THE 1977 ELECTIONS IN DJIBOUTI: A TRAGI/COMIC END TO FRENCH COLONIAL RULE

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The May 8, 1977 referendum in Djibouti, and the subsequent independence of the territory on June 27, 1977, has provided what can be cynically labelled as a fitting end for French colonial rule in Africa. As an institution exerting dramatic influences on the political and social history of the entire continent, colonialism has been portrayed in terms ranging from Achebe's tragic perspective to Ferdinand Oyono's tragi-comic light. Pre-independence visions of large-scale infusions of Saudi Arabian dollars combining with French technical know-how and commercial activity to create an East African Hong Kong, have served to underline the note of absurdity inevitably present in the sad circumstances characterizing this last colony's arrival at political independence.

As a political entity, Djibouti came into being 115 years ago, when Napoleon III signed a "treaty of friendship" with local Afar tribesmen.[1] Situated on a volcanic wasteland, the country fits the description of a moonscape, with little agricultural potential other than date culture and market gardening, and no known or suspected underground resources.[2] Location on the Red Sea gave strategic and economic significance to Djibouti's port facilities, and provided the incentive for France's continued presence. However, since the 1967 closing of the Suez Canal the port's operations have been reduced to 25% capacity, making substantial French subsidies a necessity. Reopening of the canal has shown little effect in the quantity of goods and ships passing through the port, and the past several years have coincided with the periodic sabotaging by Somali-backed guerillas of the railway link with Addis Ababa which had formerly contributed over 60% of the port's business. The population is ethnically heterogeneous, inherent divisions having been fostered and exaggerated by French "divide and rule" policy,[3] as well as by rival ambitions of the country's neighbors. Generally, political, social, and economic justifications and prospects for Djibouti's existence as an independent entity have been seen to be negligible.

The 1977 combined referendum on independence and elections to the National Assembly represents an appropriate starting point from which to evaluate political development in the new state. The series of events leading to the elections began in 1975, when the French government, acknowledging growing Arab pressures for withdrawal, the intensification of the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict, and the destabilization and mounting civil unrest within the territory, announced an about-face on its former policies. Realizing the French change of heart too late, Chief Minister Ali Aref Bourhan changed the name of his ruling party from the 'Union and Progress within the French Whole' to the National Union for Independence (UNI), and attempted to maneuver himself into a bargaining position with the French.[4] However, having served loyally for 15 years, Ali Aref was now out of step with both French opinion and the political climate within the territory. His resignation in July 1976 was followed by the formation of a transitional government headed by Abdullah Mohammed Kamil, based on a wider tribal and party mix, and including for the first time two ministers from the opposition African Peoples League for Independence (LPAI), as well as breakaway members of the UNI. Kamil, who only one year previously had broken with Ali Aref claiming that he was pushing ahead for independence at too fast a pace, now mustered French support and campaigned for redefinition of citizenship laws which would enfranchise more Issa Somalis and thus facilitate a vote for independence.[5] A roundtable meeting on the political future of the country was held in Paris in February 1977, at which time the decision was reached to hold an independence referendum on March 8, to coincide with the planned general election for an enlarged 65-member Chamber of Deputees. With voting lists extended from 52,000, of whom 57.6% were Afar to nearly 106,000, of which approximately 40% were Afar, the referendum results were to be expected.[6] In addition, the major Afar parties, including Aref's loyal faction of the UNI and other groups aligned against the Issa-dominated coalition and boycotted

1. Iain Guest, "Djibouti Tiptoes to Independence", *New Statesman*, vol. 93, no. 2412, pp. 768–769.
2. Nancy A. Shilling, "Problems of Political Development in a Ministate", *Journal of Developing Areas*, no. 7, July 1973, pp. 616–617.
3. M. Zarkovic, "The New State of Djibouti", *Review of International Affairs*, vol. XXVIII, August 5–20, 1977, Belgrade, pp. 30–31.
4. "Afar and Issa", *Africa Contemporary Record 1976–77*, Colin Legum, ed., Rex Collings Ltd., London, 1977, p. B427.
5. "Djibouti: Rough Road to Independence", *Africa Confidential*, vol. 17, no. 16, August 6, 1977, pp. 1–2.
6. "Afar vs. Issa: Looming Conflict?", *Bulletin of the Africa Institute of South Africa*, vol. 15, no. 5, Pretoria, 1977, pp. 100–107.

the Paris meeting, thus allowing the largely Issa Popular Independence Rally (RPI) to present an unopposed list of National Assembly candidates. Since by this time all shades of political opinion in the territory favored independence in some form, the Afar parties were forced to call for a "yes" vote on the independence question while urging their supporters to boycott the legislative elections by casting blank votes. However, it has been noted that it could present difficulties for those unused to free election procedure to take the ballot paper out of the single envelope with which they were presented and throw it away.[7] The problem may be said to have been compounded by the fact that, despite the presence of an 18-man French election commission and observers from the OAU and the Arab League, the Afar parties not presenting candidates had no right to have representatives in any supervisory capacity during the elections.[8] Thus, the results showed only a 10% response to the Afar call to cast blank voltes, although traditional Afar strongholds showed relatively low voter turnout.

