

# Considerations on the African National Question

*K. Prah*  
(Dept. of Sociology UBS)

## STATING OBJECTIVES

Briefly, the main aim of this paper is to discuss the issue of the African nationality. Of particular importance in the exercise has been the need to explain the class character of African national expression, and in the process of analysing the subject of the paper concepts like, Pan-Africanism, nationalism, Populism, and the Right to National Self-Determination have had to be subjected to relevant scrutiny.

In a late edition of the radical African journal "Ikwezi", the following statement is attributed to one of the greatest men of the 20th century, the great Vietnamese revolutionary and leader Ho Chi Minh. "It is a well-known fact that the black people are the most oppressed of humankind." For centuries ever since the beginnings of capitalism, the labour of black people has been an important source for surplus value in the global process of capitalist accumulation. Almost everywhere people of African descent are outside Africa; they have been taken there as slaves. Today in a large part of Africa, in the south, white fascist minorities in a manner presently unique for the whole world, ruthlessly oppress, exploit, and treat Africans as inferior humans, sub-human types in the land of their fathers and forefathers. The aura of servitude

which has hung around Africans for centuries lingers on as echoes and reminders of the sad past. In black culture and politics, expression has been given to the black human condition, for the history of the African people is indeed a history of resistance and protest, which was carried into sublime music and bloody warfare. Again today, the possibility of organized proletarian struggles co-ordinated on a broader African level has opened up perspectives of the African revolution in a fresh and historically more advanced way. Students of African history are cheered by Blyden's last sentence in his The Negro in Ancient History (1871). "Time's noblest offspring is the last". Indeed, the most violent and the most benign expressions, war and music, have been used by blacks to register their records. With respect to "Africans in Diaspora", it is interesting to remember that in all their exteriorization of spiritual and physical anguish attendant on slavery in the form of deeply moving music, there was solace in the millenarianism which saw "judgement day" and the destruction of "Babylon" round the corner; on which day the tribulations and woes of black people will end. This was the use to which christian mythology was put. It was set into music as a form of political protest. Black protest and nationalism, also developed a more direct political form, under the aegis of Pan-Africanist ideas. But what are the constituent elements of these concepts of African nationhood?

#### NATIONALISM AND THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Nationalism<sup>1</sup> has been one of the difficult politico-sociological concepts to define. To some it is a state of mind, a mere ideological orientation, within which the idea is held that one's ultimate loyalty and social commitment lies with the nation-state which is his or her native land, ancestral traditions, customs, and people. Defined in such loose terms, it represents a purely super-structural phenomenon with all the attendant problems of

subjectivism and terminological discrepancies. When the concept is placed within a historical framework, it tends to be less elusive, it is more materially grounded, and yields more cognitive gold. In the sense that it is generally understood contemporarily, it is a modern phenomenon dating from the late 18th century in Western Europe and North America. It is not however so easily understood that it arose at a specific stage of socio-economic development, and represented the super-structural exteriorization of material substructural conditions. The nation-state which was its existential crucible was essentially the post-feudal state constituted structurally for the expansion of capitalism and its dominant class, the bourgeoisie. The emergence of the nation-state shifted the point of focus of political allegiances. Before the era of nationalism in the West political allegiances often focussed on the secularized remains of the Holy Roman Empire, the Christian world community; and specifically on the feudal potentates, principalities, and sometimes religious sects. Thus in a sense ironically the specific parochialism of the feudal period was replaced by yet another form of parochialism whose frame of reference was more extended in terms of its ethnographic prerequisites. It would be however quite mistaken to overemphasize its ethnic specifications at the expense of its fundamental class character. The National movements which swept Western Europe between 1789 and 1871 represented in fact the ascendancy of the bourgeois classes, and the collapse of the older dominant classes i.e. the feudalist groups. The ideology of nationalism, and its political expression, the emergence of nation-states was nothing more, and nothing less, than the development of more favourable conditions for capitalist development at its pre-monopoly stage. As Lenin explained: "Throughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. For the complete victory of

commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature eliminated. Therein is the economic foundation of national movements. Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of national states under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most profound economic factors drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is typical and normal for the capitalist period."<sup>2</sup>

In the effort towards creating a bourgeois nation-state generally in both Europe and outside Europe, all the historically post-feudal classes are active in these movements, although in the long run, their interests in the political economy which is being created greatly vary. Thus the proletarian and capitalist classes unite to overthrow feudalism and establish the nation-state, but the nation-state itself becomes the structure within which the rule and domination of capital over labour is firmly consolidated. The ideological basis of these movements both in the past and near present, have been essentially populist.

