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Directeur du Laboratoire
Dr. Belmekki Belkacem
Université d'Oran

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Abdelkader SAYAD
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Email : labo3lgha@aol.fr

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**L'élite intellectuelle en Afrique : entre
engagement et désengagement**

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Email : labo3lcha@aol.fr

Directeur de publication : Dr Belmekki Belkacem

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Beyond the Tribe: National Commitment in Colonial Kenya

Belkacem Ghassoul
University of Oran

British colonialism which at some point in time dwelt upon Kenya left its stamp on its history. More specifically, British rule brought about encompassing socio-economic, political, religious and educational changes that affected the life of every autochthon; better still British presence, from the 1890's to the 1960's, brought about a reaction that culminated into a nationalist movement.

To begin with, this article is meant to create a space to problematize how colonial Kenya bridged the divide from tribalism to nationalism. In other words, how did the subjection of ethnic ties for national ones operate?

Pre colonial Kenya:

To review sketchily the hectic years that marked the early years of British colonial rule in Kenya, which was not a nation in the European sense, is also to recall that there was no single country known as Kenya prior to 1880's; instead, the region was known as East Africa. At best, there was a particular topography including: highlands, semi-arid lowlands, lacustrine region, coasts and deserts – "*an area of 225, 000 square miles*" – (Hazlewood, 1979: 2). Eventually, along with Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, Kenya was to be part of British East Africa.

In all likelihood of events, while launching unrestrainedly its process of settlement in Kenya and stamping its name ingloriously on the pages of history by the end of the nineteenth century, Britain did not actually operate in a vacuum. Like virtually most African regions, East Africa, including Kenya, consisted of a jumble of unrelated tribes or kaleidoscope of clusters of tribesmen subdivided in their several local cultures, and these tribesmen themselves had no inkling of placing a policy of togetherness and coordination on the same footing.

In truth, British civilization was to be grafted upon more than two hundred ethnic groupings (Meister, 1975:27), a certain number of whom proved unforthcoming and sought to thwart British project of settlement.

In substance, the traditional landscape of Kenya had been mostly shaped over centuries by stateless societies with few exceptions, such as the Wanga state under chief *Mumia*. Nonetheless, for the stateless societies, the implication was the existence of pre-literate organizations with almost no incentives for state formation because of rugged terrains, poor soils in certain areas, bushy hills, inadequate rainfalls, secluded deserts. Instead, the locals either wandered across the territory — for example the Masai tribesmen spread over pastoral regions under the impulse of their migratory nature— or preferred living in small groups dispersed around tillable and fertile lands to graze their flocks. They moved notably to the Rift valley and the highland regions of south-western Kenya where, for instance, the Kikuyu tribesmen happened to be long-established occupants.

Politically “pastoralist people and cattle-owning cultivators did not form a common political organization and where within themselves decentralized” (Roberts, 1997: 245). In effect, most of these tribes had neither any kind of autarchy i.e. a centralized form of government nor chiefs, and nor were there great empires. “Instead of being concentrated in a single central authority, tribal authority was dispersed through a number of counterbalancing segments” (Mc Ewan and Sutcliffe, 1965: 93) such as the Kamba, and so forth. Precisely, the main clusters of population were not integrated within a unitary structure. They were loosely constructed politically and inherently democratic. Several, but not all, had no acknowledged clan heads (Wagner, 1949: 20). If ever clan heads existed, they did not play an active part in the rise of nationalism. The historians Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy were right to point that the struggle for a viable nation in Kenya was considerably hampered by acute ethnic cleavages, often separating Bantu from Nilotes etc... (Mazrui and Tidy, 1984: 253). Albeit symbiotic relationships existed between some ethnic groups; many other tribes were swept by the wind of intermittent inter-tribal warfare. These rival tribes embarked upon what H. Kjekshus calls “*internecine wars*” (Kjekshus, 1977: 18). In that context, Tribesmen believed good-naturedly that the tribe was the be-all and the end-all. Such a belief precluded rather than conjured up the notion of inter-ethnic relatedness. The tribe functioned as a strait-jacket. In the late 1800’s many autochthons had no national culture, as indicated before, and; therefore, it was difficult to generate a sense of

ideology of the nation. The subjection of ethnic ties for national ones was part of a lengthy historical process.