The history of ethnic voting patterns and entanglements over manipulation of citizenship laws can be traced through all of Djibouti's colonial elections. The French created a Representative Council in 1946, half of whose members were representatives of the local French community, and the other half of which was composed of separate Somali, Afar, and Arab delegations. This system, perhaps reminiscent of that introduced by the French to Lebanon, established a communal voting system, and encouraged the two dominant indigenous groups to view themselves "not only as culturally and economically distinct, but as politically separate entities with fundamentally different if not irreconcilable interests."[9] The first referendum for independence was held in 1958, at which time the impending independence of the Somali Republic stimulated previously latent pan-Somali aspirations among the Issas, who represented the sole challenge to a continued French presence. The French response was to undertake "protection" of the Afar against the Issa, playing on Afar fears of becoming an insignificant minority within a greater Somali state. French protection apparently included requiring unavailable documentary proof of birth in the territory for Issa Somalis wishing to register as voters, while presumption of birth in the territory was frequently made for potential Afar voters. Reacting to a Somali call to boycott the elections as a protest

against French interference, the Issas abstained in large numbers while the Afars, Europeans, and wealthy Arab and Indian immigrants who could buy the required "proof" of citizenship returned a nearly unanimous "yes" vote.[10]

The next referendum was held in March 1967, following General de Gaulle's August 1966 visit to Djibouti which had become the occasion for demonstrations and rioting by Somali nationalists and their supporters. The French government made clear that a vote for independence would signify an end to all French military support and financial aid, following the example of Guinea. Once again, French manipulation of electoral rolls was evident, as an estimated 25% of all Issa in the territory were registered, as opposed to 46% of the Afar population.[11] Thousands of Somali were deported as suspected aliens, and in Djibouti, a predominantly Issa town, nearly one-quarter of the population were classified as "foreigners".[12] It may be interesting to note that the nomadic Afar, whose nationality in terms of modern borders may be extremely difficult to determine, were registered as citizens in numbers far outweighing the largely urbanized Issa. Accusations of French importation of Afars from Ethiopia have been raised by Somalis, as well as continued protests over an electrified fence erected by the French around Djibouti town in order to prevent further Somali urban migration. With an Afar majority assured, the 1967 referendum resulted in 60% favoring continued association with France, with local government conducted on an autonomous basis and France remaining in charge of defence, external relations, and finance.[13] The extremely polarized results of the referendum followed by widespread rioting, more mass deportations of Somalis, intensification of the already simmering Ethiopia-Somali Republic conflict, and Somali boycott of Djibouti internal government, was capped by a change of the colony's name from the French Somali Coast to the French Territory of Afars and Issas.[14] Thus, the combination of electoral manipulation and boycott

7. *Africa Research Bulletin*, May 1–31, 1977, p. 4436.
8. Ibid.
9. Shilling, p. 619.
10. Ibid., pp. 620–621.
11. Ibid., pp. 622–623.
12. "Afar and Issa", *Africa Contemporary Record 1976–77*, p. B435.
13. "Djibouti: Uneasy months to independence", *Africa*, no. 66, London, Feb. 1977, pp. 18–19.
14. Thomas A. Marks, "Djibouti: France's Strategic Toehold in Africa", *African Affairs*, Journal of the Royal African Society, vol. 73, no. 290, pp. 102–103.

by one or the other major ethnic groups has become something of a tradition surrounding elections in Djibouti.

By the time the 1977 elections took place, continued immigration had raised population estimates to 250,000, over 100,000 more than any previous estimation. Voter registration was by all accounts free of interference, the French having had no interest in altering the expected results. Although *Le Monde* reported that election day passed in a calm atmosphere, the international tension inspired by the referendum should be kept in mind.[15] A massive French naval buildup, complete with an aircraft carrier transporting marines and fitted with berths for women and children in case of a civilian evacuation accompanied the approach of election day.[16] In addition, the permanently stationed Foreign Legionaires and the much hated internal gendarmerie were placed on full alert, and rumors of both an Ethiopian and Somali, not to mention Soviet, alert have been mentioned. Certainly, the quantity of rhetoric spewing forth from the information services of both neighboring countries increased drastically, with Ethiopia continuing to insist on guarantees for Djibouti's independence, and Somalia continuing in its refusal to reject all irredentist claims.

The tragi-comic nature of France's exit as a colonial power in Africa is evident in several respects. As a strategic island carved out of the Horn of Africa to serve France's global interests, Djibouti lies helplessly sandwiched between two seemingly irreconcilable enemies. Thus, a continued French military presence has been deemed necessary to safeguard the new country's independence, serving at once to relieve France of the political embarrassment of holding on to a colonial throwback, yet preserving any strategic value which the former colony may possess. In terms of internal political inte-gration, the ethnic cleavages which the colonial situation actively fostered now represent the greatest challenges to nationhood. Issa sentiment is, by most accounts, pan-Somali, whereas Afar aspirations are both dependent on and wary of Ethiopian interests. The very impossibility of this situation may have activated desires on both sides for national unity, as illustrated by the participation of a large number of individual Afars in the Issa coalition. However, this base remains exceedingly fragile. Economically, the situation appears hopeless, as French colonial interests neither perceived nor sought economic viability. Djibouti unemployment is staggeringly high, with estimates running between 40% and 60%, and the assumption being prevalent that a French withdrawal could cause an additional 80%.[17] Local engineers have been reported as numbering less than ten, and the number of Djiboutian doctors is said to be an even two.[18] Economic hopes have again been based on a continued French presence, as well as large injections of Saudi aid. The overall picture tends to foreshadow a state of nomads and urban poor in an artificial, ethnically unjustifiable enclave kept alive by outside capital and technical assistance, with foreseeably huge contrasts between wealth and poverty.[19] Plans for a free-port and tax haven for foreign depositors in a country where half the population does not participate in a money economy and the other half presents the unemployed population of urban slums appears almost comical in its irony. The outcome of the 1977 elections illustrates that French policy, while exacerbating Djibouti's already difficult existence, has provided France with many of its sought-for results.

15. *Africa Research Bulletin*, May 1–31, 1977, p. 4436.
16. Guest, pp. 768–769.
17. *Africa Research Bulletin*, May 1–31, 1977, p. 4437.
18. Guest, pp. 768–769.
19. Ibid.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDEPENDENT AFRICA

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The present article examines the national question in post-colonial Africa. It moots criteria for discerning and demarcating cultural and national collectivities. It also considers the principles of territorial integrity and national self-determination in the context of the *independent* states of Africa. Above all, the national question in Africa is approached here not as an array of unique local problems, but as a continentwide issue with very serious global implications.

