

The salient features of the political economy of Africa and continental challenges in the new millenium

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The article indicates how the political economy of contemporary Africa is to be explained and what might reasonably be conjectured about the challenges of development for the continent in the new millenium. The author is mainly interested in what he considers to be the salient features of the political economy of Africa, namely intense ethnic conflicts and fragmentation of the African leadership; the recurrence of military coups; poor performance in economic development and corruption; and international marginalization of the continent.

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The Material Base of African Economies

In order to explain these phenomena, the paper begins with an appreciation of the material base of the African economies, especially their meagre social surplus product which leads to the socio-economic insecurity of the individual in society. African countries could be characterised as follows: firstly, they are highly statist, i.e. in spite of the current political and economic liberalization policies including privatisation process, the state in Africa still dominates the economy much more than in the industrialized western countries; secondly, the productive forces in terms of modern western production techniques, skills and knowledge, are underdeveloped and hence the social surplus produced is very meagre; thirdly, they are highly dependent, especially on the former colonial powers. Practically all the technology needed for socio-economic development is imported, and a considerable proportion of capital requirements for this development comes from loans, grants and foreign investments; fourthly, the economies are “disarticulated”, i.e. the economic exchanges between the various sectors of the economy are externally oriented and there is an over dependence on the export earnings from a few agricultural or mineral products; fifthly, is the juxtaposition of various contradictory modes of production in society which include:

(a) the “primitive” community mode of production in which the basic means of production is land. The latter is usually owned collectively by the clan or the tribe. Its use is permitted to members of the clan or tribe subject to certain conditions which vary from one place to another. This mode of production exists with different modifications in different parts of Africa. In some areas the communal land has been wholly or partly alienated such that individual ownership has emerged. In other parts the families or individuals who are granted the

use of communal land by the tribal authorities employ agrarian wage labour. The picture is very confusing and makes it difficult to make generalizations;

(b) the small commodity mode production based on private property. Production in this mode of production depends on either the personal labour and instruments of the small commodity producer or on occasional hired labour or both. The small producer could be a peasant, artisan, local beer brewer, shopkeeper, etc. who produces for the market as part of his/her subsistence. The prevalence of this mode of production in most parts of Africa today can be attributed to the fact that wage earners still constitute a very small proportion of the economically active part of the population .

Schneider (1996) and Ake (1982;) argue that simple commodity production in Africa is in the process of merging with lower forms of capitalism but it is not yet clear whether this mode of production is yielding to capitalism. This is due to lack of credit facilities for small producers in most African countries and the low level of industrialization in most parts of the continent.

(c) the capitalist mode of production which could be described as derivative. It is derivative in the sense that it developed incidentally as an effect of the western capitalism quest for markets, raw materials and profit. It is capitalism grafted into societies whose level of development of productive forces is still rudimentary. It is also derivative in that much of the capital, technology and entrepreneurial skills come from abroad. There are two further arguments concerning the peculiar nature of the capitalist mode of production in Africa.

Schmidt (1990) states that although capitalism is rapidly penetrating the African economies, it is difficult to say that capitalism is the dominant mode of production. This is the case if

capitalism is examined in terms of production based on wage labour. As already pointed out, lack of credit facilities and entrepreneurial skills limit the development of small commodity producers into capitalist entrepreneurs. Moreover, due to the low level of industrialization wage earners still amount to a very small proportion of the economically active part of the population in most African countries.

However, there is an important sense in which one could argue that capitalism is now the dominant mode of production in most African countries. Firstly, the capitalist sectors such as commercial farming and mineral extraction dominate the African economies. They contribute large proportions to their Gross Domestic Products and export earnings.

Secondly, is the peculiar character of capitalist exploitation in African economies. The classical capitalist pattern of exploitation is that of the capitalist appropriating the difference between the value produced by the wage labourer and what he pays him for his labour power. Ake (1982) argues that this form of exploitation is found in Africa but it is not necessarily the dominant form of capitalist exploitation. In Africa most of the exploitation is not done by individual capitalists but by the state acting as an entrepreneur. The state establishes business, hires wage-labour and extracts surplus value from its subjects. Moreover, those who exploit others in most African countries do not themselves own the means of production, unless state power could be categorized as a means of production. They are able to exploit others because they have access to state power. They use the latter to control the means of production and have access to the distribution of the national wealth.

Another aspect associated with this form of exploitation of the social surplus is what could be called "exploitation without wage-labour". The state induces the peasants, sometimes by threat of punishment, to concentrate on the production of particular cash crops such as coffee, cotton, foodstuffs, etc. and

the state sets itself as the sole authorised buyer of these crops from the peasant producers through state controlled agricultural marketing boards.

