Looking Backwards, and then Forwards: Africans and the 21st Century

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Introduction

Two years ago, we were consumed by a disease called the 'millennium fever', or as some preferred to describe it 'millennium mania'. This epidemic gripped the world as we moved into A.D. 2000 forcing on many minds exercises of historical summation, which permitted observers to indulge, in modest conjectures, about the past, present and future, but also, often grandiose prognostications about the future. The symbolic significance of the millennium, many will admit, provided an intellectual excuse for the evaluation of records. The choice of records to be examined was left to the individual.

There was also a minority, which saw the millennium fever as simple-minded gullibility about a magic number introduced by Christendom. The millennium fever was also plain commercial hype, a chance for consumer society to splurge and over-indulge. But whatever we made of our times and the millennium fever, many concerned Africans regarded it as a time to take stock and define the challenges, which lay ahead of us in our quest for emancipation and development.

The west is triumphant in its supremacy of the non-western world. It is a supremacy, which reached its high-water mark at the end of the 19th century. Today, a century later, Asia is on the move, and we are entering the 21st century with Asia arguably, in the leadership of global economics and technology. Africa remains in slumber and stagnation, and no intelligent person of African descent can be acquiescent and accepting of this reality. There are signs that the old neo-colonial order is disintegrating, will ultimately yield place to a new order. African intellectuals need however to show better appreciation of the social forces and interests at play. African thinkers will need to provide answers, as to how to move forward.

Background to the 20th Century

The 20th century captures almost neatly a historically definable phase of African history. It has been dominated by the colonial experience - its installation and demise. At the beginning of this century, Africa had freshly been chopped up by various colonial powers into colonies and spheres of influence. The first decade-and-a- half saw the unfolding of vicious wars of colonial subjugation. During the next decade, while firm colonial administration was being established, nationalist impulses began to stir under the leadership of middle class African elites, the type Ayo Langley described for West Africa as 'the lawyer-merchant class'. The contradiction of this class was that educated in the western mould and ways, they sought social and economic advancement for

Africans along independent lines while at the same time they were trapped in the culture of the west and were what Kobina Sekyi in a play of 1915 defined as 'social hybrids', or people 'born into one race, and brought up to live like members of another race'.[1] If in West Africa, the period threw up figures like Casely Hayford, Attoh Ahuma, Herbert Macaulay, Herbert Bankole-Bright, Prince Bassey Ephraim and E.F. Small, in the South comparative thought was reflected by, John Dube, John Tengo Jabavu, Solomon Plaatje, Molema, and Pixley Seme, while in the East, Harry Thuku, and Jomo Kenyatta easily come to mind.

The 2nd World War saw the entrance into the political arena of new, less educated, but assertive social groups. These had links with the growing mass of proletarianized urbanites dissatisfied with colonial rule, and who demanded political freedom. Many of the leadership had expected that colonial freedom would be part of the post-war world order. This view was widespread in the colonial world. Afro-Asia moved directly after the war into anti-colonial insurgency in large parts of Indo-China and South East Asia. In Africa, the Mau Mau Land and Freedom War was the first armed confrontation of a sustained kind, which emerged in the post-second world war era. In addition to the restive urban masses were the growing number of miners and cash crop producers concentrated in the rural areas in East, West, Central and Southern Africa. As a political objective, colonial rule had not come to an end with the winning of the war by the Allied forces, as was expected by people who had made sacrifices for this, and who expected recognition for the ideals for which some were sent to war. It was the political mobilization of these social elements, which opened the way towards colonial freedom. Starting in the late 1950s the process of colonial devolution slowly wound down

during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. After 1990, South Africa became the last outstanding case of settler-colonial rule in Africa. This was also brought to an end in 1994.

The historical canvas in sum reveals that, while the century started with the establishment of colonial rule, by its final decade political freedom had been achieved by colonially constructed states structured along neo-colonial lines. What such neo-colonialism meant was that while in semblance the new states of Africa enjoyed sovereignty and independence in all areas of activity, in fact, the economic, social and cultural lives of these states continued to be dominated by structures and relations put in place under colonialism. The era of Palme Dutt and Nkrumah's 'New Colonialism' has in Africa flourished for four decades.[2] The profounder meaning of neo-colonialism has not been lost on us. Krobo Edusei, ministerial *enfant terrible* of the Nkrumah regime, asked to explain what neo-colonialism meant retorted that it meant, *Kwesi Broni a kôtè kwangchen* (The white man has gone to hide at the road side – meaning, he has not really gone).[3] But challenges to the neo-colonial order may be emerging as we move further into the 21st century.