The concept of the Rights of Nations to Self-determination, like several other modernist democratic concepts of today, generally have their genesis in the period of the European Enlightenment in the 18th century, and the French Revolution in particular. In his statement on the "Declaration du droit des gens" submitted in April 1795, the Abbé Gregoire had expatiated on this neo-Rousseauian doctrine. He argued that every people has the right to organize or change its government according to its own inclinations. The American Revolution revindicated this stand-point and again it received reiteration during the struggles for Independence in Ibero-America.

In the early period of its use, the idea enjoyed a deepening effect from the philosophical ideas of such varied pre-Marxian thinkers as Kant, Fichte, Herder and Schleiermacher. It became one of the central peace aims of the 1st World War, and President Woodrow Wilson in a statement to the U. S. Senate on January 22, 1917 submitted that "no nation should extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity." This principle was spelt in more historically specific elaboration in his "Fourteen Points" on January 8, 1918. The realities of real-politik have however demonstrated that this was empty idealistic rhetoric which neither victors nor vanquished have stuck to. Imperialist rivalry, the contention for colonies, neo-colonies, and spheres of influence have featured more practically in international relations, than the sanctimonious verbiage of Woodrow Wilson. The principle featured as a cornerstone of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and subsequently in the Atlantic Charter (August 14, 1941), the United Nations, (January 1, 1942) and even the Yalta Agreement (1945). In the post-1945 era, the main arena of debate on this issue has been on the floor of the world body where the depth of the meaning of the concept has come to encompass on the one hand, the more classical perspective, the right of self-determination in the sense of the right of a state to choose its own politico-economic and social modus vivendi, and on the other, meaning and emphasizing more the right of a people to constitute itself into a state or otherwise freely to determine the form of its association with an existing state or states. No group of analysts and observers have pursued discussion and debate on this question with as much vigour and thoroughness as the Marxists. Elaborating strictures against Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin forcefully stated very correctly that "if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal

definitions, or 'inventing' abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state."<sup>3</sup> In the theses of the 2nd Comintern Congress (1920) it was, among other things, stated that "real national freedom and unity can be achieved by the proletariat only through revolutionary struggle and by the overthrow of the bourgeoisie". Stalin's brief treatment of the subject "Nationalism outside Europe"<sup>4</sup> summarized precisely the essence of these ideas.

In Africa, because capitalist colonialism was imposed by whites throughout the continent, nationalist reaction albeit populist has been anti-white colonialist. Historical conditions have made it nothing else. To most Africans colonial oppression simply means the national oppression of African people by Whites.

Hodgkin's<sup>5</sup> argument that often nationalist propaganda in Africa "is liable to be emotionally highly charged, relying on rhetoric rather than argument" is very true but mass nationalist politics in Africa because of the basically morally justified character of its demands has needed often only slogans to make sense to masses whose rejection of colonialism and European oppression is so well and easily understood, that argumentation on such basic issues becomes rather superfluous. That is the catch about choruses like: "You Europeans are nothing but robbers, though you pretend you came to lead us. Go away, go away, you Europeans, the years that are past have been more than enough for us".<sup>6</sup> A more stylized rendering of the same idea can be read in the Mau Mau secret society oath of the mid 20th century.

I speak the truth and now before God  
And before this movement  
The movement of Unity  
The Unity which is put to the test  
The Unity that is mocked with the name of "Mau Mau"  
That I shall go forward to fight for the land,  
The lands of Kirinyaga that we cultivated  
The lands which were taken by the Europeans.  
And if I fail to do this  
May this oath kill me,  
May this seven kill me,  
May this meat kill me.<sup>7</sup>

Under conditions of colonialism in the past and settler-colonialism in the present, these expressions are the substance of reality for large sections of the exploited African classes, although obviously pre-Marxist in an ideological developmental sense, the millernarianism and messianism of groups like the "Mau Mau", the Kimbanguists of the Congo, and others represented the politico-religious protest of deprived classes with relatively low class consciousness.

#### PAN-AFRICANISM

The prefix pan, which precedes Africanism in the concept of Pan-Africanism derives from the Greek word Pan (all). Pan movements have historically not been confined to Africa, and this is no surprise, for the wish and recognition of identity in the broad basis of culture history and ethnicity, transcending contemporary state boundaries, are sentiments which have in different ways and to different degrees, affected most peoples on this globe at different historical periods. The Slavs have articulated Pan-Slavic views, which originated at the beginning of the 19th century and envisaged a union of the Slavic language speaking peoples. It started as a movement among intellectuals, scholars, poets etc., under the influence and in