In most African countries one sees large numbers of peasants and other simple commodity producers who are not wage labourers and who are said to own their means of production such as land and equipment but this ownership is just nominal because they are easily compelled to submit to exploitation by those who control state power.

The above exposition of the material base of the African economies, especially the meagre social surplus, has a great bearing on the understanding of the salient features of the political economy of Africa. These features are discussed in following sections.

Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and Their Future in Africa: Theoretical Perspectives

In pre-industrial societies such as those of Africa, where more than sixty per cent of the population live in rural areas and subsistence agriculture is the basis of life, primary groups, i.e. social groups based on kinship, such as the extended family, the clan and the tribe, invariably define an individual's life chances and constitute the bases of his/her group identity. The significant primary group to which an individual attaches the strongest identification varies from place to place and with circumstances. Sometimes, it is the extended family, sometimes it is the clan and sometime it is the lineage or the tribe. However, by virtue of the fact that primary groups are fundamental bases of group identity, they inevitably become important conflict groups as well because they are ipso-facto the bases for excluding other people from privilege and access to scarce socio-economic opportunities such as access to land, employment,

political power, etc. (Lemarchand, 1992) adds that once the primary group becomes the basis of discrimination, it invariably becomes an object of hostility at some point or another.

There are several theories concerning the future of inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa. Firstly, there are social scientists who argue that primary groups are the basis of social, economic and political conflicts in all pre-industrial societies and will remain so as long as the low level of industrial development continues (Noel, 1996). Extrapolating from this argument one may say that ethnic conflict has always existed in African societies. Secondly, Melsen (1990) argues that inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa are bound to decrease with increasing new modes of social, economic, political and cultural integration. The dominant theme of this point of view is that modernization defined in terms of the rapid increase in urbanization, schooling, communication, improved transport facilities, development of territorial political institutions including strong national leaders and political parties, etc. would lead to the integration of diverse communal groups and reduce ethnic consciousness. However, the ethnic tensions which have occurred in different African countries since the 1960s and continue to date show that inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa are in the increase despite western modernization:

(a) between 1967 and 1970 Nigeria, the largest country in Africa in terms of population, was involved in a destructive civil war (the Biafran War) , followed by a series of other bloody inter-ethnic conflicts arising essentially out of different forms of inter-ethnic animosity including religious differences;

(b) in Kenya the assassination of Tom Mboya in 1969 led to violent clashes between the Luo and the Kikuyu ethnic groups and also followed a series of other bloody inter-ethnic conflicts in different parts of the country. For instance, be-

fore and after the 1990s general elections, violent inter-ethnic tensions erupted in the Rift Valley Region between President Arap Moi's ethnic group (the Kalenjin) and the Kikuyus living in the Region over the issue of land ownership.

(c) In 1971 the rise to power of General Iddi Amin in Uganda was later accompanied by a systematic liquidation of the Langi and Acholi people within the Ugandan army and elsewhere in positions of authority and potential influence who were associated with the ousted President Milton Obote. Ethnic tensions still persist in post -Iddi Amin Uganda.

(d) The recent mass killings in Rwanda and Burundi of the Tutsi minority by the Hutu majority are also vivid examples of increasing inter-ethnic conflicts in modernizing Africa.

Besides the above examples, a wide empirical examination of the situation in Africa reveals that civil wars with strong ethnic undercurrent afflicted Chad, Sudan, Zaire, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Mali, Somalia, Zambia, Ghana, Malawi, Congo, Zanzibar, South Africa, etc. Einsenstedt (1990) adds that the ethnic factor was a dominant element in more than 40 successful military coups; 20 attempted coups; 80 plots; and 17 mutinies in Africa. All these examples show that ethnicity has not only persisted in African politics but has worsened in intensity despite increasing western modernization in the continent.

As a result of the above situation, (Mitchell, 1991) argues that since primary groups are a characteristic of less industrialized societies such as those of Africa, an attempt to explain inter-ethnic conflicts in these societies poses problems. Emphasis should rather be put on explaining why ethnicity has become so intense and destructive in these particular societies despite modernization.

This paper rejects the contention that ethnicity is an inherent aspect in all pre-industrial societies because to accept it is to endorse the status quo of inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa; to give the impression that the problem is insoluble; and to justify the inevitability of political instability in Africa. The failure to find a solution for the inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa is not due to any inherent characteristics of ethnicity in African societies but is due to inadequate analysis of the problem and inability to manage inter-ethnic relations on the part of political practitioners.