Let us retrace our steps to better understand the foundations of 20th century Africa. The era of colonial rule had been preceded by the suppression of the slave trade, both Arab and Western, in order to establish a social basis for *laissez faire* 'free trade'. For part of the 18th and much of the 19th centuries, the British, unlike Portugal and Spain, left trading to their traders. British traders exercised the powers of government. These trading companies played a key role in colonisation of America, South America, the West Indies, Africa and parts of Asia. These companies provided their own protection and were in the names and under

the flags of the colonial powers, laws unto themselves. The colonial powers intervened only when the trading companies proved unequal to the task. Following the abolition of the slave trade, British traders, for example, plunged themselves in West Africa into the palm oil trade. With the industrial revolution in Europe well underway, palm oil became a principal source for the production of soap, margarine and candles manufactured in the factories of Europe for the consumption of particularly the increasing urban populations both in Europe and the rest of the world. It is indeed arguable that it was the need for markets and a pacified consumer population capable of purchasing industrial goods in the colonial areas, which served as the key economic factor for the termination of the slave trade.

During the last two decades of the 19th century when colonial powers annexed colonies and spheres of influence, these powers to different degrees, surrounded the territories they annexed with protectionist tariffs. The economic debate of the period revolved around free trade and protectionism. Colonial annexations provided sources for the exploitation and winning of colonial produce through the sweat and tears of the colonized, who were at the same time markets for the value-added industrial goods produced in the *metropoles*. In order to have consumer populations in the colonies, which had the purchasing power and structural conditions for the purchase of industrially, produced goods, the colonized needed to be drawn into the capitalist economy as either wage earners or people capable of earning cash through either mining or the cultivation of colonial produce. Tax regimes of various sorts, like poll taxes, head taxes, cattle and other livestock taxes, and labour exactions were other instruments for driving the colonized steadily into wage labour. Three decades ago, it was suggested

that, with some important differences, the trading position of the majority of under-developed countries in the post-colonial era had increasingly deteriorated, and would continue to deteriorate if trends did not change.[4] What we can today say is that these trends have not changed.

The structural and built-in disadvantages of a system in which one part of the world extracts raw materials while the other part adds value and sells to the labouring masses in both the *metropoles* and the colonies, but particularly in the colonies, was the foundation on which the current neo-colonial system was originally, at least during the last century, constructed. Inherent in this system was the pattern of lop-sided terms of trade, which operate to the present day to the disadvantage, and impoverishment of Africa and the Third World. Myrdal writes that

'.... market forces did not, as in abstract economic theory, work under free competition. There were many elements of monopoly, almost always working in favour of businesses in the metropolitan country and usually, to an extent, condoned or even promoted by the colonial government. .... Decolonization has not by itself changed much of this situation .... Because of their status of underdevelopment, these forces are adverse to their strivings for development'.[5]

The colonial powers with differing degrees of venom and ruthlessness established their hold on the lands and peoples they colonised. The barbarities of the 'Red Rubber' – King Leopold's regime in the Congo Free State – enjoy legendary notoriety in the annals of colonial history. The testimony of Morel and Casement bear this out well.[6] Basil Davidson writes that,

'what was bad in the Belgian Congo had long

been notably worse in the French provinces to the north of the Congo and Ubangui rivers. Here, in 1899, a French Government had installed a close copy of the Leopoldian System on behalf of French and Belgian capitalists, who were eager to reproduce in French territory the same opportunities for ruthless plunder which Leopold had found in the Congo Free State. These hopes were realized. By 1900 the whole wide territory of these French equatorial provinces was parcelled out among forty concession companies enjoying thirty years' charter'.[7]

The subjugation of the Baganda and the razing to the ground of Kampala is celebrated by Lord Lugard in his diaries. The sacking and looting of Benin; the destruction of Kumasi and the subjugation of the Ashanti, the brutal conquest of the Fon, Omdurman, and numerous other savage military activities by imperialist forces in Africa established western supremacy in Africa. The military technology of Richard Jordan Gatling and Hiram Maxim contributed in no small measure to this military superiority of the West over us. Genocide in South West Africa, Tanganyika, the Congo and in other pockets of Africa, marked the bloody way of the westerner in Africa and other parts of the world. The so-called 'pacification' of Africa by colonial powers was the for most part complete by the beginning of the 1st World War. However, armed African resistance sporadically continued until the Nuer rising was crushed in the beginning of the 1930s. African resistance continued mainly in the form of millenarian and messianic movements. Kimbanguism in the Congo and Chilembwe's nativised Watch-Towerism in Nyasaland are good examples. Syncretic churches came to represent nativist reaction to the colonial experience and many of these movements and formations became elements

in the creation of more modern proto-nationalism.

