The African Nationalist Idea of Africa

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Abstract

This paper probes the impact of colonial designs in the fabrication of native subjectivities, which eventuated in toxic political identities that would later undermine the post-colonial nationalist project. African history was shaped by three discursive periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The colonisation period deformed, distorted and adulterated Africa's pre-colonial cultural landscape—its sense of selfhood. African nationalism was a response to this ontologically debilitated condition of African personhood resulting from the violence of self-serving European colonial modernity, which created a structured subjugation of the African 'other.' African colonial elites at once defined and epitomised various forms of African nationalism against European incursion. However, these African modernisers failed to grasp the historicity of such enduringly baneful identity politics, and were thereby often themselves cast into the vortex of social contradictions reflective of this history. Mamdani made this observation when he stated that in kick-starting the nation-building project after independence, post-colonial elites turned their backs on the history of colonialism and thus on their own history. Instead, they modelled their political imagination on the modern European state, the result being the nationalist dream was imposed on the reality of colonially imposed fragmentation, leading to new rounds of nation-building by ethnic cleansing. Consequently, African nationalism has invariably spread across large swathes of post-colonial Africa as it degenerated into odious ethno-nationalism and chauvinism. Only through a deeper historical understanding of these colonial processes of African political identification can an we begin to understand how this once glorious African nationalism regressed into a dystopian one. This article draws on history to dissect this legacy of subjective forms of African self-understanding.

Introduction and Context

'For the Nation to Live, the Tribe must Die'---Samora Machel

Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. Martin Luther King Jr.

This paper probes the impact of European colonial designs on the fabrication of native subjectivities, which eventuated in toxic political identities that would later undermine the post-colonial nationalist project among African nations. African history has been shaped by three discursive periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The colonial period deformed, distorted and altered Africa's pre-colonial cultural landscape - its sense of selfhood. African nationalism was a response to this ontologically debilitated condition of African personhood, resulting from the violence of self-serving European colonial modernity, which created the structured subjugation of the African 'other' (Masilela, 2013). African independence movements at once defined and epitomised various forms of African nationalism in its tstruggle to rid Africa of oppression and find passageways into the African future.

However, quite often, these African modernisers, comprising both nationalists and intelligentsia[1], failed to grasp the historicity of enduringly problematic identity politics, and were, thereby, often themselves cast into the vortex of social contradictions reflective of this history. Mamdani observes that "in kick-starting the nation-building project after independence, post-colonial elites turned their backs on the history of colonialism and thus on their own history. Instead, they modelled their political imagination on the modern European state, the result being the nationalist dream was imposed on the reality of colonially imposed fragmentation, leading to new rounds of nation-building by ethnic cleansing" (2021: 15). Consequently,

African nationalism has generally spread across large swathes of post-colonial Africa where it degenerated into odious ethno-nationalism and chauvinism. In this regard, a deeper historical understanding of these colonial processes in African political identification reveals how a once productive African nationalism regressed into a dystopian one.

This study therefore draws on history to dissect the injurious legacy of Europe on subjective forms of African self-understandings. It largely relies on Mamdani's (in Martin and West, 1999; 1996; 2013; 2021) study of European colonialism's strategies of both direct rule and indirect rule, which was weaponised to deconstruct and reconstitute African societies along ethnic lines. Mamdani's study is useful in showing the causal link between the impact of colonialism in remoulding African societies, later post-colonial instability and the fragmentation manifested in insidious political identities. Nation building, 'the creation and consolidation of political and national identity in former colonies or imperial provinces' (Erikson, 1994: 3) could not come into its own under these antithetical conditions, immersed as they were in the invidious, harmful history of colonial identity formations. Following on the fractious effects of the politics of toxic social identities wrought on post-colonial Africa by colonialism's indirect rule and perpetuated by the post-colonial nation-state, nationalism was structurally undermined as African nation-states wrestled with the all-too violent political animosities embedded in this history of ethnic politics. What once were coherent African forms of national self-consciousness soon deteriorated into pernicious forms of ethno-nationalism, as diverse social identities created by colonial designs staked a claim in the new order. Mamdani (2021) argues that this type of identity politics was spawned by the failure on the part of the African independence movement to 'decolonise the political'. By decolonising the political Mamdani means,

Upsetting the permanent majority and minority identities that define the contours of the nation state. The idea of the nation-state naturalises majority and minorities identities, justifying their permanence (2021: 19).