the wake of the French Revolution. In 19th century Russia, Pan-Slavic ideas crystallized into Slavophilism as opposed to Westernism. In the Moslem world, Pan-Islamism originally underlied the efforts of Muslim states in the 19th century to resuscitate Muslim power and achieve Moslem unity. These notions have lingered on into the 20th century, with contemporary Neo-Pan-Islamism. Pan-Germanism has been another species in this genus. Its aim has broadly been a union of all Germanic people. In the Western hemisphere, Pan-views exist particularly in Latin American where the common Latin culture has been a fertile ground for the breeding of such sentiments. Not all these varieties of Pan-ism have had the same politico-ideological focus. Some have in general terms represented essentially right-wing view while others have carried a leftist orientation, depending on the historical specifics of the societies and peoples involved, so that Japanese views of the "Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" and the Pan Germanic theories of Nordic-Aryanism, and the ideas which lay at the bottom of the Hitlerian contention for Germanic "Lebensraum", were based on purely extreme right-wing racialist views. Other less openly fascistic notions which have had clearly right-wing expansionist and imperialist inclined intentions have been such views as the Pan-Americanist ideas enshrined in the Monroe Doctrine, and Pan-Slavic views under Tsarist Russian leadership; this latter indeed became a vehicle of Russian domination over the Slavs. However even within the same broad framework of Pan-Slavism, a more progressive version representing popular, generally leftist, aspirations have also been historically present. The first Pan-Slavic congress of the Slavic nationalities of the Habsburg monarchy held in June 1848 in Prague under the leadership of the Czech patriot Frantisek Palacky highlighted demands of Austrian Slavs for the transformation of the Habsburg monarchy into a federation of equal peoples under democratic Habsburg



rule. The same can be said for Pan-Africanism which till today has largely represented demands of African people in and out of Africa for unity, freedom, and self-determination. Historically for Africa and people of African descent it has for most of its life span been a rallying point for African resurgence and unity, a popular reference category in the aspirations of black people. However, today it is clear that the idea of African unity as understood by Pan-Africanists has been largely a populist apology of the African Revolution and class struggle.

Generally whatever credit and emphasis is placed on the contribution of others before the 20th century, it is agreed that the dominant figure of Pan-Africanist thought this century is W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois' impact has been perhaps only equalled socially, although not intellectually by Marcus Aurelius Garvey, who has been variously called, "The Negro Moses", "the black Zionist". These two figures stood at opposite poles in the ideological spectrum. Garvey was a blackist who divulged: "I believe in a pure black race just as all self-respecting whites believe in a pure white race, as far as that can be".<sup>8</sup> On another occasion he said: "We were the first Fascists. We had disciplined men, women and children in training for the liberation of Africa. The black masses saw that in this extreme nationalism lay their only hope, and readily supported it. Mussolini copied fascism from me, but the negro reactionaries sabotaged it".<sup>9</sup> Garvey collaborated with the Ku Klux Klan and other white right-wing extremists. Du Bois on the other hand was a highly sophisticated left-wing scholar.

In a preface to the Jubilee edition of his "Souls of Black Folk" Du Bois noted that: "As I re-read these messages of more than half a century ago, I sense two matters which are not so much omission on my part as indications of what I then did not know or did not realize:

one is the influence of Freud and his co-workers in their study of psychology; the other is the tremendous impact on the modern world of Karl Marx . . . My college training did not altogether omit Karl Marx. He was mentioned at Harvard and taken account in Berlin. It was not omission but lack of proper emphasis or comprehension among my teachers of the revolution of thought and action which Marx meant . . . I still think today as yesterday that the colour line is a great problem of this century. But today I see more clearly than yesterday that at the back of the problem of race and colour, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it; and that is the fact that so many civilized people are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their following; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous and the excuse for this war continues largely to be colour and race."<sup>10</sup>

Pan-Africanism originated not in Africa, but the New World. It was precisely those Africans, taken from their homeland into slavery and servitude in the Americas and the Caribbean who articulated their aspirations for Africa and "Africaness" into what later became known as pan-Africanism. The picture was caught in the poetry of the black American writer Claude McKay's often quoted poem "Outcast":

"For the dim regions whence my fathers came  
My spirit, bonded by the body, longs.  
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;  
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.  
I would go back to darkness and to peace.  
But the great western world holds me in fee,  
And I may never hope for full release  
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.

Something in me is lost, forever lost,  
Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,  
And I must walk the way of life a ghost  
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart  
For I was born, far from my native clime,  
Under the white man's menace, out of time."<sup>11</sup>

