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### **Destroy Africa and Rebuild it from the Ground Up: A thesis**

I am well aware of the fact that it is nearly impossible for there to ever be such a thing as to destroy Africa, lest to 'rebuild it entirely'. Back in the New Testament times when Jesus boldly proposed to the Jewish leaders that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, he got quite the reaction. It was almost blasphemous what he was suggesting: the destruction of a temple that had taken years to build. It turns out that Jesus was talking about his own body as the temple, and it sooner than later, came to pass when he died and resurrected after 3 days. Only then did it make sense.

In the same spirit, this essay puts forward a bold proposition! Let's talk about Africa and its nation states. A nation-state is a political entity that encompasses both a distinct nation—a group of people who share common characteristics such as culture, language, history, or ethnicity—and a defined territorial state. In simpler terms, it is a country as we know it today with citizens identifying themselves as belonging to that particular country. My assertion is that an Africa organized in the way that it is today, as nation states, is bound to get trapped in the cycle of problems that plague it recurrently. For so long as Africa is organized as countries, we will continue to grapple with the same issues that stem from this organization. I will attempt to defend my proposition by first of all, briefly exploring the history of nationalism.

### **Origins of Nationalism and the Nation State: A brief history**

To rephrase, nation states are the fragmented bounds we see on the world map today. Within an enclosure that we shall call a state, there exists a nation: a group of people with a perceived unity, a claim to sovereignty, and ideally, equality of membership to the nation among all its members. Such an organization of power wasn't always the case in the world. Empires and feudalistic societies once stretched across a large portion of the continents. One of the earliest forms of the nation state as we know it today emerged in late 15th Century England, specifically during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487) (Greenfeld). During the protracted armed conflict, the two warring branches of the Royal House of Plantagenet: Lancaster and York, which were small

to begin with, fought over the crown until their order was effectively exterminated. The new Tudor dynasty therefore had to assume the crown, and recruit their aristocracy from below (Greenfeld). The common people thus had to rise into positions of power. However, just as chickens are not horses, it was inconceivable for these common people to hold power. Instead of claiming that they were lost children of dead princes, the new aristocracy professed that 'the English people was a nation' (Greenfeld).

This was a pivotal train of thought because it meant that power belonged to the people and everyone had equal membership to England: the concept of equality. Not only did this gradually transform England from a hierarchical society to one with a fluid social structure, but also set the stage for its nationalistic growth until the 17th century when the first full manifestation of modern nationalism occurred, during the Puritan revolution (Britannica). The ideas of nationalism consequently spread across Europe, until the enlightenment period when the famous ideas of individual rights, equality, freedom of thought and pursuit of progress and knowledge, laid the foundation for radical movements for the reorganization of European societies into modern liberal democratic nation states. An example of one such reorganization of society was the French Revolution of 1789-1799.

### **Export to Africa**

One of the most important aspects instilled by nationalism was a new sense of pride and dignity that was associated with membership to a nation. This made nationalism competitive as each nation wanted to take pride in their high economic, intellectual and military strength (Greenfeld). This competition to elevate the dignity of the nation drove a period of growth economically, scientifically and militarily that soon led to the pursuit of colonies around the world. It was not long before Africa became the next stop for resources, territory, and power to drive this growth. And so the European scramble and partition of Africa ensued.

As a by-product of colonialism, nationalism in Africa developed in a way different from how it did in Europe. Here in Africa, nationalism was reactionary: as a necessary antithesis to the unjust rule of the colonialists. Because they were a group of people within the same artificially-carved borders, living the same unfavorable experience, the people thus engaged in a united fight for liberty (Clemens). The natives in these colonies thus rallied together internally to make claims to autonomy and the right to self-rule; this was the birth of nationalism as we know it

today in Africa. Tribes and kingdoms that never found common identity now found a common identity in the cause for liberty and sovereignty. And so across Africa it was a cycle of colonialism -> claims to membership to a nation -> fighting for self-rule (Clemens). We can clearly see that something drastically switched in the process: borders were created between similar people, new common identities were formed and thus nation-states were synthesized. This drastic switch and the new organization that resulted presents a number of problems for Africa. This essay explores three of the most notable problems.

### **Ubuntu versus Nationalism: A Clash of Ideals**

From a Pan-Africanist point of view, the philosophy of Ubuntu and the core values of nationalism present themselves as direct opposites, just as day is to night. Nationalism places a heavy emphasis on the individual nation's interests and its prosperity as it is, at the core, growth-oriented and competitive in nature. It pits nations against each other in a conflict of interests and a competition for growth. Ubuntu philosophy, on the other hand, glorifies community and collective prosperity. It emphasizes that individuals derive their dignity from the prosperity of the society rather than the other way around (New World Encyclopedia).