By the end of the second decade of this century, at the close of the 1st World War, African nationalism, as a westernized anti-colonial reaction was on the move. The 1st World War, which was essentially a war of imperialist rivalry, weakened imperialism. The 2nd World War continued this process. The inter-war years saw a great deal of political ferment as westernized African elites led the way ahead of kings, chiefs, clan and lineage heads in anti-colonial politics.

In 1945, Africa as a continent, counted only four independent states, these being Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and racist South Africa. Twenty years later there were 35 independent states. By the 1980, over ninety percent of Africans lived in independent states. The transformation from colonial territories to political independence was for the most part totally conceded by the colonial powers, who assured of the fact that their economic interests were acknowledged by the new elites, were ready for most African countries to allow a fairly uncomplicated transition to political independence. The major exceptions were the Portuguese colonies, Kenya and the English and Afrikaans-speaking settler colonial countries of the south. In these instances anti-colonial wars had to be fought. But in no instance were these anti-colonial wars strategically and tactically geared towards the same political and economic destination as had been the case in post-Second World War South-East Asia. Initial French intransigence was only broken by the application of the charisma and authority of Charles de Gaulle, and this only after Sekou Toure's Guinea had opted for unconditional political independence.

African Anti-Colonial Nationalism

African nationalism is in many respects different from the earlier forms of nationalism which emerged before the 20th century. Together with their Asian counterparts, they shared the element of protest against alien rule. In both Asia and Africa, nationalism carried a strong dose of anti-racism. In Africa as well as Asia it bore as an ideological strand in its make-up the assertion that black or brown peoples had an indelible right to be treated as equals of white people. The colonial colour-bar and the treatment of Africans as inferior social elements even when they were educationally and economically equal to whites was crucial in fermenting the heady potion of African nationalism. Furthermore, it firmly represented an aspiration to technologically and developmentally advance out of conditions of backwardness and relative deprivation. Very importantly, while the earlier nationalisms of the western world were drawn mainly from emergent productive capitalist classes, the ascendant social classes of African nationalism were dominated by small producers, small-holders, westernized clerks, teachers and professional groups in short – petty, bourgeois elements. While the former were as productive, acquisitive and accumulative as well as consumptive, the dominant groups which ushered in nationalist power in Africa had little or no capital bases and were clearly more consumptive than accumulative. It is however arguable that, although the roots of African nationalism have been factorally diverse, it was socio-economic grievances which galvanized the process at crucial junctures. Cocoa trade and disease in the Gold Coast, copper prices in the Congo, cotton problems in Uganda and exploitative wage labour conditions were all examples of these factors.

The Elites

One of the significant results of the colonial experience in Africa is that it created a new set of dominant elements, a minority, who unlike their predecessors were products of the colonial order, and were economically and culturally creatures of colonialism. The colonial process produced elements educated in western schools. Most (except in the Muslim areas) converted to Christian religious practice, spoke English, French or Portuguese, and cultivated western tastes in all areas of cultural life. These were some of the cultural ingredients for the social hybridity to which Kobina Sekyi referred. Social success and upward social mobility was largely dependent on the extent to which they had adapted to westernism in cultural practice.

From the early stages of the western encounter, with the passage of time and the consolidation of the colonial order, the value system of the new order came to totally eclipse the pre-colonial, pre-capitalist social system. Imitation and mimicry of the westerner became part of the social diacritical signs of the elite, which in close concert with the westerner in Africa controlled the social order.

In service of the colonial order, such types, although frequently ridiculed by the westerner, fitted and served well in the colonial scheme of things. The elements were the archetypal 'black skins, white masks' made infamous by Frantz Fanon.[8] In the imagery of Shakespeare, they were the Calibans of Prospero's magic.

But if such types suited the workings of the colonial order, under the changed circumstances of independence, they became strategic misfits whose tragedy was that they were yesterday-men who had inherited states with objectives, which were totally different from those for which these elites had been formed and oriented. The neckties they wore

in the heat of the African sun, the 18th century European wigs the lawyers and judges wore, the French wines which were drunk at the high tables of their university refectories, the fascination with British, American and metropolitan French accents, the stretching and hot-combing of the hair of women to make them look European, the bleaching of black skins to acquire lighter skin colour, went hand in hand with the denigration of traditional African practices and customs.

