuss the changing trend of events from the agitation for inclusive government (proto-nationalism), up to the wake-up call for anti-colonialism and self-rule by Africans (militant nationalism). The paper concludes by unveiling certain paradoxes of African nationalism before and after independence.

Keywords: African Nationalism, Paradoxes, Theoretical Perspective.

INTRODUCTION

African politics has travelled along a historical path pitched on foreign domination, control of its natural reserves and the usurpation of political administration. The Europeans especially the British, Portuguese, French and the Belgians among others, dictated the pace of activities and national development during the golden age of the Europeans in Africa (Brako & Asah-Asante, 2015). This lasted until the aftermath of the Second World War and eventually, the formation of the United Nations which made a wake-up call on the African to fight for total freedom and self-rule. The policy of extending political power to a foreign entity outside the territory of another is termed colonization. Colonization did not start as an intended ideology of the Europeans after their advent into Africa. The 18th and 19th Century industrial revolution that hit Western Europe brought about an increase in production of goods due to the introduction of basic sophisticated machinery as well as the gradual shift of the labour force from traditional agrarian sector into manufacturing. As production increased amidst the proliferation of industries and manufacturing firms, profit margin began to rise given much profit to the industrialists. However, the increment in the establishment of industries, as well as several people producing virtually similar goods brought about the economic element of excess supply. Hence, causing a split in profit. The excess production also brought about an imperative to search for external markets, investment avenues and the hunt for raw materials to power up the industrialization of Europe. The European industrialists have no option than to explore for other markets to carry on their trading agenda. Adu Boahen, posits that upon the discovery of Africa, Asia and other parts of the globe, the progress report sent to Western Europe by the early Dutch and the Portuguese, motivated other European economies to move into Africa (Brako and Asah-Asante, 2015). This led to the internal struggles between the European countries on the ownership of territories and the scope of their trading activities.

Brako and Asah-Asante (2015) described the period as ‘a mad rush’ for African territories. To resolve this impasse, the 1885 Berlin Conference was convened by the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck under the influence of the Portuguese, to channel the course for a peaceful co-existence and ultimately, the partition of Africa among the entrenched economies (Brako and Asah-Asante; Stilwell, 2002). It is very imperative to ask why the expansion of trade and the search for raw materials escalated into political domination by the Europeans on African soil. This paper thereby argues that, the uncertainty in the minds of the Africans, led to the growing agitations and nationalists movements which eventually took the Europeans out of African political and economic affairs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a discourse on the theories of nationalism and other related scholarships. The content review would provide theoretical basis for the arguments of the current paper.

Theories of Nationalism

Nationalism has been a powerful force in modern history as it arouses strong feelings which for some, “it create solidarity and stability which makes nationalism tantamount to racism, but for others, nationalist sentiments create solidarity and stability which are preconditions for freedom” (Hoffman & Graham, 2006:262). The two perspectives are informed by history, as its most extreme form of nationalism was at the root of the genocide of the Nazi Germany. It has also been the basis of liberal movements in such regimes like the Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. There have been several competing ideas and arguments on the relationship between the nation as an entity, and nationalism as an ideological attachment of the people. Otto Bauer defined a nation as the totality of people who are united by a common fate, so that they possess a common character. The common fate to him, is primarily a common culture whiles the common character involves almost necessarily, a uniform language (Hoffman & Graham,