Evidence of the attitude of black slaves in America to Africa can be gleaned from the references and sentiments expressed in their songs (the spirituals). Inspired closely by the metaphor of the old testament, the slaves in America compared themselves to the Israelites in Egyptian bondage. In the structure of this lyrical imagery "Heaven", "Jerusalem", and "Zion" represented Africa and "River Jordan" the wide Atlantic. "Ethiopia" was part of this vocabulary, and till today the Rastafarians of Jamaica, latter day millenarians and messianists regard the Negus as their messiah and Ethiopia their Valhalla. During the early nineteenth century, a French writer observed that in parts of the New World, (Haiti in particular) among blacks the myth persisted that the souls of black folk went to Africa after death in America.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously one factor which enhanced the development of Pan-Africanist notions in the New World was that here Africans from different parts were thrown together under conditions of extreme degradation and suffering. The commonness of their history, lot, and destiny was an immediate reality to perceive. Thus although they were cut off from their various and specific ethnic origins and the cultural references this provided, their loss was replaced by a new consciousness which recognized and "embraced the totality of African humanity". Stuckey<sup>13</sup> indicates that the wish for independent and autonomous development of blacks in the New World is probably as old as the 1600s, however it may have matured into clear ideological form about the mid-19th century. Even then in some

parts of the New World militant proto-black-nationalism was definitely pre-mid 19th century. With respect to the Guianas, Anton de Kom's "Wij Slaven van Surinam" is particularly illuminating.

Denmark Vesey's<sup>14</sup> leader of the 1822 Charleston slave conspiracy had been an activist of a black separatist church movement who had been greatly inspired by the Haitian revolution. In North-East Brazil, a variety of religious cults became the protective setting for black consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Robert Alexander Young's "Ethiopian Manifesto" (1829), David Walker's "Appeal (1830)", H. H. Garnet's "Address to the slaves" (1843), and Martin Delany's "the Political Destiny of the Colored Race" apparently went some way in laying the ideological foundations of Black nationalism in the U. S.<sup>16</sup>

In so far as the political goals of Black nationalism in the U.S. and Africa are concerned, one important point has to be borne in mind. Whereas in America black nationalism is the political expression of a minority nationality for equality and self-determination, in Africa nationalism has been the expression of the majority nationality for freedom, independence and self-determination in the land of their forefathers. However, there is a fundamental and persistent notion among people of African descent, in and out of Africa, this is the belief that they all belong to the African nation.

#### IDEAS IN PRACTICE

As Padmore<sup>17</sup> points out the concept of Pan-Africanism arose out of the feeling of brotherhood which exists between Africans and people of African descent. It was apparently thrown into currency by the Trinidadian lawyer H. Sylvester-Williams. He convened the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 to which he invited Du Bois among others, this conference addressed itself to the black human condition and as Legum<sup>18</sup> sadly admits, at

that time, over three-quarters of a century ago they were protesting against the treatment of Africans in South Africa and Rhodesia smarting under the social torture of white racist chauvinism maintained in support of developing capitalism. Three years after this congress Du Bois broke with the more pacifist ideas of Booker T. Washington. The second congress took place in Paris (1919) under Du Bois' leadership. The third and fourth congresses were held in 1921 and 1923, and the fifth which was held in New York took place in 1927. Between the 5th and 6th congresses, the ideas of figures like C. L. R. James, George Padmore and Peter Milliard became influential in Pan-Africanist circles. The 6th congress was held in Manchester (1945). By now the youthful African element had become predominant. It boasted members as R. G. Armattoo, Peter Abrahams, Chief S. L. Akintola, Jomo Kenyatta, Chief H. I. Davies, Joe Appiah, J. C. de Graft Johnson, Otto Makonnen, Magnus Williams, E. J. Du Plan, Dr. K. K. Taylor, Kwame Nkrumah, C. L. R. James, George Padmore and of course the "grand old man" "father of Pan-Africanism," W. E. B. Du Bois.

The West African National Secretariat, (organized by Nkrumah in 1945) at its conference in August 1946 launched the idea of a West African Federation, as a step towards a United States of Africa. Dr. N. Azikiwe the older veteran African nationalist endorsed these ideas which he had been known to support in earlier years.<sup>19</sup> Between the late 40s and 1960 many of these young militants got back to Africa and started translating their ideas in practise. Its first success story was Ghana's independence in 1957. With this foothold secured, the first conference of Independent African States was held in Accra in 1958. A second such conference was held in Addis Ababa in 1960. The All African Peoples Conference of political parties and movements in Africa also took place in Accra, 1958. Subsequently follow-ups took place in Tunis (1960) and

Cairo (1961). At its meeting, which drew people like Patrice Lumumba, Felix Moumie, representatives of ANC (South Africa), nationalists from Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Kenya, Tanzania, etc., it adopted a resolution in support of the ultimate aim of a Union of free African States. Between the 60s and the 70s these ideas have hobbled along and even the only existing political organization which in the late 50s - early 60s based itself on Pan-Africanist principles, the Pan-African Congress of South Africa, in recent years is drifting slowly from this position to a more thorough-going marxist viewpoint.