The elite has been defined as 'those persons who were western-educated and wealthy to a high degree relative to the mass of the population'.[9] In a study produced during the early 1960s, a minimum annual income limit of 250 pounds sterling was given as a guide.[10] The African elite has always represented a very small fraction of the population. While differences existed in terms of their relative sizes as one moved from country to country or region to region, they remained a small minority. Lloyd observed that,

thus the West African states have a long history of educational experience. In both the former British and French colonial territories Africans gained early political training in their legislatures .... Nigeria today (1960s), has nearly 2000 lawyers in private practice and 600 indigenous doctors, in the Eastern and Western Regions, as in Ghana, over three-quarters of the senior posts in the civil service are held by nationals.[11]

In contrast, in French West Africa, even in the late 1950s, few Africans could be found occupying higher positions in the bureaucracy. Frenchmen held senior positions, which required only secondary education. In Tanzania, there were less than a hundred graduates in 1964.[12] The relative paucity in numbers of African elites has been remarkable. Lloyd noted that precise estimates

of numbers of elite members, using the criteria of varying levels of education and wealth, have been difficult to make for African states. During the early 1960s, Senegal, with a population of 3,000,000 had about fifty civil servants with a salary of over 2,400 pounds per annum and another 275 earning between 1,200 pounds and 2,400 pounds. The next lower category of civil servants earning over 850 pounds per annum numbered 1,600. In private employment there were 350 Senegalese with a mean income of 850 pounds per annum (as against 1,600 expatriates in the same category). In Western Nigeria, if taxation were trustworthy, only 2 per cent of the adult men earned above 500 pounds per annum. In Zambia only 1,000 persons had twelve years of primary and secondary education, and 2,6 per cent of the adult men had eight or more years of schooling – the equivalent of a full primary education. In Uganda only 5,000 men earned above 300 pounds per annum. In South Africa, with a then population of nearly 11,000,000 Africans, there were only thirty African lawyers and 100 African doctors (with an annual increase of twelve to fifteen a year), and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) then had only five African doctors, four lawyers and a few administrative officers. Ethiopia had an intelligentsia of 1,000 university graduates, two-fifths trained in the United States and one-fifth in Britain.[13] By the middle of the 1960s, Chad, a country of 3 million people had only 140 people with higher education. At the time of Congo's independence from the Belgians, you could count Africans with graduate level training on the fingers of one hand. It was these minorities who inherited the colonial state. With flags and national anthems to support their make-believe sovereignty, they faithfully carried on as they had been taught, maintaining carbon-copy western sub-cultures in a sea of tradition-bound mass cultures, from which they have

been alienated.

I am in agreement with the African-American artist Leroy Mitchell when he writes that; 'in the 20th century there have been very few persons of African descent who have been able to free themselves from the vestiges of inferiority left by slavery and colonization. Certainly, education alone has not done it ...'[14] This is a fact which many do not readily admit, and which is invariably dismissed outright by most of us when confronted with the question. A number of observations on this would be useful here. The fact that Africans relate to other peoples, particularly to westerners from inferior postures, can be hardly surprising given the fact that for centuries we have been so ruthlessly exploited and enslaved, first by Arabs and subsequently by westerners. Arab slavery has continued into the 20th century and continues to linger in places like the contemporary Sudan and Mauritania. Half a millennium of western slavery and other forms of economic exploitation have left their mark on both slave-master and slave. It was the British colonial governor Sir Alan Burns who with imperial frankness suggested that 'perhaps the most serious failing of the educated Negro, so far as the advancement of his own race is concerned, is his lack of the will for cooperation, the inability to follow for long a leader of his own colour, and the jealous vanity which prompts him to criticise and pull down his brother Negro who has ascended a few rungs higher than himself on the ladder of culture and progress'. In the same text, Burns quotes William Plomer to the effect that in South Africa (but this could be well generalised), 'it has nearly always happened that when one Bantu attains a position where he could use power for the benefit of his race he is either pulled down by the jealousy and faction of his fellow-countrymen or abuses the power he has obtained, for the sake of fraud or

tyranny or excess'.[15] Africans need to confront these realities dispassionately and frankly if this syndrome is to be eradicated.

Complicating this further, is the existence of an elite which while supposedly serving as a reference group and leadership for the African masses, in reality, is groomed and contented with imitating the westerner in almost every way possible. This confirms western superiority in the eyes and minds of the masses, but also likewise confirms western superiority in the mind of the westerner. It is hardly possible to treat a person who too readily yields the palm, and who, without fail imitates whatever you do as an equal.

