Micro-Founding Agency

Economics, Politics, and African Societies: TA 02

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Discussion Section

Economic and political development in Africa cannot be understood without the roles of colonialism and post-colonial foreign elite. However, this view often appeals to the fallacy of "denying the antecedent", hence discounting the role of African agency in encountering and combating these pernicious forces.

1. Find instances of African agency in combating the colonial/post-colonial episodes and consequences.
2. Discuss the origins of this agency, appealing to your understanding of social science.

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Decentralized Despots?

"*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" ... Alongside received law was implemented a customary law that regulated nonmarket relations, in land, in personal (family), and in community affairs. For the subject population of natives, indirect rule signified a mediated, decentralized despotism.*" (p. 17)

"*The functionary of the local state apperatus was everywhere called the chief. One should not be misled by the nomenclature into thinking of this as a holdover from the precolonial era. Not only did the chief have the right to pass rules (bylaws) governing persons under his domain, he also executed all laws and was the administrator in "his" area, in which he settled all disputes. The authority of the chief thus fused into a single person all moments of power: judicial, legislative, executive and administrative.*" (p. 23)

Mamdani's argument: "Decentralized despots"

- Indirect rule created decentralized despotism: chiefs accountable to colonial state and not members of their society.
- Chiefs became despotic, unaccountable, and illegitimate.
- Power delegated to chiefs to administer and run the daily lives of indigenous customary "subjects" while very few indigenous people were "citizens" directly governed by European laws.
- Dual spheres: urban/rural, civil/customary law, citizen/subject

- Colonial categorization hardened and politicized identities, creating pernicious, ethnic/tribal instead of national politics.
- Post-colonial legacies: warped/non-existent civil society; dual systems of power, authority and law; rural elite with little accountability that pose an obstacle to state-building.
- Hence, abolish customary authority and centralize states.

1. Accountability decreased because chiefs powers increased.

- Remember example from Nyanga chiefs' counselors.
- Paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone not unelected/unconstrained.
- Elected from eligible members of ruling families (elites who the British recognized as having local authority in late 19th century).
- PCs were constrained by secret societies, alternative ruling families, and of course ultimately British officials.
- Initially chieftaincy system was connected to the fact that the ruling party, the Sierra Leone People's Party was started by chiefs or close connections.
- But even Siaka Stevens did not abolish the chiefs. One reason is incumbency bias or the politics of fear (Padró i Miquel, 2007).
- Another reason is chiefs are so legitimate and powerful at the local level to be abolished.

2. Transformation of economic institutions, particularly land.

- Land alienation creates indigenous labor reserves. Further land expropriation or population growth immiserates indigenous people, causing them to seek wage labor outside of the reserves. Land alienation reduces the prevailing wage rate for indigenous labor. (Huge assumption: indigenous labor are only unproductive.) (Lundahl, 1982)

- "A chief holds land just as any individual does—that is, he has his share in the land belonging to his family. As regards all other lands in the chiefdom, he is the guardian of the rights of the different families … owning these lands. … In none of the districts of the Protectorate is there any evidence that any land was set aside for the office of chief" (Goddard, 1925)

3. Chiefs negative roadblocks to post-colonial state building.

- Strong argument for complementarity between chiefs and state, through integration into national constitution (Henn, 2020).
- β of development on state cap. is 3x when chiefs are integrated.

4. Creation of new identities, largely through colonial practice.

Identity Formation

- An individual i identifies with group $J \in G$ maximizes

$$\max_{J \in G_i} \pi_i - \beta_i d_{iJ} + \gamma_i S_J$$

d_{iJ} is i's perceived distance from J, S_J is the status of group J.

- Formalism helps study equilibrium behavior.

- National identity emerges when national status is high(er than the middle class) and when the perceived distance to larger group is small(er than distance to own group). (Shayo, 2009)

- Crude? The set G is exogenous, although historical, economic, political forces define its scope. Endogenizing G is an open research area in identity economics.
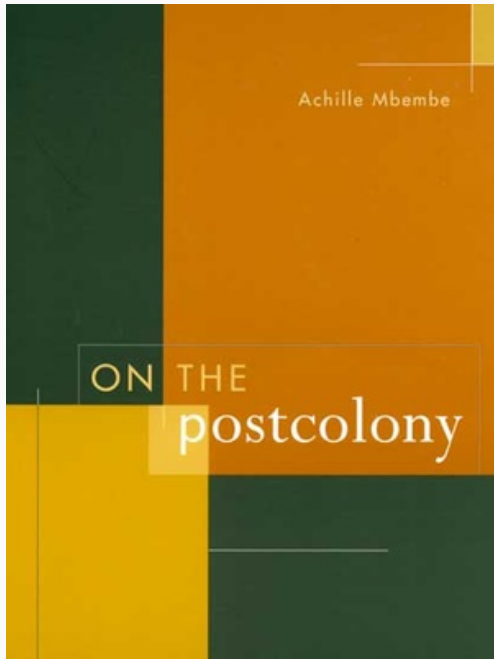
- Nation is "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."
- Print media are argued to incite collective consciousness.
  1. Printed language created a unified medium above regional vernaculars and dialects.
  2. Printed language resisted linguistic transformation and allowed continuity with past.
  3. Created languages of power by privileging idiolects which were closest to the written form.
- Another theory which formalizes outcomes of nationalism precede Anderson and are due to Gellner: linguistic standardization, cultural similarity, national standardization, bureaucratic control, social entropy. (Reverse causality?)

- "Anti-colonial nationalism is itself made possible and shaped by European political and intellectual history" (Loomba, 2005)

- Imagined communities are used two ways: The extensive margin of nationalism to drive out colons during independence, and the intensive margin of nationalism to create collective cultural values.

- Chatterjee argues that the form of anti-colonial nationalism takes the form of active emphasizing of colonial difference, departure from the colons. (Chatterjee, 2004)

- Achille Mbembe emphasizes acceptance and transcendence of the difference.

https://www.e-ir.info/2008/06/26/what-is-the-relation-between-nationalism-and-the-'colonial-difference'/

The role of political entrepreneur in imagining community

- Identity of oppression and injustice, perhaps, speak more volume because of the effects on psychology than otherwise.
- Perhaps used by political elites, such as Mobutu, also in Shaba separation and Soviet-Cuban scheming.
- Mobutu plays upon the divisions of his external supporters as well as he exploits the rivalries of the Zairian opposition: French versus Belgians, Belgians versus Americans.
- Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania created a collectivist-based idelogy called Ujamaa, and perhaps used that as an MO for consolidating power under TANU.
- Interestingly, Kwame Nkrumah undermined the institution of chiefs to consolidate nationalism against the British in Ghana.

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