The issue

Since the first wave of decolonisation was completed a decade and a half ago with the political disengagement of Belgian, French and British colonial powers, the continent has experienced recurrent and potentially ever more devastating *national* crises, focusing on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of formally independent states. Challenges to national sovereignty have been of four types: (1) political and military conflicts over a disputed claim to the right of secession; (2) contestation of a frontier demarcation between neighboring states; (3) intra-state claims for devolution of power; (4) inter-state federalist initiatives.

Specific historical instances do not necessarily conform unequivocally to one or other of these abstract categories, although the following examples are approximations. The first type is instanced by the secessionist wars of Biafra, the Southern Sudan and Eritrea. Frontier disputes are a widespread legacy of arbitrary imperial divisions, whilst actual border conflicts have been especially notable in the Horn. Somalia's territorial claims are an extreme instance of this second type; however, advocates of Somalia's cause (viz., WSLF) cite a right to 'Somali national self-determination'. The third type, involving claims for regional or 'cultural' autonomy, range from the relatively muted national political debate which occurred in Kenya through the early 1960's[1] to the appreciable threat of recurring constitutional and political upheaval, such as has been faced by past and present Nigerian Federal Governments, and recently manifested by a deadlock this year in the Constituent Assembly on the matter of Sharia Law.[2] Finally, inter-state federalist tendencies have involved the voluntary surrender of a portion of the national sovereignty by participating governments for interests of inter-state co-operation. This last category has included the formation of economic and monetary unions, as well as tentative moves towards actual political federation.[3] Both instances have a disappointing record, as demonstrated by the collapse of the East African Community in 1977, despite initial successes and a promising outlook,[4] and as shown in the case of the ill-fated Federation of Egypt, Libya and Sudan, which foundered in mutual distrust and recriminations before it had become a reality, being finally buried forever in the brief Libyan-Egyptian War of July 1977.

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The Organization of African Unity is committed to defend the legitimacy of the Independence frontiers. This is in accord with the collective interests of the member states, but is also tempered by the original pan-Africanist goals avowed by the signatories to the Addis Ababa Charter. Therefore, it would be erroneous to interpret the official OAU policy on Independence frontiers as equivalent to an assertion of the *immutability* of the confines of nation states at Independence. Whilst Articles II.1c and III.3 of the OAU Charter uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, as does the 1964 OAU Resolution on Border Disputes Among African States, Articles II.1a and II.2a-f and the 1963 OAU Resolution on Regional Groupings promote federalist initiatives in a pan-Africanist spirit.[5] Moreover, the OAU policy on the legitimacy of Independence frontiers is equivocal in the case of frontiers which were in dispute in colonial times or prior to colonial intervention.[6] In effect, the OAU has tended to issue usually unenforced and unenforcable paper resolutions endorsing existing borders and condemning secessionist currents.[7] However, the immobility of the Organization in such matters is in part a consequence of a schism based on the old Casablanca and Monrovia Groups,[8] which to some extent corresponds with superpower alignments. Thus, the ability of the Organization to wield a determined and active policy, in accordance with its principles on the national question, is neutralized.[9]

1. This is referred to briefly in the concluding section of this article.
2. Olu Akaraogun's report in *Africa*, No. 83, July 1978, gives an account of tensions in Nigeria's federal state structure over the question of a Sharia Court of Appeal and over other divisive issues facing the nation's 19 states as they prepare to found the Second Republic.
3. The two major economic unions developed in the francophonic states of West Africa and in the former British dependencies of East Africa: West African Customs Union 1962, Monetary Union 1966, West African Community 1970; the East African Community came into being through the Kampala Treaty of Co-operation 1967. The aspiration of political federation is expressed in the June 1963 Declaration by the Governments of East Africa; it was also manifested in Egypt's renewed bid to found a federalist United Arab Republic.
4. For a view of East African prospects after the collapse of the EAC, see *The Economist*, March 11, 1978: "Back To Back—A Survey of Kenya And Tanzania."
5. The 1963 OAU Charter and the Resolution on Border Disputes are reproduced in *Basic Documents On African Affairs*, Ed. Ian Brownlie, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1971. The Resolution on Regional Groupings appears in *Basic Documents and Resolutions* (OAU Provisional Secretariat).
6. Brownlie, Op. Cit., p. 360.
7. Direct OAU intervention has been strictly limited. However, in 1964 the Organization was charged with the responsibility of supervising a ceasefire between Somalia and Ethiopia, and in 1967 and OAU mediated between Kenya and Somalia. The OAU's position on secession is articulated in the 1967 Resolution on the Situation in Nigeria (*vide* Brownlie, Op. Cit.).
8. See *Africa*, No. 83, July 1978: "Must The Adolescent Return To The Cradle?"
9. *The New York Times*, March 10, 1978, gives a revealing account of superpower consultations and OAU exclusions at the time of Somalia's withdrawal from the Ogaden. See also J. Stockwell, *In Search Of Enemies*, W. W. Norton, 1978, Ch. 11, for a perspective on CIA gerrymandering of OAU politics.

In the final analysis, it is quite certain that the legalistic and constitutionalist considerations espoused by the Organization of African Unity cannot and will not be decisive in settling the national question in Africa. The legally defined boundaries nevertheless do reflect, however imperfectly, the governmental structures and productive forces which have welded together otherwise arbitrarily demarcated territorial units, both during the course of European administration of protectorates and colonies and in the ensuing period of national government.