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2006:264). According to Max Weber, a nation then is a community of sentiments that could adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which tends to produce a state of its own (Hoffman & Graham, 2006). I would like us to consider another interesting view taken on the nation by James Kellas. To him, a nation is a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture and common ancestry, a religion or common descent, as well as subjective characteristics. These he maintained, is essentially a peoples' awareness of their nationality and affection for it (Kellas, 1998 cited in Hoffman & Graham, 2006). Considering the opening statements of the two definitions, there is some level of similarities in the use of words such as 'collective', 'totality of people', and 'community of sentiments'. This portrays a nation to be nothing more or less than people coming together to cohabit a chosen area. It however appears that there exist variations on how these 'people' (forming the nation) are held bond to each other. Hoffman and Graham (2006) agreed with Otto Bauer's assertion that a nation possess a common character or common fate which necessarily entails a shared language as a bond. Max Weber sees the existence of the common sentiment- 'fellow feelings' as the bonding force whereas James Kellas appears to give a more in-depth view of the scope of unity between the people. To him, there exist a 'subjective' and 'objective' dimension of the nationhood. Objective materials include territory and language but there must also be a corresponding consciousness of belonging, which is more subjective. As opined by Ellie Kedourie, nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the 19th Century. To him, "it pretends to supply the criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively of its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state and for the right organization of the society of states" (1993:9 cited in Hoffman & Graham, 2006). The doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, which are known by certain characteristics; and that, the only legitimate government is national self-government. Pointing to the arguments of Kedourie, the nation then is seen as an already existing entity instituted by nature which only requires the people to feel their belongingness to it and to also enjoy unlimited freedom under the relationship of their own. This is a clear shift from the assertions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who attributed the nation as a modern concept created by the capitalists (Hoffman & Graham, 2006).

The Modernists theory of nationalism

The modernists view the nation as a modern entity created and dependent on the consciousness of belonging. They argue that nationalism (the ideology of nationhood) precedes the creation of the nation. Taken that the nation was created by human activities especially the class and sectionalism perpetuated by the capitalists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who are both German scholars, postulate in their respective book titled 'Contribution to the critique of the political economy (1859)' and 'The condition of the working class (1844)', that the growth of a national consciousness, and thus a nation, is bound up with the development of capitalism, which requires determinate legal institutions, bounded territorial market, a shared means of communication, a flexible labour market related to the level of education, a single unit of currency as well as trade agreements with others. To these proponents of modernism, the economic venture by the capitalists

necessitated the development of a psychological identification of the people with the nation to help legitimize the state.

The Perennialists theory

The perennialists on the contrary, see nationalism as a modern concept and that the nation itself has undergone changes in the modern period, but is a continuation of older communities which may have an ethnic, linguistic or cultural basis. They thus affirm that the nation predates the people's consciousness of belonging to it. A notable proponent of perennialism, Hans Kohn in his 1944 publication argued that there exist two forms of nationalism; *organic* and *voluntarist*, with the voluntarism corresponding to modernism (Hoffman & Graham, 2006). Pertaining to the organic nationalism, he assumes that the world consist of 'natural' nations which are the primary actors of history. Each nation according to the perennialists is an 'organic whole' with a distinct character. The acclaimed organic nations have lost their self-consciousness as nations, along with their political independence. Hence, nationalism is a 'restoration project' rather than a 'construction project'. An example of the restoration project is the creation of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the wake of the collapse of the Hungarian empire after its defeat in the WWI (Hoffman & Graham, 2006). One important assertion made by Clifford Geertz (1993) will help in our analysis of the colonial and post-colonial nationalism in Africa in subsequent sections. Making an analytical study of post-colonial nations in Africa and Asia, Geertz ingeminate that such nations are caught between the 'modern' demand for economic success and a 'primordial' desire to belong, based on assumed blood ties (Hoffman and Graham, 2006).