What all this implies is that the contemporary African elite is incapable of leading Africans out of the syndrome of inferiority into fully-fledged self-assertiveness and socio-cultural development. Fanon realised this some forty years ago and his verdict remains outstanding. The argument is indeed, a long-standing one. The nationalist Kobina Sekyi in a letter written to the editor of *The African Times and Orient Review,* (October -December 1917) made the point that 'on the one hand we have the progressive aggressiveness of European industry, and on the other hand we have the complacent decadence of the subject peoples, who believe that by imitating Europe they will raise their respective nations to a level of power, or of efficiency, similar to, if not the same as that of Europe'.[16] Another leader of African opinion in the early part of this century, Attoh Ahuma, makes similar observations.

'The average West African of the Molluscan Order is a clever imitator of everything the Whitman thinks, and does, and says, particularly in the outward appearance and observance. If he doffed his coat and went about in his shirtsleeves in broad daylight, by

reason of our intolerable tropical heat, his Native understudy faithfully followed suit; if, in the cool of the evening, he discarded his headgear, the backboneless myrmidons did likewise. As he lands in the latest things in vogue, his echo takes full notes, and in less than seven weeks, like a puppet or marionette, he sports the identical style and fashion. Thanks to the letters C.O.D., facilities are afforded the young upstart to gratify his unworthy ambition. What the Whitman eats, he eats; what he drinks and smokes, he drinks and smokes, thereby securing what, in his deluded opinion, are considered the Hallmark of respectability, civilization and refinement. If his lord and master holds a cigar in a peculiar manner, it is copied; his gait, mode of expression, his expletives, smiles, laughter and other mannerisms and peculiarities, are all taken in wholesale, and reproduced with the fidelity of an Edisonian Phonograph. These are the things the black wretch in his Bœtian ignorance and folly, regards as signs of perfect manhood – this thin veneer of polish – and there the lesson ends'.[17]

The elite about which these observers wrote have not in substance changed in orientation. They have consistently reproduced themselves and expanded in numbers, in absolute numbers but not in relative terms. If the African elite as it is currently oriented cannot lead Africa forward, where do the answers lie?

The Way Forward
It is 20th century sociological wisdom, since Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto's work, that leadership and elites are abiding features of societal organization. All societies, in as far as they have stratificational features, are dominated by leading groups. Be that as it may, what Africa requires is therefore a new elite with a new and different orientation; an orientation which is not bent on the mimicry

of the present, a *counter-elite* which is not alienated from the aspirations and culture of mass society. An elite which does not turn its back on the tradition-bound culture of mass society, but rather accepts that as a premise and builds on it. Like the Japanese writer Amar Lahiri wrote many years ago about Japan;

'*... the application of western methods did not obliterate or outshine the true native quality and the native culture and understanding. Because Nippon did not assimilate western ideals along with her adoption of western technique, she was able to maintain her traditional character and qualities in toto and, therefore, the urge for modernization was motivated by the sincere desire of the people to produce their own culture in an international form ... '.*[18]

Central to this idea is the need to develop education in the linguistic usages of the masses. To do this we need first to disabuse ourselves of the idea that Africa is a Tower of Babel in which thousands of languages are spoken. The implication of the idea of Africa as a Tower of Babel is that there are too many languages for Africans to be able to work in their languages, therefore they must work in colonial languages. The work that we have been doing in CASAS suggests that this is a myth which helps to preserve the cultural and linguistic hegemony of colonially introduced languages in Africa. My finding is that, as first, second and third language speakers, 75 percent or more of Africans speak no more than twelve core/root languages.[19]

If the total population of Black Africa is between 550 and 600 million, the Fula, Pulaar, Peul. Tuculor, Fulful, Fulbe, Fulani cluster of mutually intelligible dialects alone would account for about 50 million, Hausa and its varieties bring up another 40 to 50

million, Oromo, Amharic, Igbo, KiSwahili, Yoruba and Bambara would produce at least another 35 million in each instance, the Nguni dialects, the Sotho-Tswana, the Akan, the Eastern and the Western inter-lacustrine Bantu languages and Luo are between 30 and 35 million per set.

In as far as African development is concerned, the upshot of these facts are that the harmonisation of African languages which show high levels of mutual intelligibility would greatly facilitate the economies of scale in the development of educational, media and cultural materials which could go a long way in strengthening the basis of society for the cultural and social development of Africa. Furthermore, it is the only way of culturally empowering the masses of African society. It is the one way, we can remove the cultural cleavage between the elite and mass society. It provides the key to the methodology of eradicating the stigma of inferiority which the colonial experience has invested in African languages. Indeed, African languages provide the key to African advancement and development.

Africans need to work together in order to deal with the language question. What the logic of the harmonization and standardization of African languages leads directly to is the question of African unity. Africa has no chance of progress without unity. And the respect, which Africans seek, will not be forthcoming until Africans are united. In my view, African unity can only be built on democratic units which celebrate cultural and ethnic pluralism in a non-hegemonic arrangement. It is through the struggle for democracy that the basis for unity can be found. Africanism must be won through Africanist practice structured through democratic institutions. Related to this, is the question of the African diaspora.