Although the role of socio-economic factors is acknowledged in the analysis of ethnic conflicts, most studies have tended to deal with these factors only briefly. Emphasis is put on aspects such as the degree of inter-ethnic cultural and institutional differences, etc. They tend to treat the symptoms of inter-ethnic conflicts as underlying causes and ignore the effects of socio-economic organisation of the societies under study. For instance, Seifert (1992) states that any serious attempt to understand inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa should not ignore an investigation of the material conditions of that particular society, i.e. the nature of the social system, the political organisation, the structure of social consciousness, the ideological and socio-psychological orientation of its members, views of the ruling classes and the contradictions among the different sections of the ruling classes. But he does not go further to explain the dynamics of these social, political and psychological factors in relation to ethnic consciousness in African politics.

Nnoli (1973) on the other hand, points out two aspects which lead to an increase in ethnic consciousness and inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa, namely, the socio-economic insecurity of an individual in a society with diverse primary or communal groups; and that this insecurity is directly related to the scope and intensity of socio-economic competition, the extent of eco-

conomic scarcity and the degree of inequality tolerated by the society. In order to understand these phenomena one has to go back to the colonial situation in Africa.

Colonialism and Ethnic Particularism in Africa

The intensity of inter-ethnic politics in contemporary Africa cannot be fully understood without taking account of the role of colonialism. Colonialism in Africa as an extension of European capitalist exploitative relations was less interested in the development of the colonies than merely exploiting them. The colonial powers realised that resistance to exploitation in the colonies would be less effective if the colonized were kept divided. Thus the integration of the colonised people was not in the objective interests of the colonizers. This was the same situation in Apartheid South Africa including its “tribal homeland system”. It was not surprising, therefore, that even the French colonialists who were not so much fascinated by the doctrine of indirect rule tended to choose administrative units which coincided with tribal boundaries. These colonial administrative units became political constituencies for African leaders when electoral politics were introduced at the time of political independence.

As long as these political constituencies corresponded with ethnic groups, it was inevitable that campaign for political support also involved the stirring of ethnic consciousness. This was enhanced by economic competition among the administrative units for socio-economic amenities. The colonizers built socio-economic infrastructure such as roads, railways, schools, health facilities, etc. in areas which served their narrow political and economic interests such as in the mines, export/cash crops plantations, urban areas, ports, etc. Moreover, in some parts of Africa, if an ethnic group appeared to be more docile than another,

its ethnic members were recruited to serve in the colonial state apparatus.

There was scarcely any thought for balanced socio-economic and political development in the colonies. Ultimately colonialism and apartheid (in the case of South Africa) left a legacy of socio-economic imbalances in which one ethnic group or part of the country had better socio-economic amenities than another.

This colonial indifference to balanced socio-economic development in the colony nurtured attitudes of superiority among the favoured ethnic groups and inferiority among the marginalized or disadvantaged ethnic groups. It also led to labour migration from the marginalized areas to the more developed areas in search of employment opportunities, education, etc.

But life in these modern enclaves, especially in the urban areas, offered little guarantee of socio-economic security and opportunities in terms of employment, health and entertainment facilities, housing, etc.

Mitchell (1991) elaborates this situation by stating that, in less industrialized societies such as those of Africa where society is not professionally differentiated and the level of class consciousness is very low, the individual in an urban environment faced by socio-economic insecurity tends to look for assistance and alliance with those who share with him the same primordial characteristics, i.e. members of his clan, village, tribe, language, religion, etc. This is because in such alliances he/she becomes confident of mutual trust, useful communication and possible assistance.

All over Africa, the urban working class and the unemployed try to relieve their wretchedness by developing their own welfare systems. They form tribal associations which serve a multiplicity of socio-economic functions. These associations keep the urban dweller from feeling too lonely, by making available

to him the friendship of people from his/her own ethnic background. They serve as social insurance to the individual. It is quite common for them to help ethnic members who are in difficulties by contributing towards funeral expenses, court fines, education expenses, etc.

By creating the ethnic communities in the urban areas these ethnic-based associations virtually discredit the effects of modernization in Africa. They demonstrate the usefulness of ethnic identification. For example, people in search of jobs seek the assistance of well placed members of their own ethnic groups. When they lose their jobs or fail in a competition for advancement the blame tends to be put on the ethnic particularism of someone else.

Extrapolating from the above analysis one could argue that inter-ethnic politics in African politics is essentially an urban problem. This is because any significant inter-ethnic contact in the rural areas is confined to those villages bordering other ethnic groups and those villages close to urban centres, mines, and other places of wage-employment. Otherwise inter-ethnic experiences of the rural populations in most African countries are obtained indirectly from stories of urban dwellers, mine workers, etc. who return occasionally to their villages for a visit.