[1]Ntongela Masilela (2013) refers to the early African intelligentsia which illuminated African responses to European colonial modernity in intellectual, artistic and cultural terms as the 'New African Movement', i.e., individuals armed with modern European education who set out to 'master the complexity of European modernity with the intent of subverting it to a form of modernity that would emerge from the democratic imperatives of African history' (2013:xiii-xv). Across colonial and post-colonial Africa, this was not necessarily philosophically monolithic grouping, as their disposition to European hegemony differed according within countries, as the case of Congo-Zaire shows (see the section entitled 'The Failure to Decolonise the Congo' below).

> " In essence, decolonising the political refers to the process of dismantling the colonial legacy of exclusion based on social identities and their replacement with a reconstituted, all-inclusive, egalitarian political community driven by a cohesive, superordinate national vision which transcends the contours of ethnicity. "

In essence, decolonising the political refers to the process of dismantling the colonial legacy of exclusion based on social identities and their replacement with a reconstituted, all-inclusive, egalitarian political community driven by a cohesive, superordinate national vision which transcends the contours of ethnicity. Another formulation would be creating the nonnational state; a state not tethered to ethnic identities but driven by political processes. Decolonising the political equates to depoliticising racial and tribal practices, without seeking to extirpate cultural difference. Cultural difference, or ethnicity, existed before colonialism and formed the African human landscape. It was only when colonialism politicised it by way of reification for purposes of 'divide and rule' that cultural difference was politically toxified (Mamdani, 2021).

In this environment of 'tribally'-orientated permanent majority and minority populations, post-colonial Africa remained locked up in self-consuming, regressive cycle of political violence[2] that impeded political unity and social coherence. With the atrophying of post-colonial African nationalism, Pan-Africanism was 'deoxygenated'. It could not be otherwise. Pan-Africanism could not stand on its own two feet without nationalist underpinnings since it was the progeny of the former. As Falola (2001) shows,

> Nationalism gave birth to Pan-Africanism, Pan-Africanism radicalised nationalism, and both combined to contribute to the fall of the European empires in Africa. As the empires were crumbling, nationalism and Pan-Africanism appeared to be separating and nationalism itself was in retreat (2001: 98).

Pan-Africanism cleaves to the historical self-consciousness of global Africa; it encapsulates both continental Africa and Africans in the diaspora. Adebajo (2020) defines Pan-Africanism as:

> The efforts to promote the political, socio-economic and cultural unity, emancipation and self-reliance of Africa and its diaspora. The concept of Pan-Africanism developed amid the sweltering oppression of slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas, and was transported back to Africa by its students who went to study in the US and Europe (2020: 4).

Once Pan-Africanism philosophy landed on the African continent it became an ontological project of African nationalism[3], serving as a contrastive vision and antidote to the smothering oppression of Global Europe. To that extent, the growth and durability of Pan-Africanism on the African continent became contingent on the sustainability of nationalism as a political force. How the post-colonial African politics fared would therefore determine whether a Pan-African vision survived as a coherent, continental force capable of galvanising African unity.

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[2] In line with his core argument on this front, Mamdani differentiates between two types of violence: 'criminal violence' and 'political violence'. His thesis is that what is normally thought of as criminal violence in post-colonial societies is actually political violence whereby excluded groups fight for belonging. Therefore, solution to post-colonial violence (Sudan; Nigeria; Kenya etc) is not to criminalise it but to see it as a political expression of a group's longing for membership.