The European and African perspectives of nationalism

Inasmuch as nationalism as an ideology has one inherent meaning, the application of its tenets such as belongingness, common political entity as well as ethnicity can be considered different across regions. The position of an individual or group of individuals in the larger community would tell the lens under which nationalism is viewed. The Western European view of nationalism in my opinion is more of communal than of self-rule which the Africans and other Asian countries struggled for. The organic nation which predates the consciousness of belonging by the people, had the basic attributes of language and territory but is just left with consolidating the feelings of the people. A good example is that of Italy. The unification of Italy in the 19th Century was driven by a fervent nationalist movement whose principals were put in terms that reverberated through the century, most famously, by Giuseppe Mazzini. According to Mazzini, an Italian nationalist (1805-1872), "the first duty of man is to the whole human family but what can each of you with his isolated powers, do for the moral improvement, for the progress of humanity? God gave you these means when he gave you a country, when he divided humanity into distinct groups upon the face of the globe and thus planted the seed of nations. Bad governments have disfigured the design of God" (Hobsbawm, n.d). This then implies that nations are natural creations designed by God as his original idea for humanity. Hobsbawm saw that at the same time as Mazzini's nationalism is revolutionary and progressive, he also appeals to an original ethnic plan from which Europe has supposedly deviated, owing to the greed of few kings, noblemen and warriors. The process of nationalism then to Europe as in the case of Italy,

was to call for a national unification which seeks to restore the natural divisions between people, and to banish the arbitrary ones imposed by the kings. To this end, a famous Italian nationalist called Massimo d' Azeglio asserted that "Italy has been made and now it remains to make Italians" (Hobsbawm, n.d). In effect, the Europeans view nation-building as the first phenomenon and the common national bounds proceeds. Contrary to the European view, is the African perspective of nationhood and nationalism. Though historians have argued in favor of already existing nations of Africa before the advent of the European merchants, the 19th Century call on nationalism presents it as more of a 'construction' project than a 'restoration' project. It is a construction because, most Africans were now to call for unity in diversity. Herbert McCaulay for instance, is attributed to be the founder of Nigerian nationalism (Uche, 1989). He asserted that "Nigerians are a 'nation' and promotes the cultural unity of Nigerians". He made a continuous call for a 'territorial nationalism' emphasizing a cultural connection of the people to the land (particularly along the Niger and the Benue Rivers). McCaulay justified his nationalist ideas on grounds that, it is necessary for the people living in the British colony of Nigeria of 'multiple backgrounds', to unite as one people in order to be able to resist colonialism Guntram & Kaplan, (2008). A quick review of the assertions made by this Nigerian nationalist vis-a-vis the definitions established in the previous sections on nation, will tell the diverging point of the African and European nationalism. The Nigerian nationalists sought to campaign for the unification of many features, which in the contrast view of Otto Bauer, Max Weber and James Kellas, are the basic tenets upon which a nation can be established. The territories are now to be united; culture to be connected and most importantly the multiple backgrounds (language) are also to be dealt with in the African context of nationalism. The question to ponder on is whether the nation was created in Africa already and thus, awaits for the consciousness of the people to belong or the two are to start and magnify each other simultaneously?

Proto-Nationalism

The literal meaning of the concept will be to break up the two composing words; "proto" and "nationalism". The word proto is from the parent word *prototypical* which is an original object or form which is a basis for other objects, forms, or for its models and generations (American English Dictionary). It is better still defined as an early sample or model built to test a concept or process. "Proto" then, is to precede the proper beginning of the real thing. Howbeit, the term as used in this paper will focus on the peaceful protests by the African elites on the European rule. Simply put, it defines the first phase of the Africans' steps towards to removal of colonial domination (Brako & Asah-Asante, 2015). Proto-nationalism has been prefixed with the word 'popular' by Hobsbawm (1990). To him, nationalism will be of no interest were it nothing but a self-serving ruling class ideology. It is much more than that, it is popular, and it becomes so very quickly. The question of concern to Hobsbawm is to know why nationalism as an ideology of a new kind of political entity have gripped the imagination of millions so suddenly? As political theorists and other nationalists have purported nationalism to have been the gradual development of a sense of belongingness to an entity, the application of this concept by many African elites at the time towards their European lords is something very important to deal with in this section. In an attempt to find solution to the