Smith (1996) argues that inter-ethnic contacts per se do not fully bring about inter-ethnic tensions. The most significant factor is the structure of the contact and the degree of socio-economic competition involved. This is supported by Schneider (1996) who states that it was the intense competition for land between the Kikuyu and white settlers during colonial Kenya and between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu in the post-independence Kenya, which led to serious political tensions. The same applies to the political conflicts in the history Southern Africa between the white settlers and the indigenous African people such as the Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Shona, etc. Competition for land is also an

important factor in the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic conflict in Rwanda and Burundi including the Great Lakes Region as a whole.

The individual's search for socio-economic security finds expression in politics. Members of an ethnic group tend to look more and more towards their ethnic group for socio-economic security and political support. Candidates for political office are not elected or chosen for their commitment to the nation as a whole but because they can promise socio-economic rewards to their ethnic conscious constituents. This inter-ethnic group cohesion separates it further from other ethnic groups. Members begin to develop common experiences and interests in relation to other ethnic groups. For instance, during the struggle for political independence in some African countries, alignment with a particular ethnic group meant an identification with a specific political party as the best representative of that ethnic group. Examples of such political parties with ethnic affiliations include the Kabaka Yekka (Baganda), Action Group (Yoruba), KANU (Kikuyu), ZANU (Shona), ZAPU (Ndebele), IFP (Zulu), etc.

If the ethnic group coincides with regional geographical boundaries, the resultant territorial cohesion acts to convert ethnic group boundaries into cultural, economic and military barriers, which could later lead to demands for secession as in the case of the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1967 to 1970.

Regionalisation and Fragmentation of the African Leadership

In order to complete the discussion on the prevalence of inter-ethnic politics in Africa account has also to be taken of the ethnic fragmentation and regionalism of the leadership. As already stated, African economies lack balance and integration. As a result of this, the African bourgeoisie and political leadership is correspondingly fragmented and ridden with contradic-

tions. This fragmentation has its origin in the colonial political and economic policies that the colonisers adopted in order to maintain their power and curb African nationalism.

In different African countries, colonial governments including the apartheid regime in South Africa, tried to check the march to political independence by sponsoring reactionary political parties. Examples are the United Tanganyika Party in Tanzania, Inkhata Freedom Party in South Africa, Kabaka Yekka in Uganda, Kenya Democratic Union, etc. This strategy could only work if a political base could be created for the reactionary political party. The sponsoring of these political parties sometimes involved the policy of making certain political constituencies autonomous or/and limiting the access of politicians from other parts of the country. The colonizers encouraged the fear of ethnic domination by exploiting the regional socio-economic imbalances which they themselves had created (Richards, 1996). This led to the regionalisation of the African bourgeoisie inherited by the post-independence African states.

Moreover, within the same region the African leadership was also fragmented. Two categories of the African leadership and bourgeoisie could be identified within the same region, i.e. one category which could be called the "traditional leadership" and the other is the "bureaucratic leadership". The former are those who derived their socio-economic and political status by being members of families which had wealth, status and political power in the traditional African societies. The latter are those who acquired political and socio-economic status by taking advantage of the changes which came with colonialism such as western education, etc. It could be generalised that the socio-economic and political power base of the "traditional leadership" tends to be rural and that of the "bureaucratic leadership" is mostly urban.

Some social scientists have made class distinction among the African leadership between the "non-bureaucratic bourgeois-

sie” and the “bureaucratic bourgeoisie”. The latter being those functionaries of the state bureaucracy who owe their socio-economic status to their positions in the state apparatus. The former are those who do not owe their socio-economic status to state positions. A further distinction is made between the “comprador” bourgeoisie who are appendages of international capitalism, and a “national bourgeoisie” who own independent capitalist enterprises.

However, in this discussion of inter-ethnic politics the above distinctions are less important than the regionalism and fragmentation of the leadership. This is because during colonialism and the apartheid era (in South Africa) the regions were so isolated that it did not make any sense for the African bourgeoisie to form political alignments on the basis of the above class distinctions. Moreover, the African economies are so disjointed that alliances between “traditional” and “bureaucratic” bourgeoisie from different parts of the country is not viable or rewarding. For instance, a national party of bureaucratic bourgeoisie would be useless in so far as regionalism had created a situation of competing regional bourgeoisie. The same applies to the modern and traditional bourgeoisie of the same region. Their economic and political interests did not necessarily coincide. For instance, if the bourgeoisie had made these distinctions the basis of their political differences, the emerging political parties would be difficult to make their differences clear to the masses whom they wanted to mobilise for political support. This was more true in the colonial situation when the African leaders were in the grip of the struggle against colonialism.