[3] Unlike European nationalism, African nationalism was an imposed response to conditions of external domination, which response had the aggregate effect of turning Africans into the subjects of history (Masilela: 2013). The ideological evolution of African nationalism stemmed from the lived reality of colonialism. African nationalism in this reactive vein was far more sustainable than its post-colonial iteration which had to re-define its ontological legitimacy within the context of power in the face of which it fell apart due to inherited fabricated ethnic identities which the architects of nationalism failed to transcend through an all-inclusive vision. Ironically, post-independence nationalism took on the ethno-connotation which harked back to the beginning of European nationalism. In this sense, nationalism referred to 'the belief that 'the nation' is the central principle of political organization (Heywood, 1992:143). If the 'tribe' substitutes 'the nation' in the preceding sentence the parallels are clear. Despite its complex evolution in its European home soil, European nationalism became 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983: 6) while in Africa it remained reified identity frozen in time as it served political purposes.

Identity Politics and the Global Political Economy

The spectre of a post-colonial African failure of nation-building is comprehensible within the broader context of the history of neo-colonialism, to which newly-freed African states are invariably subjected (Gutkind and Wallerstein, 1975; Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996; Mafeje, in Nabudere, 2011). Attributing the vulnerable post-colonial condition of Africa to the asymmetric global trade, Archie Mafeje argues that 'being a direct product not simply of colonialism but of pervasive global capitalism, African economies (with the exception of South Africa), unlike any other regions in the world, had suffered total vertical integration into the global system' (in Nabudere, 2011: 57). Gutkind and Wallerstein (1976) advance the same argument about the 'subordination of the continent to the economic and political needs and objectives of the major Western powers' (1976: 7).

Olukoshi and Laakso (1996) conclude that both individual and group identity crisis, which unfold in post-colonial Africa do so against the background of these domestic and international macro-conditions shaping the political environment. This identity crisis is therefore compounded by 'deepening social inequality/fragmentation, the weakened administrative and policy apparatuses, of the state, the decline of the ideologies of communism and anti-communism that dominated the Cold War years, and the accelerating process of globalisation...' (1996: 5).

In view of these broader global, socio-economic currents, this article does not seek to reduce the debilitated post-colonial African condition to a monocausal paradigm centred around identity politics. Olukoshi and Laakso maintain that 'the tendency to regard ethnic/religious pluralism as essentially incompatible with the goal of nation-building is grossly mistaken and ought to be jettisoned in the quest for a more solid basis on which to build national unity in African countries' (1996: 5). As the foregoing explications demonstrate, the causes of African under-development are far more complex, even though, as this article maintains, identity politics remain the common denominator. To be sure, toxic identities have often taken more forms than just the ethnic, just as overlaps of these adversarial identities have not been unusual. For example, in post-colonial Africa these overlaps are typified by the case of 'Sudan and Chad, (Muslim/Arab North, Christian/Animist South) and Nigeria (Muslim and Hausa North, Yoruba Southwest, Ibo Southeast)' (Hobsbawm, 1990: 154). The failure of post-colonial politics invariably leads to the flaring up of hidebound and atavistic forms of ethno-nationalism, with dire socio-political consequences for the newly independent state. For his part, Vail maintains that,

> the nationalist message before and immediately after the end of colonialism was that the new dispensation would result in improvements and much increased welfare benefits. Unfortunately, this progress has not occurred, and instead the nation state's administrative structures have faltered and shrivelled (1989: 17).

Aborted African nationalism is therefore not only the function of the African leaderships' failure in historical imaginings, but also the upshot of the bleak state of the political economy. Under desolate socio-economic conditions, social contradictions are sharpened with ethnic hostilities accentuated by the scramble for scarce resources. Mamdani illustrates that by saying,

> Extreme violence in the postcolonial condition is very often nationalistic violence, as ethnic groups, organised as separate tribal units under colonialism, vie for privileged access to public goods (2021: 21).