Africans in the diaspora were forcibly removed from Africa. Remarkably, the whole subsequent history of African nationalism has been directly linked to the diaspora. Much of the principal ideological architects of African nationalism have either been directly drawn from the diaspora, or such diasporal elements have profoundly influenced the thinking of African politics on the continent. The relations existent between China and her diaspora, European states today and people of European decent elsewhere, India and her diaspora, international Jewry and Israel, needs to be equally affirmed for Africa and Overseas Africans. I am thinking here, particularly of rights which must be extended to the African diaspora - national and citizenship rights. This ultimately makes full sense only in the context of a unified Africa constructed along pluralist organizational lines. I have elsewhere made the point that the right to African citizenship on demand for the diaspora must be conceded.[20] We know that most diasporal Africans have no wish to return to the continent. But the right to return is a right of the African nation, and belongs to Africans everywhere. It is their right. I am inclined to think that Africans in the diaspora are unlikely to gain equality until Africa is united and on the way to technological and socio-economic advancement. In much the same way that overseas Chinese have contributed greatly to the emergence of China as an economic and technological power, the African diaspora could do the same if the permitting conditions are created. We do well to remember J.E. Casely Hayford's point made in *Ethiopia Unbound* (1908) that; A ....the average Afro-American citizen of the United States has lost absolute touch with the past of his race, and is helplessly and hopelessly groping in the dark for affinities that are not natural, and for effects for which there are neither national nor natural causes. That being so, the African in America is in a worse plight than the Hebrew

in Egypt. The one preserved his language, his manners and customs, his religion, and household gods; the other has committed national suicide, ... it is not so much Afro-Americans that we want as Africans or Ethiopians, sojourning in a strange land, who, out of a full heart and a full knowledge can say: If I forget thee, Ethiopia, let my right hand forget its cunning!'. Casely Hayford takes the argument in the opposite direction for full effect and writes that; ' ... how extraordinary would be the spectacle (if), ... having imbibed all that is best in Western culture in the land of their oppressors, yet remaining true to racial instincts and inspiration, customs and institutions, much as did the Israelites of old in captivity! When this more pleasant picture will have become possible of realisation, then, and only then, will it be possible for our people in bondage metaphorically to walk out of Egypt in the near future with a great and a real spoil'.[21] What Casely Hayford did not realise in his time however, is that, the pitfalls of the American experience is now present on the African continent, and is being propagated, without much thought, by an elite which generationally reproduces itself by educating its offspring increasingly away from its linguistic and cultural moorings. On both the African continent and in the diaspora, conscious effort will need to be made this century to strengthen the cultural and historical linkages, which define the uniqueness of the African experience.

Random Observations

Africa's advantage is that it is in global terms at the bottom of the heap in as far as development and democracy are concerned. What this implies is that enhancement of its advancements in these two areas of social life adds to the long-term advantage of humanity as a whole. But Africans must be the instruments of such change in Africa. The forging of social tools and their use to effect such change rests with African ingenuity. This will require single-mindedness of purpose and the creation of a counter-elite which will question the premise of the post-colonial state, its neo-colonial character, its barren, uninspired, unproductive and consumerist culture; its politically predatory character, the comprador syndrome which induces leading social elements to pillage the state and bank the loot in Swiss banks. The theft, disgraceful as it is, is not even put to productive enterprise as has been the case in many parts of post 2nd World War Asia; that sort of economic patriotism has been missing in the behaviour of African elites. They have accepted the economic confines of flag and anthem and allow less movement of labour and capital among themselves than was the case under the colonial regime. The excuse of sovereignty has become a convenience of the attachment of human rights by the state, and its rationing in the relationship between government and civil society.

Post-independence African states have been remarkably unable to sustain democratic practice. During the late 1960s and 1970s in particular, democratic politics was frequently usurped by one-party state structures and military regimes. Coups became, for a period, the dominant mechanism for governmental change. The resultant military-bureaucratic states represented a narrowing of the basis of governing elites, a trend which tended to proliferate as the resource bases of African states shrunk in the face of declining economies. African elites have become renown for the kleptocratic ethos most have cultivated and maintained. However, since the 1980s, democratic pressures have continued to steadily build up. Today, military regimes are out of favour, but, the culture of kleptocracy has not seriously shown signs of diminishment.