In East Africa during the last quarter century, Jomo Kenyatta has been the most prominent Pan-Africanist. He had been one of the leaders of the Pan-Africanist Congress in Manchester (1945). His historical status in a way makes him a lonely figure in so far as Pan-Africanist traditions in East Africa are concerned. James Gichuru the former president of the Kenya African Union argues that Pan-Africanism appeared in East Africa as an open political force between 1955 and 1960. Tom Mboya's remarks suggest the late 50's as a crucial watershed in the development of ideas of African unity<sup>20</sup>. Apparently Julius Nyerere caught up with these ideas also in the mid-50's.<sup>21</sup> However already in 1945 the concept of an all-embracing East African movement was being discussed. In 1953, Ugandan nationalists sent telegrammes to Nehru, Fenner Brockway, Nkrumah and others proposing an All Africa government.<sup>22</sup>

In Africa, early nationalist thought emerged in the 1850s and 60s. The resettlement of former slaves in Sierra Leone and Liberia was not inspired or instigated by Africans. But once it had happened, it brought in its wake a cross-fertilization of ideas between the former slaves and the emerging westernized African classes on the West coast. The early leading advocates of Black nationalist ideas were probably Africanus Horton and Edward Blyden.

They were followed closely both historically and intellectually by other bourgeois African nationalists like J. M. Sarbah Jr., Attoh-Ahuma, J. Casely-Hayford, Holy Johnson to mention a few of the better known ones. Some of them actively sought to create political organisations with a wide African geographical and historical base, and in their writings the nationalist unitary African sentiment was never overlooked.

Booth, the Baptist missionary who came to Nyasaland in 1892 became close to Nyasaland's first African nationalist, John Chilembwe. In 1894, at Blantyre, a politico-religious grouping, the African Christian Union was formed under the auspices of Chilembwe, Booth and others. Among other things, their stated desire was "to unite together in the name of Jesus Christ such persons as desire to see full justice done to the African race and are resolved to work towards that day when African people shall become an African Christian nation"; it also desired "to pursue steadily and unswervingly the policy of 'Africa for the Africans!'"<sup>23</sup> Further down south in Natal the first South African black medical doctor, N. Yembula and others like Solomon Kumalo welcomed the ideas of the Christian Union. Already in the 1970's isolated groups of Africans had started organizing their own church communities in the face of racism of the whites in the two Boer Republics, Transvaal and Orange Vrystaat. As Legum points out, the emphasis was on "the African to write and work for his own redemption, political, economic and spiritual".<sup>24</sup> Apparently Booth brought together in Natal about 120 educated Africans who in the end rejected his proposals on the grounds that they could not trust any whiteman with a project like that. "No trust or reliance at all would be placed in any representative of the blood-stained whiteman who had killed scores of thousands of Zulus and their Matebele relations".<sup>25</sup> Today these feelings among Africans

have been reinforced even further by apartheid in Rhodesia and South Africa. So powerful were nationalist ideas from the U. S. during the early part of this century, that it is interesting to observe<sup>26</sup> that among the about 20 South African students who went to America at about that period, P. K. Isaka Seme (one of the founding members of the ANC - 1912) Sol Plaatjie, J. L. Dube, D. D. T. Jabavu and A. B. Xuma were all prominent in South African early nationalist history. Later others from elsewhere in Africa like Hastings Banda, P. M. Koinange and N. Azikiwe caught the nationalist fever in the U. S. A.

### NATIONALISM AS A POPULIST FORM

In 20th century Africa, nationalism has been very much a populist ideological form. Its thrust has been an anti-colonial (or anti-settler-colonial) in an overt way. The state structures it has given birth to have been all either laissez faire capitalist or state capitalist, or a mixture of the two dominant varieties of capitalism. In some instances state capitalism has been catchily dubbed socialism or African socialism. But any real analysis of these state structures reveals their basic bourgeois character. Above all these nationalist independence movements have said and done all "in the name of the people". It is interesting to note that populism where and whenever it has historically reared its head, has vocalized and idealized the interests of "the people". It has thus tended to attract popular sentiment. However invariably no structurization is accorded the concept of "the people"; no precise definition of the content of "the people" is given. Rather socio-economic differentiation among "the people" is avoided or under-emphasized, although superficially, slogans in favour of the common-man are fan-fared far and wide. Populist nationalism thus has been adaptable both to right and left-wing radicalism and rhetoric. In this sort of populist language "the African