Such has been the crisis of the nation-state in Africa in the wake of the adverse state of the international and national political economy, coupled with reified ethnic politics. The African Confidential (as cited in Olukishi and Laakso, 1996: 8) once boldly stated that 'there are signs everywhere that the era of nation-state is fading...The awkward marriage of the 'nation' in the sense of an ethnic coalition and the state as the principal source of political authority is coming under pressure from above and below' (6 January 1995).

Instead of flourishing after defeating external conquests, African nationalist configurations quite often tend to succumb to the legacy of the exogenous ruination as the local political leadership misconceives the remedial response to the afflictions of politicised identities. In turn, these residual colonial effects wilt Africa's post-colonial nationalist self-consciousness, thereby undermining its national unity.

From Direct Rule to Indirect Rule

The African independence movement's espousal of the nation-state, for all its innate inimicality to the African political community, turned out to be a tragic flaw for national cohesion. Dissimilarly, the evolution of the nation-state in Europe occurred under congenial conditions. In its European historical habitat, 'nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and, by definition, its relationship to the state. A nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries' (Gellner, 1983, in Eriksen, 1994: 10). In Europe the evolution of the nation-state was therefore an organic process which eventuated into wholesomeness, despite challenges. To the contrary, the notion of the nation-state as an extraneous colonial imposition ended in degenerate African states. On a subjective level, this failure is ascribable to the failure of African nationalists and the intelligentsia to interrogate the historicity of the post-colonial moment.

According to Wamba-Dia-Wamba, 'the National Question refers to how the global form of social existence, characterising the relationship of society to its environment, is historically or politically arrived at' (in Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996: 154). Dia-Wamba delineates a dual conception of the national question, splitting it into objective and subjective conditions in terms of which there is,

> an objective side where the nation-state refers to the complete subordination of the National Question to the state, i.e., the state as creator and organiser of the nation, and a subjective aspect involving a subjective capacity in which the common people (les gens), independently of the state, constitute a national subjectivity or national community serving as reference for political solidarity and action' (in Olukushi and Laakso, 1996: 154).

For Dia-Wamba, a state can come into being in either one of the two ways above. He emphasises that the subjective process of nation-state formation 'calls for real transformation of the colonial state to make it democratic/representative and capable of empowering people against foreign domination' (in Olukushi and Laakso, 1996: 155). African state formation under colonial domination instantiates the process of the objective conditions of state formation. Thus, the African nation-state incarnates inherent incommensurabilities. Inversely, the inability to decolonise the political means that most post-colonial African nations cannot rise up to Dia-Wamba's subjective condition for the national question.

Colonialism assumed two modes of political domination in Africa - direct rule and indirect rule (Mamdani, 1996; 2013; 2021). Mamdani (in Martin and West) reasons that the legitimation of both direct rule and indirect rule came about in response to the question: 'how can a tiny and foreign minority rule over an indigenous majority?' (1999: 189). To this end, colonial conquest had to introduce innovations for purposes of self-preservation. Direct rule was the initially preferred colonial strategy in terms of which the colonialists sought to replace African modes of being with European cultural forms. It was 'centralised despotism' which 'involved a comprehensive sway of institutions: the appropriation of land, the destruction of communal autonomy, and the defeat and dispersal of tribal populations' (Mamdani, 1996: 17).

Direct rule excluded from its definition of citizenship those individuals it deemed beyond the pale of 'civilisation'. This was emphatically captured by the British colonial secretary's pronouncement in 1849 that authorities would brook only that version of customary law that is not 'repugnant to the general principles of humanity, recognised throughout the whole civilised world' (Mamdani, 2021: 146). Its other side was the nonrecognition of the 'native' institutions" (in Martin and West, 1999: 189-190). Christian European culture was the gold standard of citizenship. It embraced the idea of equality for all who met the threshold of European standards. This is best captured by Cecil Rhodes' call for 'equal rights for all civilised men' (Walshe, 1971). Mamdani concludes that,

> Thus did the Europeans turn to the colonies and seek to build the avatar of modernity; the nation state, as it existed in Europe. The French called this the 'mission civilisatrice' which was anglicised as the 'civilising mission' (Mamdani, 2021: 2).