Consolidation of the British Machinery and its Consequences:

Whenever humans have come together, *a priori* they have inevitably felt the need for rules to guide their behaviour. By 1895, the East Africa Protectorate (as Kenya was then called) was no exception. Within the confines of a foreign politico-economic system whose foundations were created by British officialdom and inside new boundaries that were erected after the Berlin Conference (1884-85), Kenya was taking shape.

Very likely, the British consul-General A.M. Hardingue had signalled an interest in establishing a diplomatic presence in Kenya. He announced British willingness to proclaim a protectorate in the region. In 1894, the Uganda protectorate was proclaimed and the East Africa protectorate (as Kenya was, then, called) followed in 1895, while the coastal strip remained a protectorate under the nominal sovereignty of the sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Ali's successor.

Regarding the British machinery, it was to be progressively consolidated through administration with various local and regional branches. Initially, a slender number of—short or long term—officials and Sir A. Charles Eliot¹ and Sir J. Sadler, among other men, were successively committed to establish and mould a colonial

¹Sir Charles Eliot, the High Commissioner, was a scholarly man who thought that Africans were barbarous and in need of being colonized by white administration (Marsh & Kingsworth, 1972: 113).

system into lines consonant with British standards and values.

The broad outlines of the policy were formulated primarily in terms of the needs of the metropolis. The goals revolved around the fostering of obedience to the British authorities through the imposition of law and order, in addition to the introduction of bureaucracies that regulated taxes, trade, land issue and, above all, the defence and promotion of politico-economic interests of the British metropolis any time soon while vesting control of existing resources, whether they be natural or human. As Charles Jeffries underscores: "*The British have imposed their rule because the furtherance of their main interests appeared to make such action necessary*" (Jeffries, 1972: 1).

In reality, British colonial rule was heavy-handed and oppressive in Kenya because of the white settlers who expropriated large tracts of land and did their utmost to deny Kenya farmers the opportunities to be integrated into the colonial export economy or even possibilities to represent their Kenyan followers on the Legislative Council (Martin and O'Meara, 1986: 130).

The foundations for British rule throughout the East Africa protectorate were effectively laid with the construction of a railway. Sir Gerald Portal, Britain Acting Consul in Zanzibar, recommended the Foreign Office its construction in order to effect any real improvement in property or commerce efficiently and to reap the benefits of material progress (British dominance/Jambo/history.com7.htm). In fact, a key to the conquest of Kenya's interior was the railway

construction. It started in 1895 from Mombasa to Kisumu near the shores of Lake Victoria where it reached its planned terminal later in 1902 (Hazlewood, 1979: 1). Reportedly, "From a logistical point of view, a railway was the only viable means of supporting Britain's growing endeavour in the interior. It would not only carry East African export crops from the British territories, placing them on the world market, but it would provide the cheapest route between the coast and the populous German districts to the south west of Lake Victoria" (Fage and Oliver, 1997: 657).

The railway also caused the spilling of blood, especially amongst the autochthons. The latter expressed resistance to that intrusion. Notwithstanding considerable tribal opposition to the building of the railway, British settlement made strides. As yet, further forts were built and areas had to be encroached upon. This could only be achieved through clashes with several Kenyan groupings. The Giriama, the Masai, the Teita, the Kamba, some Kikuyu and Nandi and the Elgoyo were all receivers of brutal patrols which happened to kill ruthlessly men and women and sometimes exterminate their stock. In the light of these gory incidents, these tribes did not cry their eyes out; contrariwise, they masterminded a series of warlike acts without complacency and clashed fiercely with the invaders. The pattern of resistance went on, yet most, if not all, tribes were crushed by the turn of the 20th century.

Nationalism:

Nationalism insists on the rights of all people to govern themselves. What could be more democratic? In Kenya in seeking to throw off the shackles of alien rule, Kenyan nationalists outreached to the masses. Their nationalism did not spring from some starry eyed-principles. It started off through their early strategy in Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru and elsewhere after their rallies in these towns to win the masses. The leaders sought to stir political interest among the people, instil the sort of love that would transcend the tribe i.e. the love of homeland, of the nation.