question posed, Hobsbawm (1990) proposed two kinds of answers. Firstly, is to know the various forms of popular group identifications that may have grown into nationalism proper. Secondly, he wanted to see how governments encouraged and directed nationalism to suit their interests. The political system at this period was of a kind which I describe as having a 'three-tier' participation. The tier one is made up of the Europeans who imposed their political and economic power over the newly discovered territories. The tail end of this tier is made up of the class of chiefs, who are seen to have been co-opted into the system. Tier two is the educated elites. This class of people exhibited some customized characteristics which made them look distinct from the others. They had a passive form of participation in the system where their presence were felt, but not deemed needful in the political and economic system by the Europeans. Tier three which is the extreme bottom, are the people who were commonly referred to as the masses. They have no power input, but served as the direct victims of the colonial system. Nationalists such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Massimo d' Azeglio as well as Eric Hobsbawm proposed some fundamental characters upon which this proto-nationalism was based namely; Language, ethnicity, religion and in a minimal context, political bonds. These made people to feel equal and thus have same goals and pride for protection. This makes them to unite in the protest of whatever entity outside of their group. It is with these fundamental elements that proto-nationalism is attributed to be a popular move (Hoffman & Graham, 2006).

Proto-nationalism in Africa

The European subjugation of Africa from the day of colonization until the era of the violent struggles and resistance by Africans through the elites, is termed as the era of proto-nationalism. The period is considered to be the start-up to the real form of nationalism after the WWII. This era according to Semakula (1985) in his thesis on the topic "*From Colonialism to Independence*", brought about two major groups of people in Africa. That is the 'Resisters' and the 'Collaborators'. The Resisters according to him, were a diverse lot which consists of the kings and chiefs who wielded traditional authority, and considered their traditional powers as been curbed overnight by a foreign entity. The Collaborators on the other hand, were the group of people who embraced the European system by compromising on their beliefs. They either did it based on the assumption that the military might of the colonial power was inevitable (Semakula, 1985). Other collaborators saw the colonial wars as a perpetuation of old conflict with their traditional rivals. For instance, it was suspected that the Bagandas who collaborated with the British in the conquest of the Bunyoi saw this as a crusade against an old enemy. Chief Merere of South Unyanwezi in Tanzanian for instance, collaborated with the Germans partly because they were in conflict with chief Mkwawa and the Wahehe, his old enemies (Semakula, 1985).

Features of Proto-Nationalism

Nationalism before the Second World War manifested the following features which I classify under the following headings;

1. The nature of participants

The African proto-nationalist movements corrupted the ideological stance of nationalism to bring about a class or

sectional interest in the economic and political system of the European administration. It is this idea that made some people by then, to be considered as 'educated elites' who through colonial education, have gained some knowledge or exposition on the way the white man does his things. Proto-nationalism did not exhibit the 'popular' trait described by Hobsbawm. The irony however, is that, the 'resisters' of the European mode of operation which could precisely be the 'educated elites', are gradually changing and manifesting into the 'collaborators' of the system they seem to oppose. The illegal rule of the Europeans became the same system the elites pushed for reformations to allow for their participation (Brako & Asah-Asante, 2015). Was this a popular move of bringing the masses on board to ask for a collective good from the system or the few elites manipulating others to secure their tickets of participation?

2. The nature of struggle

Participants in the proto-nationalist activities did not sought to attack the system of colonial rule but to rather adopt several means to get their 'acceptance letters' into the political system of the Europeans. The African chiefs and educated elites who were the sole perpetrators of this form of nationalism sent-in petitions and delegations to England to reason-out with the colonial secretary on their relevance to the system of administration (Boahen, 2000). The main tool in this struggle was peaceful and orderly protest for inclusion.

3. The goal of the struggle

The proto-nationalists sought to demand for changes and improvements in the colonial administration for their inclusion. The educated elites and other 'resisting-collaborators' at the time did not seek to attain self-rule and the unification of the people to form a nation, but to opt for a review of the system in order to participate in the colonial administration as they considered themselves fit relative to the co-opted chiefs. They demanded improvement in the government, registered dissatisfaction with the lack of effective system of representation of the people in the legislative council among other self-seeking requests.