So why did direct rule shift to indirect rule? Mamdani (2013) explains this shift by what he calls 'the crisis of empire' in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In brief, his explanation says that 'the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a crisis of empire at both ends, India and Jamaica, starting with the 1857 uprising in India, known as the Sepoy Mutiny, and closing with Morant Bay in Jamaica in 1865' (Mamdani, 2013: 8). This crisis of empire convinced the colonial theoreticians that direct rule's mission of civilising the natives and 'its project of assimilation aimed at colonised elites' had failed (2013: 45-46).

Because of this force of circumstances, the British apostles of empire began to shift their focus from direct rule to indirect rule. The abiding rationale for indirect rule was that it was preserving the traditions and custom of the natives. Its main tenet was to 'manage difference', by institutionalising it 'in both the polity and society' (Mamdani, 2013: 2). Under indirect rule,

> Peasant communities were reproduced within the context of a spatial and institutional autonomy. The tribal leadership was either selectively reconstituted as the hierarchy of the local state or freshly imposed where none had existed, as in 'stateless societies'. Here political inequality went alongside civil inequality. Both were grounded in legal dualism (Mamdani, 1996: 17).

What made indirect rule an attractive proposition was the fact that it held out the prospect of emphasising, reproducing and even creating cultural distinctions between the natives themselves (Mamdani, 2013). Its

distinguishing feature was a concern with ordinary people and not just the indigenous elites. Ultimately, indirect rule was an ingenious method that enabled colonial authorities to be in charge without ever impinging on the consciousness of the ruled, since it retained indigenous institutions of governance, albeit in a re-purposed form (Myers, 2008). With the establishment of indirect rule after 1858, Africans were reconstituted culturally, socially and historically; in essence, their 'colonial subjectivity' was invented (Mamdani, 2013: 44).

Mamdani reminds us that, "unlike what is commonly thought, native does not designate a condition that is original and authentic. Rather... the native is the creation of the colonial state: colonised, the native is pinned down, localised, thrown out of civilisation as an outcast, confined to custom, and then defined as a its product' (2013: 2-3). In other words, self-conceptions of being native are the upshot of invented colonial subjectivity. In this effort to create native subjectivity for the colonialised,

> Historical writing, census-taking, and law-making fostered new subjectivities by creating for the colonised a new past, altering their status in the present, and anticipating for them futures that otherwise would never have come to pass. Colonisers wrote European race theories and perverted variations on local history into the histories of the colonised peoples, making European categories of race and tribe appear local and natural (Mamdani, 2021: 12)

Over generations, these constructed subjectivities entrench themselves, taking on a life of their own by the strengthening of historical frames of reference, in which ethnic collective memory resides[4]. The colonial 'states not only attempt to provide their citizens with official accounts of the past, but they also seek to control the particular way such accounts are used', as well as having access to alternative versions (Wertsch, in Seixas, 2004: 50). As stated above, history, culture and the official archive were instrumentalised to falsify historical identities,

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[4] Seixas refers to this collective memory as 'individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and the future' (2004, ed: 10).

thereby inculcating 'false historical consciousness'. It is exactly this self-contained, primordial sentiment implanted during the colonial era, which will grow centrifugal with time in order to antagonise the nation-state and its nationalist ideology after the dissolution of the formal colonial order. Sensitivity to this historicity or the nation-state and an attendant, appropriate response would have enabled national independence movements to re-image political categories which could circumvent the booby-traps of ethnic identity. In this way progressive anti-colonial nationalism could have transcended the repercussion of the machinations, distortions and falsifications of indirect rule.

Yet, this is precisely the self-same trap that the indigenous political class and intelligentsia fell into. At an epistemic level, this inherited colonial order posed a monumental challenge to the apostles of the nationalist project in terms of their understanding of the colonial problematic. Mamdani argues that the only condition in which the post-colonial state could qualify as having decolonised the political is when it has transformed both the civil law (racial relations) and the customary law (tribal relations) by reimagining more inclusive political communities. Eliminating both these colonially created domains implies the eradication of material privilege as a function of politicised identities based on the idea of a nation-state. As it turned out, the project of decolonising the political, to create conditions that could facilitate the sustainability of a universal post-colonial nationalism, ran aground as the national independence movement failed the most critical test of building democratic citizenship and national unity - or, in Mamdani's formulation, in decolonising the political.