It is a measure of the deep-seated character of disputes over the national question that national-territorial conflicts have continued sporadically and intensified in three particular regions: The Horn, Central Africa and the Western Sahara. Heads of State meeting at the OAU Summit convened in Khartoum during July could review a year strikingly similar in this respect to the Organization's formative year. Thus, Kwame Nkrumah's address to the Cairo Assembly of 1964 is both familiar and relevant: "Let us look back on the year that has just passed . . . Think of the unfortunate clashes between Algeria and Morocco, between Somalia and Ethiopia and between Somalia and Kenya".[10] If not strictly applicable as a factual report to the Khartoum Summit, an underlying continuity in historical process is at least discernible, with the sole proviso that the crises in these regions have deepened markedly. Nkrumah's comments on the Congo (Zaire) on the occasion of the Cairo Summit are ever more valid:" Look at events in the Congo, Why did they remain so confused, so frustrated and even so tragic for so long? If we had all been jointly responsible for bringing our brothers to the Congo the assistance they needed in their hour of travail, who would have dared to interfere from outside Africa in Congolese affairs?"[11]

Despite the erosion of even the sentiment of pan-Africanism, Nkrumah's prediction at Cairo in 1964 was unquestionably sound:

> . . . The real border disputes will grow with the economic development and national strengthening of the African States as separate balkanised governmental units. That was the historical process of independent states in other continents. We cannot expect Africa, with its legacy of artificial borders, to follow any other course unless we make a positive effort to arrest that danger now; and we can do so only under a United Government.[12]

A crucial factor in territorial disputes in Africa is the multi-cultural (and arguably multi-national) composition of the colonial territories inherited by the modern African governments. Most concretely, a contested region may have actual variations in economic infrastructure from neighboring regions of the state which assumes sovereignty over it; and the alleged distinctiveness of the eco-

nomic life of a region may be used to substantiate a claim to secession. Polemical assertions and counter-assertions to this effect may be found, for example, in the National Democratic Programme of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and in Ethiopian Foreign Ministry publications.[13] Uneven economic development and the geographical distribution of resources are perhaps more persuasive elements than language and ethnicity in motivating protagonists to dispute territory, and the most consistent factors in distorting legitimate considerations of nationality and sovereignty in Africa have been the foreign economic and political interests which have fomented and aggravated conflicts and provided material and ideological support to protagonists. Specifically: (A) secessionist movements, notably in Katanga and Biafra, have been financed by mining, oil and industrial interests, the Belgian *Union minière* having thereby gained an international reputation as a paymaster of mercenaries; (B) the dynamics of superpower involvement in African territorial politics, including the deployment of surrogate military forces, which have been documented during recent months in the European and American press.[14]

Notwithstanding the neocolonial aspects and the global economic and political ramifications of the national question in Africa, cultural[15] elements, which include the ethnic, linguistic, associational and religious composition of the population of a given territory, must be seriously weighed in ascertaining a putative right to national self-determination. Countervailing factors are: the possible damage to the economic and political integration of a region which could result from its balkanisation, with the attendant dangers of impoverishment and deceleration of economic development, and of a possible political enfeeblement of mutually antagonistic states.

In concluding this preliminary appraisal of the generalities of the national question in post-colonial Africa, it is important to appreciate the ideological legitimations of nationhood. These include: (1) *formal* attributes of nationhood, and international recognition of status as an independent and sovereign state; (2) a consciousness of

10. See *Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the OAU*, Speeches Delivered at the Assembly, Cairo 17—21 July, 1964, p. 77.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

13. National Democratic Programme of the EPLF, Introduction, especially pp. 5—6.; and in "L'Eryththrée Hier Et Aujourd'hui", Press and Information Dept., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notably sec. 4.16 on page 10.

14. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 29, 1978, noted in an article entitled "Les dessous de L'intervention" that "for the shipment of troops to Africa, France depends on the United States as directly as Cuba depends on the Soviet Union", and questions "Are the French 'the Cubans of the West'?" For reports on the NATO-Chinese alliance in Africa, see *The London Guardian* (international edition), May 28, 1978 and also *The New York Times* report of June 8, 1978: "Chinese Aide Assures Zaire of Help Against Soviet".

15. The term 'culture' is understood in common usage to mean a distinctive set of customs, mores, etc., but also refers more technically to a mode of subsistence.

nationality and citizenship by the broad mass of a population.

Firstly, the acquisition of the formal political, legal and diplomatic armory of the nation state, together with its heraldic paraphernalia, had the historical function of demonstrably severing the suzerain dependency typical of African colonies, and it also established an ideological framework by which territorial sovereignty could be defined. Likewise, the prestige afforded by diplomatic recognition and admission to international organizations effected a most decisive and fundamental transformation of the political map of the continent. Diplomatic recognition is, therefore, a very significant prize to a territory waging a secessionist campaign, as was demonstrated during the Nigerian Civil War.

Secondly, the emergence of a nationalist ideology tends to complement and replace sub-national sentiments of attachment to locality, minority language and minority culture. Thus, the processes of national liberation, state formation and nation-building assume the aspect of a preordained destiny; and the authorized and mythologized chronicle of events becomes an ideological charter of nationhood. It is particularly noteworthy how rapidly the independent states of Africa have assimilated their histories to a heroic national ideal. Indeed, among the founding fathers of the countries of the Horn it is not difficult to select larger than life national heroes with Western European counterparts: Ahmed Gran and Charles Martel; Mahdi and Cid; Menelik and Bismarck; Kenyatta and De Valera. Beyond the much publicized dangers of 'tribalism', patriotism in Africa is now a major force. A most noteworthy example of the latter kind of solidarity occurred as a spontaneous eruption in Kenya during February 1976. It was induced in the form of nation-wide mass demonstrations protesting against a statement by the Ugandan President, involving a historically accurate reference to 1902 boundary changes in the Uganda—East Africa Protectorate frontier in favour of what was later to become Kenya Colony. Although he made no definite threat to Kenya's territorial integrity, not only were demonstrations mounted in all of Kenya's major cities and very many rural locations, but dockers in the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa imposed an embargo on Ugandan goods.[16] Most significantly, this mood of national solidarity, arising from a vaguely perceived threat to Kenya's western frontier, did much to abate bitter internal political tensions which had gripped the country for the past year.[17]

The Colonial Factor

During the period of colonial extrication in the early 1960's, characterized by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan as the "wind of change", the domestic news service of the British Broadcasting Corporation tended to report African Independence arrangements with disdain-

ful arrogance, and the spectre of 'tribalism' became a staple of current affairs reports. Despite the fact that the British concept of 'tribe' was essentially a product of the British colonial model of *indirect rule*, many contemporary analysts seemed to have only the vaguest conception of what a 'tribe' might be. Thus, K. R. Minogue could write in 1967 that:

In the African beginning was the tribe. It might be a small nomadic group of closely related people whose political structure was so negligible as to cause anthropologists to coin the word 'acephelous', lacking a head or a chief. It might alternatively be a dispersed and populous group *like the Bantu, the Buganda or the Hausa* (my emphasis), all of which have many of the characteristics of nations.[18]

Although Minogue, as a political scientist, might be excused for his use of the notoriously inaccurate ethnographical category 'tribe', his short list of names is at the very least amusing. For whilst the pre-colonial kingdom of Buganda and the Hausa States would seem to satisfy conditions of embryonic national integration, it is difficult to see how the Bantu peoples could be supposed collectively to constitute either a tribe or a nation any more than would the Indo-European peoples. Particularly resolute pan-Africanists, however, might find the suggestion appealing.

Minogue's diagnosis of the *malady* of 'tribalism' is less readily excusable. Finding it significant and noteworthy that "Africans killed more Africans than Europeans" in post-war struggles, he seems convinced that he has found the key to tribal solidarity. "The tribe continues to be the focus of loyalty for the majority of Africans", he says. "The reason for this is that most Africans have very little intimate and direct contact with Europeans, whilst they have many very direct contacts with other Africans." Thus, *tribe* dissolves into *nation*, and *nation* collapses into *African-ness*. The patent absurdity of Minogue's statement can be demonstrated by inter-changing the words 'African' and 'European' as they arise in the foregoing quotation.

Without unduly laboring the point, the ethnographical category 'tribe' might best be disposed of here by the comments of two social scientists who, as exiles of the Amin regime's *political* and *racist* programs, undoubtedly

16. See the Kenyan *Daily Nation*, February 24, 1976: "Dockers Slap Ban On Ugandan Goods," and East African *Standard*, February 26, 1976: "We Keep To OAU Borders".

17. These had included a serious terror bombing incident, together with a major political crisis within the ruling Kenya African National Union, involving the assassination of a populist government minister, detentions of several members of parliament, and purges within party district branches. Most of these incidents were in some way related to district factionalism.

18. K. R. Minogue, *Nationalism*, Jarrold, 1967, pp. 105–6.

qualify in journalistic parlance as "victims of tribalism." Okot P'Bitek has noted that " 'tribe' turns out to have no definite meaning, in that it refers to no specific unit in Africa."[19] And Tarsis Kabwegyere questions with dismissive rhetoric that" if tribes are neither territorial, political, linguistic or social units, what could it be that breeds tribalism?"[20] It becomes abundantly clear that an investigation of the peculiarities of the national question in Africa requires an appreciation of the cultural and societal units which pre-date the imperial administrative zones. It requires, in addition, some understanding of the transformative tendencies of colonial rule.

A perennial problem for social scientists is the definition and demarcation of both small- and large-scale social collectivities: the abstraction 'society', the ethnographical category 'tribe', the historical category 'nation', both as concepts and as empirical forms. A particularly germane instance was the debate waged between two social anthropologists as to whether a complex of agrarian communities in northern Ghana constituted one or two societies.[21] On the one hand, it is necessary to establish criteria by which a collectivity may be defined *as a unit and as a unit of a specific sort*. Equally troublesome is the question of whether a collectivity can be considered to be *self-defining*. In short, to take the most ponderous category, the *nation*, it is of some importance to decide upon external analytical criteria of nationhood and, in addition, to consider the extent to which a collectivity, or rather a population at large, might constitute a nation by virtue of solidary sentiments or 'national consciousness'. (The latter facet is of special consideration with regard to the matter of national self-determination.)

A persistent error of colonial administrators and social anthropologists alike has been a failure to distinguish between *cultural homogeneity* and *societal integrity*.[22] (The theoretical case may only be stated briefly and imprecisely, for reasons of space and immediate relevance.) The subjective recognition by a people of their common identity is certainly of definite significance in making cultural demarcations, but this alone does not necessarily imply either a uniform or integral system of social relations, and, of course, it would in no way imply the existence of an economically unified or politically sovereign society.[23] A basic distinction between cultural homogeneity and societal integrity may be expanded upon, as follows. For a given collectivity of people, common cultural patterns in mode of subsistence, and in shared language and customs are not of themselves sufficient conditions of societal integrity; *the specific character of social relations* with regard to production, distribution, and control of property or resources, and the unitary nature of authority relations may, in fact, be decisive. For it is the latter criteria which elaborate economic and political organization, and which therefore define an integral, self-sustaining and autonomous society. The former characteristics merely specify a general cultural milieu. Thus, a *society* is not identical with a

cultural complex: several small-scale societies could comprise such a complex. For example, it is the view of the writer that in pre-colonial times the Kikuyu of Kenya can be said to have constituted a cultural complex, and the same could be argued of the Nuer and Dinka of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan[24].

Just as the above distinction, vaguely sketched as it is, might throw some light on the conceptual morass dubbed the *tribe*, it may also help to explain the process of *cultural flattening* which occurred under colonial rule. We have argued that the ethnic and cultural community generally classified as a 'tribe' does not necessarily constitute a society, but may encompass discrete societal units or, for that matter, may be integrated into an indigenous African state, as in the case of the old kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi. (Such categorical distortions are perhaps less marked in the case of Imperial Abyssinia, which was spared the European colonial imposition of arbitrary administrative categories.) However, under conditions of colonial suzerainty, indigenous societies faced progressive loss of integration[25] and autonomy, they experienced domination by a colonial polity, and were, in most instances, subjected to external economic constraints including commodity production for an overseas market, forced and migratory labor, etc. Thus, under colonial rule, pre-existing social structures were replaced by superficially uniform cultural residues: the 'tribe' was a continuing reality under colonialism; indigenous society was not. It would, in fact, be more accurate to say that the 'tribe' was a *product* of colonialism. In particular, the 'tribe' was a most notable creation of the British imperial model of *indirect rule*, which elevated 'chiefs' and authorized the use of native institutions as subordinate and totally dependent appendages of colonial administration.[26] Thus, the 'tribe'