people" becomes a holistic unit within which both tycoons and paupers are supposed to have a common destiny. This absence of a clear ideological structure dialectically delimits its weaknesses and strength depending of course on the specific historical conditions within which it is espoused and advocated. Under those conditions where the expulsion of a colonial master or white settler racism is the main item on the agenda, populist nationalism appears as a progressive force unifying all Africans against their oppressors. With the establishment of African bourgeois-democracy, the internal class contradictions among the various African classes which supported the independence movement, becomes more open and antagonistic. Under such latter conditions populism becomes reactionary and becomes an ideological weapon of mystification, and oppression in the hands of bourgeois and petty bourgeois interests. Because of its vague ideological orientation, populist nationalism tends to be philosophically highly syncretic. Witness Nkrumah in the early years of the Independence struggle in Ghana. "Today I am a non-denominational christian and a Marxist socialist and I have not found any contradiction between the two."<sup>27</sup> In the same vein populist nationalism often attempts to synthesize traditional and modern values. These tendencies are present in the ideas of Julius Nyerere on African socialism and Ujamaa, Sekou Toure on "Communaucratique", Jomo Kenyatta's African socialism, Numeiry's Arab socialism, Kenneth Kaunda on "Humanism", Leopold Senghor on "Negritude" and Mobutu Sese Seko on "Authencité" etc. In all these instances the philosophical character of their substantive ideas are eclectic "radical often in ideals but fundamentally reformist in methods". These theories in practice supervise neocolonial states for the expansion of capitalism. In this effort sometimes a superficial but often loud anti-imperialist position is adopted, and social contradictions are represented as emanating from outside. The links

between imperialism and internal reaction are not established. As I have elsewhere argued, contemporarily, populist nationalism often takes up a so-called Marxist or Marxist-Leninist garb.<sup>28</sup> The experiments in Guinea-Bissao, Mozambique and Angola fall under this category. It should be added that actually Leninism represents both historically and philosophically a rejection of populism, as can be seen in Lenin's polemics against the Narodniki.

#### RECENT UNITARY EFFORTS

Most of the recent conceptions of Unitary African Organizations have had buried deep in them all the contradictions inherent in the international capitalist order. As such their successes and failures have actually been reflective of trends in the international capitalist system, and to a steadily increasing degree the international fortunes and misfortunes of the super-powers in their tussles for spheres of influence and control.

The most important of these organizations of the last two decades is the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This body created originally on May 25, 1963, to enhance the aim of African unity has displayed purpose and strength only in so far as the neocolonial masters of Africa would permit. Compounding this problem has been the petty bourgeois chauvinism of the African ruling classes. All this has gone a long way into making this body a showground and debating club for African Heads of State. In a sense the OAU historically merged two closely preceding histories in Continental African politics. These were the political expressions of the Monrovia and Casablanca groupings.<sup>29</sup> The former tended to group the conservative governments which leaned heavily on the West, the latter were militant progressist African states, champions of "non-alignment" and "positive neutrality."

In a sense the Casablanca group had an earlier progenitor dating from May, 1959, this was the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union.<sup>30</sup> This was a radical populist group of sub-Saharan African states. Its extreme opposite in terms of ideological colouring was the African and Malagasy Common Organization (OCAM) created in December, 1960. Other similar mainly economically oriented organizations incorporating a number of African states are the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC) founded on the 8th December, 1964; the defunct East African Community (EAC) established on the 6th of June 1967, out of the older (1917) colonial British East African Customs Union; the African Development Bank (September 10, 1964); and the U. N. Economic Commission for Africa. Recently, a new economic union of West African States (ECOWAS) has been created.

Most of these structures of unity created within the last two decades have been rather short-lived, particularly the political groupings. The most dramatic and traumatic of these have probably been the collapse of the Mali-Senegal Federation, and the abortive idea of an East African Federation.

#### OLD AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

If the criterium of language is used as a yardstick for isolating ethnicities, there are then hundreds of ethnicities in Africa. In many cases, the structural likeness and proximity of these languages and cultures, are so close that, it serves little purpose to differentiate them as separate groupings. They are rather subunits of larger nationalities, and there are about 54 odd countries accommodating this profusion of nationalities and subnationalities. Within each country invariably, there are a few majority nationalities, with a host of minorities sharing a given state. There is no instance in which only one nationality inhabits a given country.

Furthermore, in all African countries, existing state borders cut through the historico-geographical locations of hundreds of these nationalities, for these borders were demarcated by the colonial powers in the 19th century without any consideration for the aspirations and wishes of the African people. Today, in many ways they have become sources of tension and conflict among African countries. Since most of Africa is still seriously neo-colonial, a lot of the tensions between African countries are actually inherited by proxy from the various imperialist powers. As such, they represent more the effects of imperialist rivalry, than internally generated conflicts. When and where inter-ethnic conflicts exist, they are often hyper-exacerbated by imperialist rivalry and contest for spheres of influence.<sup>32</sup> Although too often the real horizontal class character of these conflicts are hurried under vertical and ethnically oriented analysis common among idealists. In recent decades the oppression of various nationalities in multi-national African states has led to armed struggle. In the Southern Sudan, Arab oppression from the north provoked a cruel war which partial autonomy in the south has now quietened. In Eritrea, Ethiopian oppression has been met with a vigorous national war of liberation by the Eritreans. It is to be expected that as time goes on, and capitalist development expands in Africa, the need for wider markets for the free and speedy development of capitalism will tend to stimulate bourgeois African inspired moves towards larger unities, the ECOWAS is a case in point.