Decolonising the Political:
Exorcising the Colonial Ghost

To reiterate the central contention of this study as articulated by Mamdani (2021; 2013), the task of decolonising the political refers to the imperative to dismantle both the spheres of civil law and customary law, which were legally sanctioned domains of political dominance in which the political architecture of colonialism was constituted. It is an exercise which centres on the nonnational state which cleaves to the political process as the centre of gravity. The

two domains of tribe and race represented the hierarchisation of political identity, where identity conferred benefits within the context of a 'homeland', or on the grounds of native and non-native. Civil law represented a category of dual political identities in which individuals considered 'settlers' enjoyed the rights of citizenship while those considered native or tribal (ethnic Africans) were legally excluded. Customary law was a form of decentralised despotism in which people considered tribes were 'sub-divided into territorial homelands and made subject to separate legal regimes' under the authority of chiefs, often imposed or created *ex nihilo* (Mamdani, 2013). The South African negotiated settlement, according to Mamdani (2021), succeeded in overcoming the institutionalised segregation of civil law by depoliticising racial identity.

For Africa at large, reconstituting both domains into a new non-nation state, transcending the logic of identity politics, would have devitalised the source of national fragmentation while laying the foundations for a national unity within democratic politics. As it turned out, Africa did not follow the same logic of subverting the historical heritage of the toxic identity politics in forging the national question. Post-independence, African politics were shaped by both the national intelligentsia, concerned about reconstructing the history of the new state, and the political class, whose main objective revolved on the building of 'common citizenship as the basis of a common sovereignty' (Mamdani, 2013: 85). Both processes were ultimately about nation-building but could not succeed due to misapprehending the task of political transformation.

Across the African continent, there emerged differences in how the post-independent state was to be re-organised and reconstituted to meet this key objective of state-building (Mamdani, 1996). Some states retained the substance of a bifurcated state, while others instituted reform by consolidating the myriad customary laws into one national iteration applicable across the board, thereby, by default perpetuating despotism by reviving this throw-back (Mamdani, 1996). To varying degrees, both cases led to perverted consequences including military coups and secessionist threats, as happened in Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Congo-Zaire and many other countries.

Tribe and Political Identity

Mamdani's delineation of the problematic of the term 'tribe' is that it does not refer so much to 'the ethnic group as in a cluster of culturally unique people but to political identification with the ethnic group' (2021: 14). His exhortation to decolonise the political is motivated by this historicised reality. When Samora Machel's Mozambique proclaimed that 'for the nation to live, the tribe must die', it meant that all the inherited political identifications affixed to ethnicity should be cleansed so that a national state could emerge (ibid).

Africa's political class and intelligentsia stand guilty before the bar of history for the cardinal political sin of revitalising the colonial project of homogenising the political community in the mistaken belief that they were building national unity. National unity built on the foundations of inherited political despotism and ethnic identity has turned out to be a recipe for disaster. Erikson states that 'national identities are constituted in relation to others; the very idea of the nation presupposes that there are other nations, or at least other peoples, who are not members of the nation (1994: 134). This conception of nationhood is intrinsically exclusionary.

The Failure to Decolonise the Political in Congo-Zaire

Employing the concept of the national question to analyse the ethnic history of the modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dia-Wamba uncovers similar causes for the miscarriage of the post-colonial state as expounded by Mamdani (in Olukoshi and Laaskso, 1996). Focusing on the post-colonial conditions of the then Zaire, Dia-Wamba illustrates the effects of colonially induced political identities on the emergence of post-colonial polity and its resultant nationalist project. He insists that Zaire-Congo had never really undergone qualitative transformation from colonial construction to a subjectively new nation-state reflecting the true aspirations of the people; in fact, he argues, the only change was the departure of the Belgian rules (in Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996: 154). This would mean that since its independence in 1960, until at least the 1990s, Congo-Zaire's only underwent cosmic changes.