Therefore, the African leadership compounded the problem of their class distinctions by focusing politics on the single issue of transfer of power to the indigenous African people. Some of these nationalist movements like the Tanganyika African Union in Tanzania, the Convention People’s Party in Ghana, the African National Congress in South Africa, to mention only a

few, were able to mobilise considerable national following by harping on the exploitative and oppressive character of the colonial rule and the necessity of self-determination.

But how could the factions of the African leadership who wanted to make a bid for political power challenge the leadership of nationalist movements already in existence? This was a difficult problem. If the faction formed a political party on the platform of self-determination, better socio-economic amenities for the indigenous African masses and all other sensible commitments of the nationalist movement already in existence, then the new party would have had no claim for separate existence. It could have just as well join the existing nationalist movement.

Moreover, it could not have simply opposed the major policies of the nationalist movement because this would have appeared very bad among the masses. Therefore, it had to adopt the essentials of the programme of the existing nationalist movement and yet differentiate its political organisation from the nationalist movement in some visible way.

There was little it could do in such a situation apart from appealing to ethnicity and regionalism. The regionalism and inter-ethnic politics of Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, etc. before and after independence illustrates this phenomenon (Eisenstedt, 1995).

Saguti (1990) argues that the socio-economic conditions in most African countries are ideal for the use of ethnic consciousness to establish political bases. Firstly, given the low level of class consciousness, ethnic loyalty is something that makes sense to many people (in both rural and urban areas). Its usefulness is seen and is demonstrated in the urban areas in the struggle for socio-economic security and opportunities such as employment, education, housing, etc. Secondly, the regions and political constituencies in most African countries are more or less ethnically homogenous, such that to win an ethnic

group is to win a political constituency. If the ethnic group happens to be fairly large such as the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Ibos in Nigeria; the Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, Zulu in South Africa, Kikuyu in Kenya, etc. a political base is guaranteed.

Thirdly, the appeal to ethnicity has the advantage of concealing the contradictions between the interests of the African leadership and those of the masses. For instance, as the nationalist movements gathered momentum and the contradictions within the African leadership became more open, various political factions tried to create political bases by appealing to ethnic consciousness. It is important to point out that in their present competition for political power the different factions of the African leadership are still exploiting ethnic differences. This is in spite of the public condemnations against ethnicity and proclamations for national unity. The declarations against ethnicity are not taken seriously by the masses because the very people who denounce ethnicity are also institutionalising it as the basis for political and economic competition.

Extrapolating from this analysis it could be argued that inter-ethnic conflicts in African politics will diminish if the following occur: First, if the socio-economic security of the masses is assured through increased production of goods and services in both rural and urban areas. Second, the creation of political and social organisations which will allow a high degree of egalitarianism in socio-economic relations. Third, when the contradictions between the interests of the masses and those of the ruling class become sharper and penetrate the consciousness of the masses.

The above political economic approach to explain inter-ethnic politics in Africa could also be used to analyse the recurrence of military governments in Africa.

The Recurrence of Military Governments

In order to explain this salient feature of the political economy of Africa, we must also go back to the colonial experience in Africa. Colonial rule was based on coercion. Not surprisingly, the coercive apparatus of the state, especially the military and the police and to a lesser extent the bureaucracy were the most developed institutions under colonial rule including under Apartheid South Africa. Nelson (1990) states that the colonizers were well aware that, there was no point of amassing an impressive coercive institution if they could not control it. Control was maintained by selective recruitment and by ideological indoctrination. The officer corps of the military was dominated by people from the colonial powers. The few indigenous people who made it into the officer corps were carefully chosen. Subservience and conservatism were given the utmost priority. The colonial army was indoctrinated with the love for order and distaste for radical change, politics and politicians. If the indoctrination was at all successful, it would incline them to regard the nationalist leaders, freedom fighters, communists as irresponsible disturbers of peace.

When the nationalist leaders won political independence, they found that they were now in charge of the military which had been used against them and which had been taught to despise them. Worse still, the military still remained as a colonial institution because people from the former colonial powers still dominated the office corps. This made the post-independence situation very unstable because the nationalists who took over government office in Africa did not have control of the coercive resources of government. Equilibrium could only be achieved when those who held government office also gained control of the coercive institutions or if those who controlled the coercive institutions also took over the business of

government. The rash of military regimes after independence partly explains how the issue was being resolved (Black, 1990).