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19. Okot P'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, East African Literature Bureau, 1970, p. 13.
20. From part of a manuscript made available to me by its author in 1975 (entitled, *Myth and Social Science In Africa*), which at that time was not completed for publication.
21. See J. R. Goody, *The Developmental Cycle In Domestic Groups*, Cambridge University Press, 1958, and E. R. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology*, ASA Monographs, No. 22, 1977.
22. From a sociological point of view, *'societal integrity'* has theoretical shortcomings, but is convenient and adequate for present purposes. A more elaborate distinction is made in a forthcoming study by the writer, entitled "Ideology and Social Relations in Kikuyuland."
23. The terms *'society'* and later *'social formation'* are used with less precision than would be advisable in a more detailed study.
24. The relationship between networks of communities might change markedly over time. A particularly significant case for study would be organizational changes in the Akan communities of Ghana before and after the Ashanti Confederacy, through the colonial epoch, and since Ghanaian Independence in 1957.
25. Indigenous societies became less integrated *as autonomous societies*, but communities became more effectively integrated into wider territorial units under colonial control.
26. An entry in a colonial record book of British East Africa, dated 1909, recommended a policy of resuscitating an indigenous Kikuyu system of councils, previously undermined by the administration, to be used as an administrative tool. The measure was successfully adopted.

became a reality in British colonies. Under French *direct rule* local institutions were not adapted in quite the same way to purposes of administration, but the assault on traditional societies still left in its wake cultural residues which were remnants of integral societies.

The French sociologist Georges Balandier has written of the colonial process in general, that:

> When the traditional political unit was not destroyed, because of its opposition to the establishment of the colonisers (the case of the old kingdom of Dahomey), it was reduced none the less to a conditional existence. Colonisation transformed every political problem into a *technical* problem to be dealt with by the administration. It contained every expression of communal life and every action that seemed to limit or threaten its grip, irrespective of the forms of native political society and the colonial regimes that organized their domination.[27]

It will have become evident to the reader that the mode of analysis adopted here permits only a generalizing or *ideal-typical* study of the processes of colonial development and state formation. The general model proposed is intended to assist in an understanding of the relationships between indigenous cultures, colonial transformation, and the nascent nation state. It may, therefore, also be of assistance to further studies of the peculiarities of the national question in Africa. However, such an approach can not deal adequately with the concrete realities of specific instances, since numerous exceptions and limiting cases may be readily cited. Nevertheless, it provides a framework by which we may assess the nature of the national question in post-colonial Africa.

As a general assertion, we may conclude that, with relatively few exceptions, colonial rule so truncated the independent economic and political existence of indigenous communities that the old societies had ceased to be viable long before the close of the colonial epoch. Whilst some pastoralist and agrarian communities still adhere to a genuinely traditionalist mode of subsistence, they can now be said to have a substantive political existence only insofar as they participate as a block in the political process of the post-colonial state.[28] This is not to deny the fact that some cultural pressure groups may even be an extremely influential force in national politics.[29] As for the strong, centralized African states of pre-colonial days, with the exception of a few emirates (such as still constitute a significant political element in the politics of Federal Nigeria[30]), most are either totally defunct or mere museum pieces. The recent history of Rwanda and Burundi provides particularly violent examples of the fact that the process of modernization has swept away even the remnants of the old, pre-colonial social formations, as does the fact that the kingdom of Buganda, which still constituted a strictly limited polity during the colonial era, could only barely survive Ugandan Independence.

To a very significant extent, the indigenous African societies were not so much subdued by force of arms (although that certainly did occur) as nullified by more impersonal economic forces. Thus, Ethiopia's acquaintance with the political forms of European colonialism has been only partial and intermitent, but her participation in the world economy and the opening of the country to foreign capital accelerated the demise of her autocratic feudal institutions.

The Emergent Nation State

We have identified pre-colonial social formations which were either *integral* small-scale societies, perhaps constituting part of a wider cultural complex, or *integrated* African states which may be characterized loosely as proto-nations of a quasi-feudal or 'Asiatic' character. Whilst it is frequently noted that the colonial boundaries cut across ethnic and 'tribal' areas, it is perhaps more significant still that pre-colonial structures were either by-passed and dismembered or else became part of an apparatus of low-level administration. Colonialism, therefore, represented an almost total rupture: new forces of production came into being and European governmental structures were instituted. In short, we may say that what were later to become the Independence nation states developed as entities peripheral to and derivative of the expanding economies of the imperialist countries. Hence, the modern African state as an entity was very notably a European import.

Three basic qualifications can be made to the foregoing statements. Firstly, colonialism undoubtedly did build upon existing economic conditions. That much is self-evident in numerous instances. For example the modalities of colonial cash crop production depended upon pre-existing agrarian capacities and adapted differently according to the indigenous organization of agriculture.[31] Similarly, the development of the colonial market was inevitably forced to respond to indigenous trading capabilities.[32] However, the terms of the colonial eco-

27. G. Balandier, *Political Anthropology*, Penguin, 1972, p. 160.
28. See the East African periodical, *The Weekly Review*, November 15, 1976: "Who Speaks For The Masai?"
29. The Kenyan Gikuyu Embu and Meru Association is recognized as an extremely influential force in Kenyan politics, and even boasts a branch in New York City. See *The Weekly Review*, April 25, 1977.
30. See *Africa*, No. 84., August 1978: "Nigeria—Political Undercurrents." Similarly, in East Africa, colonial treaty arrangements with Arab and Swahili states are still a factor in the politics of the Independence states. Thus, the Kenyan *Daily Nation*, April 16, 1977, declared in a banner headline: " 'Seize All Arab Land At Coast' ", in reference to a territorial irregularity in a 10-mile coastal strip formerly under the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Zanzibar.
31. E. A. Brett, *Colonialism & Underdevelopment in East Africa*, Heinemann, 1973, passim.
32. The cases of the West African Hausa traders and the Swahili and Arab traders of the East African coast are particularly notable.