Much as such trends will facilitate the welcome movement of Africans in Africa, this is in fact, also the aim of capital at that stage of development when its further growth depends on wider markets and sources of production. As has been explained: "Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. The first is the awakening of national life and national

movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of nation-states. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the breakdown of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc. Both tendencies are a universal law of capitalism. The former predominates in the beginning of its development, the latter characterises a mature capitalism moving towards its transformation into socialist society."<sup>34</sup>

In the development of larger unities on the African continent, the African bourgeoisie would place national demands and issues in the forefront. On the other hand, the African masses specifically the proletariat and peasantry, as their class consciousness deepens would place the class struggle above narrow national demands. In the historical phase of transition from feudalism to capitalism, expectedly the African proletarian and peasant masses supported and continue to support national demands in unison with the propertied classes. However in order to achieve its strategic goal of "a world of unity between the working people of all nations, a world in which there is no place for any privileges or for the oppression of man by man"<sup>35</sup> the African labouring classes cannot from the standpoint of their own strategic interests support the permanence and entrenchment of petty bourgeois nationalism within the context of existing state structures. Its support would tend to be thrown behind the removal of existing national divisions and distinctions. In other words it would tend to support those moves aimed at bringing nationalities together; towards the fusion and merger of African nationalities; towards African unity based on principles of free unification. This freedom to unite naturally has meaning only if the right of secession is also implied. For as Lenin explained, "without freedom to secede, unification cannot be called

free."<sup>35</sup> From the viewpoint of the African peasant and worker masses, in Africa today, Fanon's description of the colonial world is still too real : "the town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other."<sup>36</sup>

In all parts of Africa, without exception one finds that the pattern of capitalist penetration cuts across borders and nationalities. For this reason often the classes which have developed across adjacent border areas are extremely similar in both national and class terms. The possibility of organizing them also on similar revolutionary lines and around similar agrarian programmes is very real, for it is the agrarian revolution under proletarian leadership which will draw the majority of African people into the revolution of the 20th century. The development of productive forces in Africa depends on the elimination of imperialism. But imperialism itself in practice is among other things "balkanization"; the fractionalization of a unit. It precisely truncates unified development, stifles the holistic and total development of productive forces.

Unity of much deeper and significant meaning, away from and beyond the ludicrous ineffectiveness of the OAU will be surpassed at the stage in African history when proletarian parties, working in close concert and cooperation both organisatorically and practically, develop the class struggle for socialism and proletarian unity. Indeed one can only conclude that it is only within the context of the struggle for proletarian unity in Africa that meaningful African unity can be achieved. That is the struggle for socialism in Africa, the African Revolution, which is only part of the International Revolution.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Various idealist but scholarly interpretations of the subject prominently include the following: E.H. Carr, Nationalism and After, London, 1945. A. Cobban, National Self-Determination, Chicago, 1947. K. Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication, Cambridge-Mass., 1953.
- J. S. Coleman, Nationalism in Tropical Africa. American Political Science Review, June 1954
- R. Emerson, From Empire to Nation, Cambridge, Mass., 1960.
- C.J.H. Hayes, Essays on Nationalism, New York, 1926
- Elie Kedourie, Nationalism, New York, 1961
- <sup>2</sup>V. I. Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination Collected Works, Vol. 20
- <sup>3</sup>V. I. Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination Collected Works, Vol. 20
- <sup>4</sup>J. Stalin, Nationalism outside Europe. In Foundations of Leninism 1924. Reprinted in Problems of Leninism, Moscow, 1945.
- <sup>5</sup>T. Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa, London 1956, page 169.
- <sup>6</sup>Chorus of Kenya African Union "hymn" quoted in T. Hodgkin, Ibid, page 169.
- <sup>7</sup>J. M. Kariuki, The "Mau Mau" Oath from "Mau Mau" Detainee, 1963, page 26. Quoted here from E. Kedourie, Nationalism in Asia and Africa, London 1970, page 463.
- <sup>8</sup>M. Garvey, Philosophy and Opinions. Vol. 2, page 37.
- <sup>9</sup>See G. Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism, New York 1972, page 75.
- <sup>10</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, New York 1953, (preface).
- <sup>11</sup>Claude McKay, Outcast, Quoted here from Colin Legum, Pan Africanism, New York, 1965, page 15.