Part of the reason for the fragility of the post-colonial state has been that cultural and ethnic features of African societies have too often been treated as anathema, which need to be stamped out in the quest for unified polities. Instead of giving such features democratic form and content, they are forcibly swept under the carpet or denied by pronouncement and fiat, only for them to resurface again as persistent social features, which will simply not disappear, and which have more resilience and life than is simply imagined. We need to be able to turn the tapestry of Africa's ethno-culture to our democratic and developmental advantage and not treat them as signs of primitivism and backwardness.

A lot lately has been made of the upsurge of demand for debt cancellation for the poorest countries of the world. If and when this happens it is likely to be a carrot and stick arrangement much like Bretton Woods institutions currently practice; support based on IMF conditionalities. 'You do what I want and I give you more debt cancellation, and financial support'. Of course debt cancellation is most welcome. Most societies of the poor Third World are net exporters of capital and spend sizable proportions of their national earnings on debt payments. Any relief is useful, but what is really wrong is the system, which makes the poorest of the earth increasingly indebted to a rich few; a rich few who ensure diminishing prices for primary commodities and increasing prices for industrially-based value-added products. It is within this system that 'modern slavery' is constructed.

What many Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora, need to understand is that colour and biology are no bases for defining African nationality. There are many, in especially Northern and Southern Africa, whose colour would be an African defining attribute in the North American context, but who on the continent would not regard themselves as African. Most Northern Sudanese Arabs and many Mahgrebi could physically be compared to African-Americans. But while African-Americans in nationalist thought generally acknowledge their African roots, South African coloureds or North Sudanese, latter-day Nubians, prefer to see themselves as Arabs or in the South, 'Coloureds'. There are also even light-skinned people, some white, who regard themselves as Africans. Being African needs to be divorced from colour, without denying that the overwhelming majority of Africans are black, and very black at that.

Africanness is a historical and cultural phenomenon and process. Africans are contemporary people who are historically and culturally rooted in Africa. Africans find in Africa, sentiments of identification and linkage to Africa now and in the past. This acknowledgement is uncontested, but it is a past about which intelligent Africans are critical; a past, which must be regarded with a critical gaze and sober appreciation. In the post-colonial era, in particular, romanticization of the past, imaginary idyllic conditions of a by-gone age and a tendency to attribute 'prime evil' to colonialism and the westerner has been the stock-in-trade of political ideologues rationalizing or fantasizing solutions to Africa's developmental backwardness under populist concepts like, Kagisoism (Botswana), African Socialism (Ghana, Kenya, Guinea), Ujamaa (Tanzania), or Humanism (Zambia).

In as far as relations with non-African minorities in Africa are concerned, it is worth noting that Africa has culturally from the depths of time integrated migrant peoples and cultures of various sorts. This phenomenon continues to the present day. Being an African

is therefore an inclusivist idea and process. Africans exist and are also in the making. Africanness is more history and culture than biology; more a development of culture on historical premises, rather than a fixed biological product arrested in space and time.

This new century will see the rise of Africa. But this rise is unlikely to occur without considerable ingenuity, sacrifice, pain and suffering. What we are currently witnessing is the disintegration of the post-colonial state and the cruel wars which are tied to this process. Two-thirds of Africa is embroiled in wars of various sorts. At no time in Africa's history has war on this continent been so generalised. Some of these wars are civil wars while others are interstate wars.

In a recent issue of *The Mail and Guardian,* it was observed that in the 12 months to August 1999, 10 international wars and 25 civil wars were being fought. While globally, there may be slightly fewer internal conflicts they have certainly become more intense. Eleven of the civil wars running out of control last year were in sub-Saharan Africa. About 60% of the deaths from armed conflict also occurred in the region. These included an estimated 15 000 in Ethiopia and Eritrea, 9 000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and 9 000 in Sierra Leone. Arms exports to the region nearly doubled over the year as different factions fought not only over territory but also for valuable mineral resources. Three-quarters of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in armed conflict or confronted by a significant threat from armed groups. Military expenditure in the region totalled $ 11 billion last year, if military assistance and funding of opposition groups and mercenaries are taken into account. Excluding South Africa, spending on arms in sub-Saharan Africa increased by 14% at a time when the region's economic growth rose by less than 1% in real

terms.[22]

Africans want peace, but it is questionable if western inspired ideas on peace-keeping and the military structures for peace-keeping are advised purely by altruistic considerations and geared towards the long term interests of Africans. Peace-keeping as purely military exercises without bold and creative political solutions become crude contrivances for maintaining the status quo of neo-colonialism. Peace is crucial for Africa's advancement, but it requires structural changes in inter-state relations in Africa and not simply a question of forcibly guaranteeing the inviolability of state borders and the suppression of all contrary historical tendencies.