One could as well argue that if the governments which Africa had at independence did not control the coercive apparatus of the state then they were not really governments. The further implication of this is that the African military has not been unseating governments but forming governments where there were none. However, Ake (1976) states that the lack of control over the coercive resources of the state is only one explanation for the drift to military rule after independence.

The other factor which created a situation in which office was divorced from control is the fact that the African leadership which succeeded the colonial government had a meagre and insecure material base. Under colonialism, the economy was not developed, but merely exploited, and the access of the indigenous people to control of the means of production was strictly limited by various colonial laws. Consequently, the post-independence indigenous bourgeois class is very small and weak. It is weak because of its factionalism, which in turn inhibits its ability to create a secure material base for itself. It is also weak because of its comprador character. Its control of the economy and the major means of production is limited. The real power being international capitalism.

The post-independence African leadership who replaced the colonial governments were aware of the precariousness of their economic base and of the necessity of acting immediately to make it secure. They proceeded to use their office to gain economic wealth. This was done by corruption and more importantly, by extending government control of the economy in order to control the social surplus. In a society in which these conditions exist, there would be a tendency for economic competition to be resolved into political competition. Thus, in moving into politics, the military in Africa are like everyone else seek-

ing the “political kingdom” in order to have access to national wealth.

This is due to the fact that the nationalist leaders who inherited governmental office not only lacked the essential coercive base of government, they also lacked a political base. The nationalist parties which brought them to power were a very fragile political base. Most of these parties were coalitions of groups and organizations which had various grievances against the colonial regime. The end of colonialism destroyed a vital element in the cohesion of this coalition.

Barat (1995) argues that ideology might have provided a strong cohesive political base, but the nationalist movements in Africa had never gone for ideological clarity. They preferred pragmatism, vague exhortations and emphasis on the manifestations of colonial oppression. Some nationalist leaders used their ethnic groups as political bases. The exploitation of ethnicity led to unstable ethnic coalitions and to political fragmentation. Moreover, the development of a truly national political base was even more difficult because the colony was an aggregation of peoples who had little or nothing in common before colonialism subordinated them to common rule.

It is interesting to note why the military in Africa has been more successful than other groups in taking control of the government. This is due to its direct control of the coercive resources and the structural simplicity of the African governments they replace, i.e. government power is concentrated in a few hands and is highly personalised; and most of those who are in-charge of the government are not backed by strong popular political organizations with a well-articulated ideology. Therefore, once the soldiers arrest the few leaders who personalize the government, occupy the radio station, the airport and surround the few public buildings in the capital they find (sometimes) to their own surprise that they are already in power (Feit, 1990).

Economic Stagnation and International Marginalization

Africa's attempt to achieve economic development has been shaped by the analysis of western bourgeois economists who do not appreciate that the underdevelopment of Africa is the effect of international capitalist accumulation and exploitation through the devastation and demoralization of the slave trade, colonialism and apartheid. They tend to explain the underdevelopment of Africa somewhat tautologically in terms of deficiencies of Africa. The list of these deficiencies usually varies from one economist to another. Generally the most recurrent include lack of entrepreneurial and technological skills, shortage of capital and investment opportunities, low productivity of labor, insufficient saving, inefficiency, laziness, etc. etc. (Yudin, 1995) Armed with such a view of underdevelopment one easily deduces what has to be done to bring about economic development, i.e. procure the appropriate technology, make labor more productive, create investment opportunities, mobilize more capital, etc.

Although the African leaders understand the relationship between slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism and the economic underdevelopment of the continent, they are essentially seeking economic development with the same prescriptions of the western bourgeois economists. Their economic development policies lean heavily towards efforts to secure loans, grants, foreign expertise and technology, to increase the productivity of land, to discourage laziness, improve management skills and the terms of trade, etc.

The existing evidence clearly shows that these policies and programmes have not worked. International organizations including the United Nations and the African governments themselves admit that performance has been very poor. Statistics show that Africa is lagging farther and farther behind the industrialized countries. The policies and programmes have not

failed because the prescriptions are necessarily wrong. It is not wrong to increase the productivity of land and to suggest that managerial skills of the people need to be improved. They have failed mainly because they do not confront the decisive factors which affect the prospects of economic development in Africa.

The first factor is the parasitical character of the African bourgeoisie. Let me point out that any bourgeoisie, anywhere, is essentially parasitic because it lives off the sweat of someone else. But while exploiting the proletariat in Europe, the western bourgeoisie has played the historical revolutionary role of massively and rapidly advancing the development of the forces of production (Marx and Engels, 1948). Unfortunately, this is not true of the bourgeoisie in contemporary Africa. The African bourgeoisie is completely parasitic in the sense that it lives on exploitation but contributes little or nothing to the development of forces of production.