Very likely, the colonial period was propitious to the birth and evolution of Kenyan nationalism whose origin goes back to a relatively recent past. In truth, African nationalism is a novel phenomenon. Yet, can one affirm that the concepts of patriotism, consciousness and movements were sufficient enough to forge an iron-clad national unity and thereby could be equated with nationalism? An affirmative answer would sound inadequate, in that by the end of the nineteenth century Kenya corresponded, more or less, to groups of people of disparate languages, customs and outlooks, scattered, willy-nilly, across the country as noted before. This was the basis upon which native Kenyans met colonial experience.

Mobility and dynamism accompanied the colonial occupation in the first half of the twentieth century. Gradually, Kenya became a single society, a society

where a new order was irrefutably afoot and ethnic groups re-clustered in the boundaries erected by colonial rulers. They were in the process of being welded together, a process whereby separate entities gradually ceased to be scattered. Truly, homogenization started when the British colonizers broke down the foundations of the autochthons' traditional system and laid new ones. Thus the British power created and established the territorial basis of the present nation of Kenya. Yet within colonial boundaries, the British government generated repressive machinery of control that ultimately gave rise to protest. *A priori*, the rise of nationalism in Kenya could be portrayed as a protest movement against the toughness of British colonial rule. Many historians used the word protest to define African nationalism. This is, of course, too generic with regard to Kenya. It should be stressed that Kenyan nationalism has many constituent elements that will be discussed in this work. Before World War Two, educated leaders, mainly H. Thuku (a government telephone operator) and Johnston KamauwaNgengi (he will be known as Jomo Kenyatta later) set forth claims on the basis of western style political parties. They attacked chauvinism and made all out efforts to explain their aims to masses overburdened and overpowered with resentment and grief in order to secure their support.

resistance of the latter. It was a long drain-out struggle against the harshness and the pushiness of the British colonial system.

Against such a background and in any event, "nationalism emerged as a means through which territories were produced and reproduced by somehow amalgamating individual places into a national territory" (Paasi, 1995: 53). This process happened in Kenya in the making of its colonial and post-colonial history. Is it still true of today? In any event, in Kenya nationalism could not be fathomed unless it was to be defined not in ethnic or linear terms, nor on the basis of a monoculture, but in the perspective of a universal, plural culture based on a single status shared by individuals. In this respect, the scholar Linton points out:

Because of this difference in cultural participation, it is a mistake to consider a culture as the common denominator between the activities, ideas and attitudes of members of one society. Such common denominators can be established by individuals who share the same particular status.

(R. Linton, quoted in Nait Ibrahim, 2006: 99).

In Kenya that status was the classification of the autochthons by the dominant whites as 'Natives' reconciled to the bottom rung of society and subject to discriminatory and degrading policies. Thus classified and treated as one, the black community forged a unifying base of shared interests with the view to

challenging a common enemy. As growing awareness was heartened by the educated elite, tribal discrepancies were played down (Barnett, 1966: 30). One thing leading to another, "linguistic usage, educational advantage and political aspiration were shaping aggregations of a kind which in Europe had long been labelled nations (Flint, 1976: 4). In fact, the overlap in leadership and rank-and-file via numerous Kenyan associations (Kenya's African political, trade union and church-school movements) yielded a single movement, a nation. Nationalism created the Kenyan nation. How was that?

As it happened, during the post-war years, migrant labour threw a large number of peasants in the urban milieu. There, they often met fellow-compatriots of other districts to form trade unions, political associations and other urban groups. One thing leading to another, multi-racial associations of the city and especially the fast-growing African nationalist and trade union movements tended to cross-link the many rural peasant aggregates, the forest fighters and people of like mind to involve them diversely in the process of African unification. As a result, "inter-tribal suspicion and hostility among the Kamba, Kikuyu, Baluhya, Giriama, Luo etc...were reduced in the framework of urban associations. These multi-tribal groups were successful in pointing out the vital interests common to all Africans and in working for the resolution of the emerging conflicts" (Flint 1976: 30). Nationalism, as a form of political mobilization, had and has a strong influence on modern Kenya. While forging a nation in the European sense, the Kenyan elite somehow provided the glue to stick the separate categories of the