The Change of African Nationalism; from prototype to militant nationalism

Nationalism as defined by the modernists is now have flesh and to take effect on the African soil. The people were seen to have gathered around their individual tribal and community-based systems of administration, but were interrupted by an 'outsider'. This informed the wake-up call to totally resist colonial rule. The radical nature of the nationalists movements has been justified on the grounds that it was the last resort if not the best option at the time to end colonial oppression (Semakula, 1985:7). Nelson Mandela in a speech addressing the Annual Conference of the African National Congress Youth League in December 1951 had the following to say.

"The common man who for generations has been the tool of insane politicians and governments, who has suffered privations and sorrows in wars that were profit to tiny privilege groups, is today rising from being the object of history to becoming the subject of history. For the ordinary men and women in the world are becoming conscious creators of their own history"(Nelson Mandela, 1951).

Factors informing the u-turn in African nationalists' struggle

A more frequent feature of the militant nationalists movements was the quest for freedom and self-rule. This notion passed through all the groups that emerged across Africa and other parts of Eastern Europe and Asia. This notwithstanding, the point of divergence would be to study the mode of operation and the goal clarity during this period. A truism is that 'nothing in this world happens for no reason' and that, the shift from an orderly and slow objection to a more radical and militant struggle, occurred as a result of several contributing factors which are as follows;

1. Africans' participation in WWII

The main contest of WWII was between the Western European powers-Britain, France, Italy, Spain and their allies against the Nazi regime of Germany under Chancellor Adolf Hitler (Money, 2018). Entering the war, the European nations brought along their colonial 'assets' to the fight as well. Due to the fact that Africa was under the rule of Europeans, they were forced to fight for them. Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) for instance, fought alongside British soldiers. Africans due to the turn of events quickly began to ponder on what actually they fighting for (Money, 2018). Taking inspiration from the 1951 long speech delivered by Nelson Mandela, the answer is silent in the minds of the Africans. They are to fight to consolidate the system of rule that they were now motivated to resist. This made the African soldiers to realize that there can be life without the Europeans; and that they were not as superior as they thought. The World War II had a mind changing impact on Africa amidst the economic hardships which promoted their militant struggle for self-rule.

• The Psychological Effect of WWII

The chance given to Africa to participate in the fight along side the whiteman led to a change in the thinking mentality of the African, particularly the soldiers. After considering the take of events during their actions with their white counterparts such as the Indians at the battle field, the idea of the Europeans' fallibility sparked the African nationalist movements. Another idea that the soldiers brought back from the war was that the Europeans were not as superior as they had come to believe. The African soldiers realized that, in war, the whiteman bled, cried, was scared, and when shot, died. Hence, the conclusion that whiteman is human and not superior as they thought (Money, 2018). What actually broke the back of the camel was the revelation given by the Indian soldiers of their aim in the war. The Indians told the African soldiers that they are fighting because of the freedom promised them at the end, and with this, the African soldiers wrote back home telling all of the possibility of getting rid of the White man.

2. The 5th Pan-African Congress and The formation of the United Nations

As part of the voices reechoing the time for the African to stand up and resist foreign oppression, is the Manchester Conference (15th-21st October, 1945) organized under the influential Trinidadian Pan-Africanist, George Padmore and Ghanaian independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah. The conference had about ninety-six delegates, twenty-six (26) from Africa attending. The likes of which include Peter

Abrahams of the ANC (South Africa) as well as potential political leaders of their nations such as Hastings Banda (Malawi), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Obafeme Awolowo and Jaja Wachuku (Nigeria) and Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya) as well as the famous 77-year-old W. E. B. Du Bois were present (Ankrah, 2011). The 5th Pan-African Congress unlike the previous four, had two main objectives which were that; firstly, to liberate the whole of Africa from colonial rule and secondly, to unite all African descents living in the diaspora and on the African continent (Ankrah, 2011). The analysis of Ankrah (2011) on the impact of the Manchester Congress on African Politics concludes that farmers, workers and intellectuals in Africa were called to fight against imperialist exploitation and ultimately, for self-rule. The congress aiming at the economic, intellectual and political cooperation of the African countries, made the demand that the riches of the continent be used for the enlistment of its people. These among other compelling resolutions and demands of the congress made the nationalist movements after WWII effective and yielded results.