Fanon (1963) characterised the African bourgeoisie as follows:

“it lacks economic base, i.e. it is just a bourgeois in spirit, mostly in the civil service (bureaucratic); most of it is an alienated group as seen in its imitation of western values; it is characterised by intellectual laziness or spiritual penury, as shown by its ignorance of the economy and socio-economic conditions of their own countries. It does not take trouble to study and understand the forces of imperialism acting on them, especially on the economy. This makes the African bourgeoisie fail to rationalise popular action hence fails to lead the masses.....”

It is not difficult to see what such a situation does to the prospects of economic development. The competition for political power becomes so intense that it marginalizes every other developmental effort, especially the question of production.

Competition concentrates on how the meager social product is distributed rather than on how it is being produced.

Colonialism is mainly responsible for creating this situation in which the bourgeoisie is unable to play its historical revolutionary role of developing the forces of production in Africa. As it was pointed out earlier, the colonial regime monopolized the control of production and had tried to exclude the indigenous people from being in a position to accumulate wealth. As a result of this and other colonial policies, the indigenous bourgeoisie which developed was very small, its entrepreneurial and managerial skills were not developed, its material base was precarious and its control of production was limited. The colonizers did not only dominate the economy but they oriented it towards the metropole and made completely dependent on the metropole. Thus ensuring that even independence was won the African bourgeoisie maintained its comprador character. The latter could not just renounce this role without gravely jeopardizing its material base, especially in the short-run.

It was only natural that after independence, international capitalism was less inclined to go for long gestation investments due to fear of political instability and nationalization of its assets and geared its activities towards quick profit taking with a minimum loss of assets. If economic stagnation is to be avoided, it is more necessary than ever that the indigenous bourgeoisie should fulfill its historical revolutionary role. However, its comprador character prevents it from doing so.

The second factor that contributes to economic stagnation in Africa is the contradiction in the fundamental relations of production in post-colonial Africa. This may appear odd because the contradiction between the western bourgeoisie and proletariat did not stop capitalism from achieving an extraordinary expansion of production in the western countries. However, the African context presents a number of differences:

Firstly, the social surplus product in Africa is very small. There is no need to dwell on the unhappy statistics of the wretchedness of Africa in economic performance. These have been documented in various UN and World Bank annual reports (UN, 1998; World Bank, 1998). Moreover, Africa does not enjoy the advantages that the western capitalist countries had in the early days of their industrial revolutions, i.e. plenty of booty from abroad, relative freedom from foreign exploitation and coherent economies. Instead Africa has remained a source of booty for others, and a victim of perpetual foreign exploitation. As a result of this Africa's economy is disarticulated, distorted and disintegrated.

Secondly, Africans have a political consciousness that the people in western countries never had at the beginning of the European industrial revolution. As a result of the nationalist movement and the struggle for independence, the African masses including the peasantry had become thoroughly politicized and radicalized. This was because to mobilize them into the nationalist struggle the nationalist leaders had to capitalize on the exploitative character of colonialism including Apartheid; and to teach them to resent exploitation. The nationalist leaders had to open the eyes of the African masses to the possibilities of a better life after independence (Ake, 1982).

Thirdly, the African masses struggle with extreme poverty in a world which has been brought much closer by international communication systems including the Television. The taste of western affluence has trickled down even to the most remote Africa villages. Inevitably this penetration of western tastes has sharpened the African masses' consciousness of their deprivations.

These elements are significant in the sense that they give a particular shape edge to the contradictions between the African leadership and the masses. They constitute a strong pressure for radical changes in the political economy of the continent. More-

over, as a result of the meagerness of the social surplus product the competition for its distribution has become very brutal. This makes exploitation in the midst of such poverty a threat to the victims very physical existence. The situation is made more explosive by the victims consciousness of their deprivation and exploitation. Under such conditions the prospect for socio-economic development is difficult.

To understand how far this situation impedes socio-economic development in Africa, one has to realize that socio-economic development and the maintenance of the status-quo in the face of these revolutionary pressures are competitive goals. They compete for the energy and attention of the African leadership. Above all, they compete for available scarce resources. Most African leaders are forced by such a situation to spend large proportions of their countries' GNP on building the coercive instruments of the state such as the military and the security forces, etc. to the detriment of socio-economic development. There is also the waste incurred in killing and putting hundreds of political opponents in prison, excluding people who look troublesome from political and economic participation.