Furthermore, nationalism is territorially confined and will only be portrayed in reference to a particular nation state. For this reason, you don't hear people saying they would die for Africa. However, a number of people will confidently state that they would give their life for their country. That is why the concept of Ubuntu on a Pan-African scale is almost non-existent and why it is difficult to form a powerful sense of identity to the continent. Case in point: Casablanca vs Monrovia in the battle of ideologies for African cooperation. The Casablanca group wanted political unification or federation to form a United States of Africa while the Monrovia also believed in Pan-Africanism but not at the expense of nationalism. In other words, they wanted cooperation while still maintaining the independence of each African state. In the end, a compromise was made in the 1963 formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) whose aim was to promote political and economic integration and eradicate neo-colonialism. Sixty years down the road and it is clear that nationalism triumphed over Pan-African unity as there is no strong evidence of political and economic integration today. Therefore, with the strength and prevalence of nationalism, is it then realistically possible to have ideological synchronization and collective Pan-African integration across the continent?

### **Capitalism versus African Socialism**

It is an altogether separate essay whether African societies were really socialist during the pre-colonial times. The various organizations of people within Africa were definitely not homogeneous. However, the communal way of life of many pre-colonial African traditional rural societies is evidence for the claim that socialism has always been natural to Africa (Skurnik).

Devoid of that argument though, we know that nationalism, which is characterized by its liberal, competitive and growth-oriented nature naturally paves way for capitalism as the economic model employed. Capitalism in Africa, despite being the reason for the high rates of economic growth, still serves to exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor. Especially for developing nations, this means a number of individuals living in utterly undesirable conditions while others flourish. For Africa to take a path of inclusive development, there would have to be a hybrid system that brings the best of both models to promote economic growth that also benefits the bottom half. However, previous efforts at such hybrid systems have failed miserably.

Between 1964 and 1985, Julius Nyerere, then President of Tanzania, attempted to revert Tanzania to the pre-colonial socialist model through the Ujamaa policy. By rearranging the Tanzanian societies into small nucleated rural settlements based on agriculture, he believed that it would be possible to recreate an 'economy of affection' by tapping into the traditional African attitudes, while still providing essential services and modern technological innovations. Predictably, the people rejected this idea and soon returned to the cities to engage in wage labor and generate income, thereby failing Ujamaa (Boddy-Evans). Tanzania shows us that the organization of the nation state in itself is resistive to the ideology of socialism.

Furthermore, many nation states in Africa have already carried out large scale privatization (transfer of state-owned enterprises or assets to the private sector) often under the guidance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Because of this, conversion to socialist models would present quite a difficult task. This was also one of the reasons why Ujamaa failed: the government of Tanzania did not have adequate resources to implement this program at such a micro level. Therefore, it seems that Africa's organization as nation states will continue to preserve capitalism.

### **Function versus functionality**

It is insightful to refer to the analogy from ‘World Society and the Nation State’ by Meyer et al. of the discovery of a new island in the world (Meyer). They analyze; if a new island were to be discovered today, with a society living on it and sizeable enough to form a state, how would the society evolve to organize itself? Their assertion was that we would expect this island to immediately form leadership structures typical of a nation, the government would follow a process of expensive structuration instilling a heavy institutional apparatus with branches and organs to do all sorts of national tasks. They would very quickly seek membership to the United Nations. If the nation failed to meet some standards, ‘external help’ would be provided. Cries of equity and equality would immediately suffice. Without much attention to its specific needs, the island state would quickly morph into a typical nation state, as is the same case across the world. (Meyer et al.)

And so this wholesale import of global systems that do not necessarily benefit the nation is a problem that leads to decoupling (as Meyer calls it): a disconnect between the structures and the purpose they serve. It is therefore imperative for African states to examine what the benefits of the expensive and complex structures that they so religiously maintain are. A lot of state resources go into maintaining the large state apparatus and funding planning committees, yet rarely do any beneficial projects happen successfully on the ground (Meyer et al.). Committees, ministries, boards, agencies, and the like will be formed and yet the issues on the ground will continue to surface. It is no secret that much of the national budget of a country like Uganda goes into administrative work, and most of the large projects rely largely on external funding. Another problem created by this decoupling is the debt crisis in which Africa is currently entangled. Why then does Africa continue to religiously maintain these structures that only seem to do more harm than good?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is evident the systemic barriers presented to Africa and its unity just by its arrangement of nation-states. There lies an economic and political clash that hinders Pan-Africanism, as well as a disconnection between the intended purpose and actual outcome of the state structures. It is therefore my assertion, that only in the absence of these barriers will African states be able to integrate effectively. Africa finds itself in a world that is ever-evolving, where the status quo often hinders its progress. It is a world where Africa, the fastest growing continent,

seeks to forge its own destiny and rise above the historical limitations that have held it back. In this pursuit, the notion of reimagining the structure of African states on a Pan-African scale may initially seem audacious, perhaps even laughable. But there is transformative power in embracing unconventional paths, as is the case with the remarkable journey of China, a nation that defied cliché diplomacy and the conventions dictated by global bodies. They charted their own course and forged their own destiny. Therefore, a bold re-imagination of Africa is necessary in the best interests of Africa.

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