The road to peace can only be achieved through unified African efforts involving democratic social elements and groups working in concert for peace. The colonially created borders which are supposed to define nation-states do not coincide with the actual sovereignty and power of African states. The notion of globalization which is, more or less, in practice a euphemism for western hegemony has come to mean the dissolution of the sovereignty of African states, and through the ideology of privatization sponsored by the World Bank and IMF and their backers, African economies are being increasingly denationalised and sold to international finance. All this is being accelerated in this post-Cold War era by the emergence of a uni-polar world dominated by the United States and her European allies. Compounding this is the fact that the economic debt trap, which has crippled African economies, has led to a situation in which African states cannot economically manage or maintain economic control over their ostensible territorial backyards. Warlords and brigands have in many areas gained the upper-hand over legitimate governments both

politically and economically. Warlords and ostensible governments struggle for control over gold, diamond, and oil resources in order to prosecute meaningless wars of attrition against their competitors, while the civilian populations suffer barbarities and dehumanizing humiliations of the most horrific kinds. All this attests to the demise of the post-colonial or neo-colonial state in Africa. My view is that, in the long run, the post-colonial state cannot be saved.

It is however important that we do not continuously blame others for our own ineptitude. The western encounter has two faces, one which undermined African humanity, and the other which introduced technology, science and modernism into African society, even if this was done in an inappropriate fashion which has attempted to by-pass African culture and knowledge, as a point of departure. In any case, the colonialists have in direct form left Africa for almost a half-century. Although neo-colonialism is a reality with which we live today, it is possible to throw off this yoke if Africans are prepared to work together and treat each other as people with histories, cultures and interests which transcend the record of the colonial encounter.

Africa will need, this century, to treat as a matter of priority, the forging of strategic links with the East Asia. This will be crucial for Africa's economic and technological advancement. Current evidence suggests that scant attention has so far been placed on this issue, as Africans are psychologically, economically and politically still beholden to their former slave and colonial masters.

NOTES

1. Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa*. (Longman. London, 1983. p.31-32.)
2. See Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*. (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1957 edition. p.156-161.) See also, Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*. Panaf Books, London. 1968.)
3. I was told this by Akwasi Aidoo, February 20th 1998. Edusei was a colourful and curiously loved figure of Ghanaian politics under the Nkrumah regime, sometimes as a figure regarded with comic relief. Although he had very poor western education he was profoundly gifted in his own language Akan. He is unfairly described by James Cameron as a 'fantastic Ashanti demagogue'. See, J. Cameron, *The African Revolution*. (Thames and Hudson, London, 1961. p.89.)
4. Gunnar Myrdal, *The Challenge of World Poverty*. (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1970. p.280.)
5. Ibid. p.279.
6. See E. D. Morel, Red Rubber, The Black Man's Burden, Leopold's Rule in the Congo. (London. 1905.) Denis Gwynn, *The Life and Death of Roger Casement*. (Jonathan Cape, London, 1930.)
7. Basil Davidson, *The African Awakening*. (Jonathan Cape, London, 1955. p.84.)
8. F. Fanon. Black Skins, White Masks. Harmondsworth. Penguin Books. 1958.
9. P. C. Lloyd, *The New Elites of Tropical Africa*. (Oxford University Press, London, 1966. p.4.)
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid
12. Ibid. p.5.
13. Ibid.
14. Leroy E. Mitchell, *Africa Come Back*. (Ghana Publishing House, Tema, 1988. p.62.)
15. Alan Burns, *Colour Prejudice*. (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948. pp.137 and 138.)
16. Kobina Sekyi, "The Future of Subject Peoples", in *The African Times and Orient Review*. (October - December. 1917.) Quoted here from J. Ayo Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa. 1856 - 1970*. Rex Collings. London. 1979.

17. S. R. B. Attoh Ahuma, *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness*. (Liverpool. 1911.) Quoted here from J. Ayo Langley. ibid p.170.

18. See Amar Lahiri, *Mikado's Mission*. (The Japan Times Press, Tokyo, 1940. p110.)

19. See K. K. Prah, *African Languages for the Mass Education of Africans*. (DSE, Bonn, 1995.)

20. See K. K. Prah, *Beyond the Color Line*. (Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1998. p.105.)

21. J. E. Casely Hayford. Quoted here from J. Ayo Langley. Op cit. p.206.

22. See Richard Norton-Taylor and Owen Bowcott, "Deadly Cost of New Global Warfare". In, *The Mail and Guardian*. Vol 15, No. 43, October 29 to November 4. 1999. p.20.