Dia-Wamba puts the blame for the collapse of post-colonial Zaire squarely at the door of a group called the Zairean *national tribaliste* (ibid). The main flaw in this politics of this post-colonial grouping, as Dia-Wamba puts it, is that they "tried to rule in the name of an 'abstract state of unity' (premised on a colonially created territorial unity) incarnated by the legacy of the colonial state and a programme of 'nation-building' from above" (in Olukushi and Laakso, 1996: 155). Their aim was to 'Africanise' their political legacy on the false assumption that it could be a genuine nation-state project (ibid).

This ruling elite also conflated the notion of the 'abstract national state unity' with the image of the 'father of the nation', the leader of the national independence movement, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (ibid). It was more like the history of the French leader, Louis XIV, who is reputed to have said 'L'Etat c'est a moi' ('I am the state'). Consequently, the Congo-Zairean state was rendered brittle and vulnerable by the counter-visions of those who sought to exterminate Belgian colonial vestiges, including its material privileges for designated groups. Under such combustible political relations, what nationalist project had catapulted the independence movement to power, dissolved into nothingness.

Furthermore, the history of Congo-Zaire saw constitutionalism becoming a fig leaf to conceal the power grab of the ethnicised elites, the *national tribaliste*, and in effect therefore justifying 'a one-sided, unilateral approach to tackling the National Question: a national minority-based state, incarnated in one person, oppressing the majority of the people on the basis of class, ethnicity, or nationality' (in Olukushi and Laakso, 1996: 156). In this regard, the constitution of the country became a sham, subjected to and reflecting the arbitrary personal power of the leader of the party to whom all else were subordinated. In turn, a hierarchy of political identities was perpetuated.

The Failure of Decolonising the Political in Sudan and South Sudan

Like the Congo-Zaire, both Republics of Sudan and South Sudan botched their post-colonial transformation to the extent that they retained the poisoned chalice in the form of colonially fabricated

identities as the basis for the post-colonial state. In other words, the two countries valorised the notion of the nation-state as constructed by European colonialism by retaining politicised notions of race and tribe in the post-colonial state. In the case of the Republic of Sudan, both South (wrongly described as 'African') and the North (wrongly described as 'Arab') internalised British colonial ethnic ascriptions in the post-colonial era (Mamdani, 2021). These dual, territorialised identities fractured the national imaginary along identity lines, congealing racialised hostilities which led to the secession of South Sudan.

South Sudan has in turn suffered a bloody ethnic conflict which destabilised the country, threating to tear it asunder. The two main ethnic communities in South Sudan are the Dinka and the Nuer, both of whom had co-existed peacefully in pre-colonial times (Mamdani, 2021). Their current inter-ethnic violence is traceable to the post-independence fighting over resources within the context of frozen social identities (Mamdani, 2021). However, they had also internalised imposed political identities on what was but cultural diversity. According to Mamdani, 'whoever rules - which means whoever has enough guns and money to maintain a loyal fighting force - can funnel cash, real estate, jobs, business opportunities, contracts, and protection to his own ethnic group' (2021: 196). Colonial modernity is the root cause of this chronic

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rivalry. As in other colonies, 'after the British took over in the early twentieth century, the politicised ethnic boundaries, reconstituting cultural difference as tribal difference. The inheritors of this colonial mentality govern as the British did, not as their ancestors did' (Mamdani, 2021: 196).