society together. There was the determination to transform ethnic consciousness into national consciousness. Furthermore, there was a powerful emphasis on members of society as corporate associations (trade union, religious, educational and political associations) and not members of society as individuals. Hotchester and Kurumi make an interesting definitional point between national movement groups "seeking to persuade their compatriots of the importance of consciously belonging to a nation" (Hotchester and Kurumi, 1998: 80) and nationalism "namely that outlook which gives an absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests" (ibid.: 81). At this stage, among other aspects, two structural phases in the development of national movements are worth stressing:

Phase A involves the patriotic agitation by a new range of Kenyan activists in order to awaken national consciousness among a wide audience. Through rallies and mass-meetings educated Kenyan elite and the military or Mau Mau in the forests recalled, time and again, that they were fighting for the whole country. In so doing, their energies were devoted to the dissemination of an awareness of the linguistic, social and sometimes historical attitudes to the non-dominant group. What were the distinctive features of the different tribes and how could they be bridged over by the activists? These are two questions that the educated Kenyan elite sought to settle.

Phase B—which partly answers the questionings—shows how a mass movement was formed while the major part of the population came to set special store by their national identity. For instance agricultural tribes entered the urban environment whereby the pattern of tribal isolation was, during the post-war period, giving way to broader groupings of an African national character. Albeit in Nairobi, some societies were still based on tribal or clan affiliation (e.g. the Abaluhya Association, Kitui Friendly Association and others), a growing number of African Kenyans were “entering economic political and other associations where tribal identification was over-ridden by racial, occupational and residential criteria (e.g. the domestic and Hotel Workers’ Union, Kenya African Union, Labour Trade Union of East Africa) organized by a segment of educated Africans” (Barnett, 1966: 28).

Beyond the exercise of political power, it is not haphazard that the nationalist forest leaders did not coin their organization: the Kenya Freedom Army (KFA), but the Kenya Land Freedom Army (KLFA). The inclusion of “land” deserves commendable attention because the identification of the homeland is vital for these nationalist forest leaders. The homeland is the basis for the realization of material projects, thus its political framework constitutes a foundation and an arena without which the forest fighters’ dream remains a mere blueprint, but whose acquisition allows them—nationalist forest leaders—to translate their ambitions into practical realities. The land allows them to realize their goals of sovereignty, fraternity, identity and regeneration. “The

land can be renewed, regenerated, rebuilt and through the act of rebuilding, people can be changed, their outlook revolutionized their capacities enlarged” (Smith, 1994: 510).

Clearly, for nationalists, the territory became gradually a space to which identity did not have to be attached by a distinctive tribe that held or coveted that territory with the desire to have full control over it for the tribe’s benefit. This, in fact, led nationalists to create a special territory, the national homeland. Bearing in mind the importance of land which was perceived as a territory Mau Mau leaders with their revolutionary movement were certainly partakers in the process of cross-linking various tribes and local communities, fostering new loyalties (e.g. via oath-taking) wider groupings and, above all, introducing an element of African national consciousness.

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**Arabism, Africanism
And the problem of Self-Identification in the Sudan
(1889 – 1972)**

**Fatiha Dani
University of Oran**

Among African countries, the Sudan is particular in the sense that it is both African and Arab. The North is Arabic in culture and Muslim in religion ; its history has always been bound up with that of Egypt, its neighbour to the north. The South, on the other hand, lays claim to its "Africanness" and its affiliations tend southwards to Uganda, the Congo and Kenya, rather than northwards.

In its modern history, the Sudan has been subjected to alien rule, like the majority of African countries. The British acknowledged the Sudan North-South divisions by establishing separate administrations for the two regions. The colonial "Southern Policy" was pursued from the 1920s to the mid-1940s, to foster and strengthen a Christian, African identity. However, the British were planning to leave the Sudan in the mid-1950s ; did they prepare the South for a united Sudan? Furthermore, could the "national vision" elaborated by post-independence Sudanese governments bridge the gap between North and South, and build a sense of national identity for both regions?

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