- <sup>12</sup>I. Geiss, The Pan-African Movement, Metheun, 1974  
page 28.
- <sup>13</sup>S. Stuckey, The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism,  
Boston, 1972, page 2. In the Carribean and South  
America as opposed to the U. S., blacks managed to  
maintain a purer African cultural world. G. Shepperson,  
"Notes on Negro American influences on the Emergence of  
African Nationalism." Journal of African History,  
Vol. I No. 2 pp. 299-312.
- <sup>14</sup>See R. S. Starobin, Denmark Vesey, Englewood Cliffs,  
1970.
- <sup>15</sup>Till today many of these cults exist, and Bahia infact  
has the most "authentic" African cultural lore in the  
whole of the New World.
- <sup>16</sup>See S. Stuckey, The Ideological Origins of Black Nation-  
alism, Boston, 1972. See also H. Lynch, Pan-Negroism  
In The New World before 1862. In O. E. Uya, (ed)  
Black Brotherhood, Lexington, 1971. and H. Aptheker,  
Conserveness of Negro Nationality to 1900. In Toward  
Negro Freedom, New York, 1956.
- <sup>17</sup>G. Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism, page 95
- <sup>18</sup>C. Legum, Pan-Africanism, London, page 31
- <sup>19</sup>C. Legum, Ibid. Page 33
- <sup>20</sup>J. S. Nye, Pan-Africanism and East African Integration,  
Cambridge-Mass., 1966, page 31.
- <sup>21</sup>J. S. Nye, Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup>J. S. Nye, Ibid. page 96
- <sup>23</sup>See C. Legum, Op.cit., page 22
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid. page 23
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid. page 23
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid. page 27



<sup>27</sup>K. Nkrumah, Autobiography, London 1957, page 12

<sup>28</sup>See K. K. Prah, Social Background of Coup d'etat, Publikatie, Nr. 18. Afdeling Zuid en Zuidoost Azie. Amsterdam, 1973. Page 116. In this particular chapter the author gives an extended discussion on Populism. See also P. Worsley, The Third World, London 1967. G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, Populism, London, 1972. R. Cohen, Class in Africa. In Socialist Register London, 1972, page 231.

<sup>29</sup>The Casablanca Group was the result of a meeting held in Casablanca on January 7, 1961 between representatives of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Lybia, Egypt and the Algerian Provisional Government. They adopted a charter which provided for a joint military command and an African Common Market. Members of this group were pro-socialist, and a strong centrally organized African unity. They were supported by a newly created body - the Pan African Movement for East, Central, and Southern Africa (Pafmecca). The Monrovia Group (19) met in the Liberian capital May 8-12, 1961. They met again in Lagos, January 1962 to adopt a draft charter for an organization of Inter-African and Malagasy states.

<sup>30</sup>Also this grouping had a predecessor in the Ghana-Guinea Union of 1958.

<sup>31</sup>See Africa Yearbook and Who's Who, London 1976, page 8.

<sup>32</sup>In the late 60s the Dutch Newspaper (Amsterdam) Waarheid published a number of revealing articles about Nigeria.

See Waarheid (12/10/1968) Oorlog in Nigeria . . . stinkt naar olie, (27/11/68) Shell and BP investeren in Nigeria (31/5/67) Nigerian een van de rijkste olielanden van Afrika. (31/7/67) and (1/8/67) Shell in Biafra.

In 1968 the American Magazine Ramparts revealed that European and American oil companies invested over 1 billion dollars in Nigeria. These companies include Gulp Oil, Mobil, Texaco Standard Oil and Phillips; French companies ERAP Italy ENI. The most important of these companies was the combination of Shell-BP.

Gowon asked for higher oil royalties as his predecessor Ironsi. Gulf oil refused. Shell-BP waited for time. The oil companies speculated that the Nigerians would be better partners. In the meantime following the massacre of Ibos in the North of Nigeria, Biafra declared its independence and the question of whom to pay the oil royalties became important. Nigeria blocked the Biafran coast but allowed oil tankers free passage. Biafra was considered by the oil companies to be an ideal "oil-state" (just like the oil sheikdoms in the Arabian Gulf). In the course of the civil war, when it became clear that Biafra was losing ground the oil companies started backing more fully the federal government. Only the French oil company continued to openly support Biafra. The French company (ERAP) bought oil concessions in Biafra (3/4 of Nigerian oil area) for 15 million dollars for an area which could then deliver 2 million tons of oil per year. The French branch of Rothschild-Bank also bought mining concession (15 million dollars for tin, coal, gold and uranium), French support for Biafra and British support of the Federal Nigerian Government was as such for purely capitalist interests. Waarheid (12/10/68).

<sup>33</sup>V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 19, page 92

<sup>34</sup>V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 19, page 92

<sup>35</sup>V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 29, page 176

<sup>36</sup>F. Fanon, Concerning Violence, Quoted here from E. Kedourie, Nationalism in Asia and Africa, London.