Re-Imagining Post-Colonial Africa: The Imperative to Decolonise the Political

The cases of the Republics of Sudan and South Sudan, as well as modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, lend credence to the conclusion that the post-colonial African state, as presently constituted, is locked in a failed template with no epistemological warrants in Africa's history. The case of the two Republics of the Sudan demonstrate the failures of the national state shaped by the colonial imagination. Drawing on Marxism, Mamdani argues for the case of 'epistemological revolution, whereby the very consciousness of being, the vocabulary in which we understand the world around us, is transformed' (2021: 32). It is all very well to defeat colonial domination powered by nationalist discourse; yet, it is quite another thing to build the post-colonial nation where resources are shared not on the basis of ethnic affinities but rather on the basis of inclusive, democratic citizenship.

Dia Wamba makes almost similar suggestions as Mamdani to extricate Congo-Zaire, and by extension, the African continent, from its ethnic quagmire. Dia-Wamba's contention is that 'the only democratic state is a state of the people of all walks of life' (in Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996: 164). Like Mamdani, he warns against ethnic or religious parochialism, which excludes those defined outside the group. Referring to the volatility of post-colonial ethnic hostility, Hobsbawm too, has noted that 'the internal situation of states is unstable in which power rests with a single hegemonic community…', which was the case in Sudan, South Sudan, Congo-Zaire and many other independent African states (1990: 154). Most critical is his admonition that the issue is not just about recognising and moving away from the position of acknowledgement of the existence of multiple ethnic identities. In other words, 'the state must not be a simple composition or expression (reflection) of this multiplicity; it must transcend it with new categories' (ibid). This act of transcending the multiplicity of

ethnic identities with new categories is consistent with Mamdani's political vision of decolonising the political. Preceding the exercise of decolonising the political is the imperative to historicise current African political modernity. Underscoring the imperative to transcend the ethnic identities with a new category, Mamdani highlights that 'the right to citizenship is the mother of all rights, yet', he laments, 'all nation-states, post-colonial and otherwise, ensure that access to it is controversial, thereby fostering membership-oriented grievances' (2021: 334).

Further reinforcing the forcefulness of Mamdani's thesis, Dia-Wamba insists that the new categories which provide the underpinnings of such new conceptions of the post-colonial African state 'must not be derived from the social being which may be cultural, linguistic, religious, professional, etc' (in Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996: 164). Both Mamdani's and Dia-Wamba's shared proposition assumes cardinal importance when seen through the prism of the impact of colonial history in shaping the self-understandings of the colonised subject. Scholars have warned against undermining the extent of the entrenchment of colonially invented identities. For example, Zegeye (2001 ed.) has cited a study by Gibson and Gouws which cogently showed that South Africans still identified themselves along ethnic and racial lines. Zegeye notes that 'ontological commitments or identities point to how an individual or group is structured in terms of practical historical being' (2001 : 14). In other words, historically constituted identities tend to be ineradicable. This means if a post-colonial state is defined as a nation-state, it is likely not only to legitimate ethnic consciousness but to perpetuate it, thereby posing an existential threat to the state in turn.

Conclusion

Employing the historiography of Mamdani, this article has argued that the primary architects of African post-colonial modernity have failed the litmus test of decolonising the political; they have failed in the construction of an independent state by not abandoning the European heritage of the nation-state and in its place re-thinking an all-inclusive, democratic and united non-national state model. This would not have meant the abolition of cultural difference. It means depoliticising cultural differences

by transcending them, thereby excluding the undercurrent of fractious ethnic identities from the construction of the state itself.

In fact, persistent ethno-nationalist feelings in the post-colonial social landscape beg the question of what happened to the pan-ethnic consciousness that propelled the anti-colonial (anti-apartheid struggle)? Often, with a few exception such as the Republic of Sudan, free African nations dismantle the domain of racialised politics which constituted the mainspring of colonial order but fail to do the same in the tribal domain. At most, they impose homogeneity on the tribal terrain, with the result that contradictions erupt into inter-tribal conflagrations, perpetuating national divisions with irreparable harm to the nationalist vision. The cases of Sudan, South Sudan and Congo-Zaire are among prime examples of post-colonial societies whose aborted transformations throw up a Pandora's Box of whose collision rent asunder the ideal of African nationalism which, at a national level, is a building block for the construction and sustainability of Pan-Africanism.

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