nomic transformation were largely dictated by the needs of the imperialistic countries and at the direction of colonial enterpeneurs and administrators. Secondly, and coupled with the first qualification, colonial economic development was often in some way correlated with regional and 'tribal' variations. This may or may not have been connected, according to specific instances, with precolonial modes of subsistence. But it certainly has resulted in ethnic or regional variations in economic activity, and, in some cases, may even have introduced a 'tribal' component into the development of class stratification.[33] However, this is very much a *residual* cultural phenomenon. It does not alter the fact that systems of externally imposed forces and relations of production have developed within the geographical units of colonialism, in accordance with the earlier necessities of the industrial and finance capitals of the imperialist nations. Thirdly, the fact that native colonial personnel in the lower levels of the colonial bureaucracy or in the military were often recruited from particular regions is a reflection of administrative preferences, prejudices and grand designs. For example, British colonial conceptions of what are sometimes cited in documents and files as 'the military tribes' point to a self-fulfilling notion that different races have different aptitudes. Despite the very real impact of such colonial recruiting practices on the independent state, they should be understood as a consequence of colonial policy rather than as an index of real societal variation within the state structure.

As has been stated above, it is of some importance to the identification and delimitation of nations to be able to provide some kind of objective analytical criteria of the constituents of nationhood. A more thorough analysis might draw extensively on the theoretical formulations elaborated in Europe by the Left Social-Democrats during the first two decades of the century and addressed to the national question in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan region.[34] In the interests of brevity and relevance, we are unable properly to deal here with the complexities of the national question, especially as such external criteria can only meaningfully be based on empirical generalizations concerning existing, historically constituted nations. Rather, it shall be noted that, strictly speaking, in all but cases of African colonies being merely formal dependencies characterized by neglect and administrative indifference,[35] the process of colonial development has itself imposed the essential conditions of state integration.[36] Notwithstanding the particular circumstances of anti-colonial struggle, the colonial dependencies might be said to have *constituted themselves* as nations by default.

Even in Europe, the nation *per se* is a very recent development. With reference to its European varieties, the nation has been accurately described as a phenomenon "belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism."[37] Thus, in Europe, the modern nation arose out of a variety of currents: cultural fusions and differ-

entiations; the development of productive forces and the integration of markets; and the consolidation of a national or *state* form of polity. These currents could be said to have been generated from within in a sense which was untrue of colonial Africa, even though in Europe imperialism, like charity, began at home. Nevertheless, there was an underlying developmental continuity in the otherwise revolutionary transformations from feudalism and early merchant capitalism to modern industrial capitalism, and in the corresponding political transformations which gave birth to the modern European nations.

In Africa, there was no such continuity. Colonial systems of production and administrative structures could not be said to emanate from pre-existing cultural conditions, but merely grafted themselves onto pre-existing economic capacities and simply made use of acceptable aspects of indigenous political organization. Thus, in *transporting to* African colonies a new mode of production, together with *physical* infrastructures such as paved roads and railways, and in imposing the bureaucratic organization of government (albeit a totally unrepresentative form of administration), European imperialism instituted the conditions for future territorial states.

The form of national development typical of Europe (viz., as an internally generated phenomenon which fused together cultural diversities) was, then, not characteristic of the colonial phases of African state formation. On the contrary, local and cultural antagonisms were often provoked and sharpened. We have seen that protonational elements of the colonial territories were usually by-passed and ultimately destroyed. Therefore, for postcolonial Africa as a whole, actual *national* problems resulting from *pre-colonial developmental processes*, are the exception. Rather, there might be cultural and ethnic antagonisms resulting from 'tribal' favoritisms fostered by the colonial regimes; and the new class antagonisms might mimic 'petty tribalisms.' However, properly speaking the national question as it presently exists in *post-colonial states* must, in the majority of cases, focus mainly upon uneven development and the incompleteness of the colonial and post-colonial processes of state integration.

Conclusions

Having dealt in broad compass and in ideal-typical fashion with some of the *cultural*, quasi-national and *colonial* facets of the rise of the post-colonial African states, we

33. Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment In Kenya*, Heinemann, 1975, pp. 198–206.
34. See Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review*, No. 96 for a survey of these various currents.
35. The case of Somalia is sometimes cited as an instance of colonial neglects.
36. See E. A. Brett, Op. Cit.
37. J. Stalin, *Marxism & The National Question*, Calcutta 1975 (New Book Centre), p. 18.

may return briefly to the practical political issues involved in the national question in Africa. So far the article has raised many more questions than it has been able actively to confront, much less solve. In particular, we would not presume on the basis of this short, general study to endorse the validity of any *particular* national-territorial stance, since lack of concretely presented data here could only render such pronouncements arbitrary and piecemeal. Instead, the article is concluded with a scanty review of some of the possible political approaches to the national question.

The different kinds of problems facing the independent African states can be reiterated. In response to the foregoing analysis of state formation, these *national* problems may be reformulated. Moreover, in recognition of the *subjective element* of the national question, it should evidently be noted that a national-political movement presents collective initiatives and demands which might or might not correspond to concrete realities. The four generic types of challenges to national sovereignty, thus reformulated, are treated in reverse order. They are as follows:

(A) A proposed economic and/or political federation of former colonial territories;
(B) Demands for limited autonomy, based on (i) a claim to cultural differentiation, and/or (ii) a claim to regional distinctiveness;
(C) A claim that frontiers between states do not conform with *real* national divisions;
(D) A movement for 'national' independence, based on a claim to constitute a separate and distinct nation within the confines of a constituted state.