3. The United Nation's Declarations

The African struggle for independence was not left to the effort of the Africans alone but received the interest and support from many European nations and the newly emerged super powers- The USA and USSR. The formation of the United Nations in 1947 and its subsequent declarations helped in demotivating colonial control and rather spread the message of freedom and self-rule to all under foreign domination. The declaration written from the view of the colonial peoples, in its preamble recognized "the passionate yearning for freedom in all dependent peoples; the existence of increasing conflicts resulting from the denial of the freedom of such people which constitute a serious threat towards world peace; and the importance of the UN in assisting the movements for independence in Trust and Non-self-Governing territories" (Encyclopedia of the Nations).

The following UN declarations encouraged militant nationalist movements in Africa which eventually gave way to independence;

- *That the subjection of people to alien domination is contrary to the charter of the UN and it is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and cooperation.*
- *That all people shall have right to self-determination.*
- *That inadequate preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence*
- *That all armed actions or repressive measures against dependent people shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence.*
- *That immediate steps shall be taken to transfer all power to the peoples of the territories, without any conditions or reservations.*
- *That any attempt to disrupt the national unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the charter.*
- *That all states shall observe faithfully and strictly the provisions of the charter, the universal declaration of human right, and the present declaration on the basis of equality, noninterference in the internal affairs of states, and respect for the sovereign rights of the people* (Encyclopedia of The Nations).

It can be deduced that, the various provisions of the UN charter might not suit the interest of the colonial administrators, as they wanted to entrench their rule and economic exploitations. However, the 7th declaration called for a strict adherence to the provisions, and for any nation being a signatory to remain, its faithfulness to the other six is required. This to a larger extent, added to the effectiveness of the nationalist activities as well as the total freedom granted to Africa and other territories under colonial rule in the 1960s.

Some paradoxes of African nationalism before and after independence

This section builds on the detailed analysis of the African nationalism concept, to drum home some inherent paradoxes relative to the state of most post independent African states.

- *Nationalism became successful with the attainment of independence by the 1960s. However, most contemporary African nations are still calling for 'nation-building'.*
- *Herbert McCaulay leading the Nigerian nationalism asserted that "Nigerians are a nation and seek to promote the cultural unity, and to unify the multiple language backgrounds of Nigerians". Is this Nigerian nation the same as defined by Max Weber et al.?*
- *The protest and political movements that called for Africa's liberation before independence, were streamlined along ethnic (diverse publics) and class sentiments, but were still attributed to be the 'popular' nationalism espoused by Hobsbawm.*

Conclusion

African nationalism started as a protest movement to ask for constitutional reformations and inclusion in the colonial administration. However, continues refusal of the Europeans to grant these requests opened up for the formation of protest and militant groups in Africa to fight for freedom and self-rule. Not until the WWII, the African had a special respect and attribute of superiority to the European administrators. The participation in the war reoriented the African soldiers and helped in the fight for the total end of colonial oppression. Contributing factors such as the call of the United Nations through its binding resolutions and the 7th universal declaration of freedom; the African freedom-oriented resolutions at the 5th Pan-African Congress of 1945; the influx of ideas from black militant nationalists such as Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey as well as the resistance from other European missionaries chartered the course for political freedom in Africa. The paper concludes that haven granted the quest for political freedom, most African states still battle with internal wranglings due to the growing challenge of harmonizing the diverse-public into building a unified nation-state. To help attain this feat, the paper calls on both the leadership and general citizenry of African states to devise strategies aimed at trading-off religious and cultural differences towards a more patriotic citizenship.

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