Being in this state of siege the African bourgeoisie is obliged to follow the line of least resistance in the pursuit of economic development. It prefers to solicit aid and grants and foreign expertise. It tailors down its development programmes to technical incremental changes such as a new housing project here, an new airport there, etc. It refrains from taking drastic steps against international capitalism in order not to compound its problems.

African scholars and the international development community have raised concern about the international marginalization of continent . The concern is mainly with the economic regression of Africa relative to other regions of the world and the diminishing importance and relevance of Africa in the global

economy (Kaluki, 1998; Olok,1995; World Bank,1994;). The critical question is who is or what is getting marginalized?

This paper argues that the problem of marginalisation is essentially a restatement of the underdevelopment problem in Africa. Part of the problem is that the African leaders and the international donor agencies have superseded the African masses as the agents of social transformation and development. Politically disenfranchised, the Africa masses are no longer available for supporting the state in its development project. Ultimately, the problem is not Africa's marginality to the rest of the world but the marginalization of the African masses in the socio-economic development of continent.

Having discussed the salient features of the political economy of the continent, there is need to suggest the contours of an appropriate socio-economic development paradigm .

Towards a New Development Paradigm : Building on the Indigenous

The paper argues that the socio-economic transformation process in Africa cannot be advanced effectively unless those involved in this process take seriously the realities of the African societies as they are and not what they ought to be. This implies that sustainable socio-economic development can only be realized if it is based on the indigenous. The indigenous is not necessarily what is traditional but whatever the African masses regard to be an authentic expression of themselves. This implies the following aspects:

- While democracy is an integral part of the socio-economic development process, Africa needs a social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasizes

abstract political rights; a democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights as it does on individual rights; a democracy which entails decentralization of power to local democratic formations and empowerment of these local governance institutions; a democracy which is as inclusive as possible. The legislative bodies should in addition to national groups, have special representation of mass organisations.

- The development strategy derived from such a people-driven democratization process should be based on the following values and principles: a popular development strategy in which the people have to be the agents, the means and the end of the developmental process. This implies self-reliance and this has to be practiced at all levels, i.e. household, community, regional and national.
- Self-reliance requires much confidence. Lack of confidence is a serious problem. It may well be the greatest obstacle to the development of Africa. The humiliations of colonization and slavery before it, virtually destroyed the confidence of Africans including the African leadership.
- If the people win the process of development, they will not be alienated from it. As opposed to the present situation whereby development is anti-people, the process of development in Africa must take the African people as they are and not what they ought to be. This implies that any development strategy must be based on how the people can move forward by their own efforts and in accordance with their own values. This is because socio-economic development has to be experienced and participation is the process of bringing it about.

Building on the indigenous has a number of advantages: Firstly, it leads to a development paradigm radically different from the previous development strategies. A paradigm which is democratic and participatory, and which takes into account the socio-economic and cultural realities of the African people. Secondly, it helps to correct a situation in which socio-economic and technological transformation in Africa becomes a process of alienation.

The existing development paradigms tend to treat the African people as if they have neither validity nor integrity. Their validity depends on repudiating their present situation of “primitivity” in order to be reconstituted into something western and modern. The implication of this is that socio-economic transformation is no longer how the African people themselves move forward on their own terms but on how they may be transformed into an image that other people think they ought to be. Socio-economic transformation and development, therefore, becomes a process of self-alienation and humiliation.

Thirdly, building on the indigenous helps to avoid the assumption that the indigenous is never conducive for socio-economic development in Africa. It also avoids emphasizing western rationality too far in the African socio-economic and cultural conditions.

Fourthly, as already discussed above, building on the indigenous is the necessary condition for a “genuine” self-reliant socio-economic transformation in Africa. This is due to the fact that dependent development has failed in Africa.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that in order to understand the salient features of the political economy of Africa one must begin with an appreciation of the material conditions of African

countries, especially the role of colonialism in the creation of these conditions. To overcome underdevelopment, Africa needs a massive disengagement from the exploitative relations of dependence. But this is unlikely to happen for obvious reasons. First, the African leadership cannot reduce the exploitative relations without endangering its material base. Second, international capitalism helps many African governments to stay afloat by providing aid and grants for investment and for meeting the costs of government. In some cases it lends military support for African governments to stay in power. Second, disengagement will be inconvenient because it will deprive the African leadership of much of the western consumer goods which are important for their commodious living. Third, the hardship which will follow in the wake of such disengagement may sharpen the contradictions between the leadership and the masses. The paper therefore, suggests that Africa needs a new development paradigm which is based on the indigenous, i.e. whatever the African masses themselves regard to be an authentic expression of their own experiences. This will involve self-reliance, empowerment, confidence and self-realisation as opposed to alienation on the part of the African masses.

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