(A) Proposals for the federation of African states are likely to be stimulated by a recognition of the arbitrary character of the colonial boundaries between contracting states, and may be based on partial economic and political linkages between territories formerly controlled by a single imperial power. The desire is to further develop the productive forces of a region, to increase the political unity of the federated states, and to overcome the disadvantaged position of neo-colonial dependency.[38] The pan-Africanist approach to federation, as espoused by Nkrumah and radical African leaders, owes much to the Leninist position. Thus:

Federation is a transitional form to complete union . . . bearing in mind that without the closest alliance between the Soviet republics (sic) it will be impossible to preserve their existence, surrounded as they are by the imperialist powers of the whole world . . . [39]

(B) Demands for autonomy may spring from a desire to keep intact cultural distinctions based on language, differences of custom and religion, etc. In an African state this may, as in the present Nigerian situation, arise from a desire to maintain Islamic authority within a state committed to a secular Constitution and penal code. Such an eventuality was envisaged by the Austrian Social-Democrat, Otto Bauer, who formulated the policy of Cultural-National Autonomy as a measure intended to prevent the impending territorial fragmentation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Essentially, the different nationalities or cultural groups would preserve the interests of their various cultural entities by a framework of national parliaments and ministers constituted to take care of the various cultural, educational and communal needs of the distinct groups. Most notably, it recognized that such cultural distinctions in a modern multicultural state did not necessarily conform to divisions by district. Therefore, representation would not be decided by geographical divisions, but according to a *personal principle*. In the words of Bauer:

The principle of personality presupposes that the population will be divided according to nationalities. . . . The adult citizens should have the right to decide for themselves to which nationality they want to belong. On the basis of the free avowal of nationality by the adult citizens, national registers should be required (my translation)."[40]

Demands for autonomy might, alternatively, be based on a claim of regional distinctiveness. A most interesting case of political pressures for regionalism was demonstrated in the preparatory period to Kenya's Independence. It is also noteworthy in pointing to the possible dangers of regional autonomy. In Kenya, the enunciation of a *regionalist* political constitution came in 1959, and it was first promoted by the New Kenya Group, which was basically a settler pro-Independence group and was led by Sir Michael Blundell, the erstwhile leader of the European Unofficial Members of the colonial Legislative Council. The same platform was later adopted by the now defunct Kenya African Democratic Union, a prominent member of which was Daniel Arap Moi, who is, at the time of writing, Interim President of Kenya. Although opposed by the main Independence group, regionalism was effectively forced on Kenya as a precondition for independence, although jettisoned shortly after National Independence.[41]

38. See Nkrumah's speech to the OAU Cairo Assembly (reference cited above) for a very concise statement of the position.
39. See p. 24 of *Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Questions*, in *Lenin On The National And Colonial Questions*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1975.
40. O. Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Wien, 1924, p. 354.
41. Colin Leys, Op. Cit., p. 213.

(C) The claim that inter-state frontiers do not conform with *real* national frontiers may cite various instances. Most commonly they will be based on historical conditions, including contradictions, changes, or irregularities in colonial treaty arrangements. They may also take the form of a bid to reunite cultural or ethnic groups. Such demands may or may not also be connected with actual irregularities in economic infrastructure or market integration. It is perhaps significant that, in terms of the preceding analysis of colonial processes of state formation, two main regions in which border conflicts have been continuing problems (The Horn and the Western Sahara) involve at least some factors which are non-colonial in character. In the case of the Horn, Imperial Ethiopia was, of course, the African territory least affected by political forms of European colonialism. Some analysts might also argue that the Colonial Somalilands were prime examples of imperial neglect, being of strategic rather than economic interest to the imperial powers and that the various imperialist footholds in the region did little to promote integration of the region as a nation state.[42] In the Western Sahara, territorial disputes between Algeria and Morocco have included, among other factors, disputes over territorial frontiers delineated before colonial occupation.

(D) A 'national' movement for secession will cite the principle of 'national self-determination.' We have already considered the position of the Organization of African Unity on this question. We have also covered some of the bases and claims of secessionist movements. In addition, the neo-colonial and global political ramifications of the problem have been adumbrated.

The political literature on the principle of 'national self-determination' is vast and could in no way even be catalogued here. The theoretician generally acknowledged to have formulated the most thorough critique of national self-determination, and to have been the staunchest of supporters of the movement to national liberation, was Lenin. Most frequently cited is Lenin's famous debate with the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, in which Lenin consistently advocated Polish independence from Russia, whilst Luxemburg believed it to be in the best interests of the region that Poland should continue to be integrated with Russia. However, the complexity of the Leninist position may perhaps be illustrated in connection with the Horn: the Ethiopian ideologues of the PMAC, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, and the Republic of Somalia have all at various times declared their commitment to Leninist principles of national self-determination. Since Lenin's position on the national question ultimately hinges on and is subordinated to the policy most likely to promote development of forces of production in a specific region and the development of the proletariat as a class in the region, the question ultimately rests on a critique of political economy. There is also the very major consideration of the political composition of states confronted by the threat of secession.[43] Inevitably, Lenin's position is susceptible to pragmatic or opportunist deformation as well as misunderstanding.

The immensity of the scope of this article means that we have been unable to plot a course, but rather to scan the horizon. It should, therefore, be understood merely as a superficial survey. Such a survey will inevitably include components which are misleading. It is hoped, however, that some useful contributions will have been made.

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42. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam maintains in *Somalia–Problem Child of Africa*, Addis Ababa, 1975, that the policy of a Greater Somalia was originally promoted by British colonial authorities after the Italian defeat.

43. Thus, Cuba provided ideological support to Eritrean secessionists during the time of the Haile Selassie regime, but has since backed the Ethiopian PMAC. It has frequently been reported in the Western press that Cuba is still politically ambivalent on the Eritrean question, whereas Ethiopian sources firmly deny this. See *New York Times*, April 2, 1978: "Tough Job For Cuba In Eritrea Is Seen". See also the statement of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister on the question of Ethiopia's political alliances in the interview published in *Horn*, Vol. 1, No. 2.