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**THE CONCEPT OF RACISM AND ETHNICITY AS
FACTOR OF CONFLICTS AND WARS IN AFRICA
:RESEARCH NOTE**

INTRODUCTION

This is not a particularly difficult subject, considering the current level of human knowledge, but given its socio-political, psychopathological and cultural character, it could be considered as being significantly volatile, if not outrightly explosive, within the context of the present state of regional, subregional and global polity. Indeed, the 20th century has witnessed increased progress in scientific thinking and policy action directed at combating racial chauvinism, ethnic, tribal or group domination. Significantly therefore, increasing concern for race and ethnic studies over the past two and half decades is but a manifestation of the importance and relevance of the subject especially as it concerns the questions of intercultural understanding of peoples for the purpose of human advancement, peace and international security.

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In Africa, scholarship on race and ethnicity has largely been shaped not only by the theoretical proclivities of the different schools of thought or centers of learning, but principally by the highly complex and varied nature of the cultural and socio-political environment. This has acquired new and often weird dimensions, especially in its theoretical paradigm producing drastic changes all over the continent, and particularly, works touching on race, ethnicity have largely been conducted on the basis of the prevailing socio-political theoretical paradigms of the post colonial society. To this end, the definitional local concept of racism, like that of development, is not much a domain of popular comprehension.

A group of blind men might even be more successful at defining a beautiful house than, perhaps a group of experts attempting to define, with precision and objectivity, what is development, race, racism, who is a racist, when is one racist and how it is manifested. This is because racism essentially lies in the subjective, and often times within the subconscious human judgment varying in time, place, thought perception and exposure. Yet racism is a near observable practical phenomenon permitting the whole gamut of interpersonal relationships and collective human intercourse.

For this piece to be appropriately understood and comprehensive, one must accept that race and ethnic relations constitute a field which requires careful analysis, using the multidisciplinary approach, with the difficulties it entails, especially in some countries of Africa. An important analytical dimension to our contribution here will, therefore, relate to the implication of the distinction which are commonly made between race, tribe, ethnic and clan families. The paragraph 6 of the United Nations' position of 1950, speaks of "national, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups rather than strictly adhering to the term "race" all being constituent epithets of the species of the human family.

Given the time and space at our disposal, it is pertinent to state that these reflections have been prepared under conditions which impose

considerable restraint on our capacity to present a detailed analytic coverage of the topic. Our selective and generalised approach is also due to regional historical imbalances and differences on racial and ethnic issues, as well as the dearth of empirical research data on the subject. In sum and inspite of these handicaps, our postulates, derived from research and consultation, present the subcontinent's societal specific data appraisal upon which serious research studies should be founded. The definition, socio-pathological context, contextual and attitudinal manifestations, regional character and circumstantial differentiation will constitute the premise of our succinct analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FUNCTIONS OF RACISM AND ETHNICISM IN AFRICA

We shall in these reflections avoid giving a surgical definition of what is race, other notable works have attempted this. To effectively address the topic and avoid confusion of terms, we shall equally exclude the subject of apartheid, which is an extreme demonstration of racism in its crudest and most inhuman form. In the same vein we shall avoid the sharp use of the accolades "Black and White" because in the basic cultural environment of Africa, these epithets are devoid of meaning and applicability and are in no way linked to the phenomenon of "racism".

By extension, we shall focus on the traditional African environment, that is in its pure, pluralistic, diversified whole. Such an approach has advantage as well as disadvantage. Positively, it will permit us to appraise the very concept of racism in the traditional African setting yet undiluted by extra-continental influence. Negatively, we would have to exclude the comportment and attitudes of Africans living or working abroad, regardless of their origin, which in one way or the other have been constrained by their present socio-cultural climate to acquire new values and behave to type. This latter group represents what could be classed the "exposed group" to external extra-African variables. Significantly however, it must be

admitted that their innate cultural propensity and the perception of the "other" will be a function of the community character in which they live. Narrowed down to serious intellectual appraisal, one is forced here to exclude the phenomena of racism, discrimination or clanism in the large African cities, where there is strong cultural influence featuring "cohabitation" between "foreigners" and Africans. The definitional vacuum will be parallel to the position of the UN Human Rights Commission which states that "any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation, is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, reaffirming further that discrimination between human beings on the grounds of race, colour, or ethnic origin is an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations capable of disturbing peace and security among peoples", (Human Right: the first 20 years, UN/PUB,91/4pp.62-63).

We, therefore, prudently shall employ the terms "race and ethnicity" somehow imprecisely and at best interchangeably to embrace the terrain of our analysis. Similarly, the terms will connote a sort of discrimination which according to the UN shall mean "exclusion, restriction or preference based on colour, descent, clan, national or ethnic origin, capable of impairing or nullifying recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life (UN/HR/91/4, p 62).

Viewed from this perspective, one may and even better be opportuned at appraising the concept of racism in Africa. The implications of this regarding intellectual rigour is manifest as we shall see later. In the first instance, there has been no clear consensus as to the specific definition to give the term "clan, ethnic, race, tribe" at the local African level, because distinction between them are as vague as imprecise. Yet it could be said, given the revelations of scientific data, (Bash H.H. 1979; Richmond A.H. 1972) that most analysts agreed that at any level, the term race is a socio-psychological construct which confers socially quantifiable and meaningful differentiated identity based on socially and culturally perceived observable criteria.

In the second instance, outright racism and racial discrimination as concepts and products of this behaviours will remain at the local African level, an invidious manifestation of this construct. Even though ethnicity might acquire socially differentiated identity, it is clear that the criteria of its qualification will be basically and culturally differing in time, context and place to warrant generalisation. While the bulk of opinion on "racism" within the different African cultures presents some consensus as regards its practice, as has been demonstrated by Mazru (1980), Enloe A. (1978), that in its entirety, it is most dangerous, abominable, intolerable and must be eliminated, the situation is different regarding ethnicism, clanism or tribalism. These are considered as quite being divisive, discriminatory, unacceptable and which like abject racism, favours exploitation. It is of course, clearly admitted that ethnicism and tribalism or clanism have some positive political functions particularly in relation to its strategic potential, capable of being utilised as a vehicle of nation building and collective participation of people, groups, etc. in their commonly defined destiny.

To conclude this definitional conceptual framework, it is pertinent to say that two schools of thought, one founded on the political economy paradigm and the other based on the theory of development and the internationalisation of cultural relativities at the global level, contended at presenting a somewhat chaotic concept of racism, racial discrimination, clanism and ethnicity in Africa. At the theoretical level, the schools could be summarised as having accorded priority to the examination of some important factors and here it joins the anthropological perspective of racism in Africa. Such factors as the significance of important elements like social structure, type and level of education, presence or absence of discrimination, degree of societal and cultural segregation, social intercourse, group solidarity, quality and character of neighbourhoods, religious beliefs, ethnic stratifications, inter-cultural prejudice and inter-ethnic *rapprochement* or hatred were the basic parameters that were adopted in explaining the

socio-pathological manifestations of racism in the larger African society (Enloe. A, 1978). It must be admitted, of course, that the research data, considering its urban character and its "discriminatory criteria" could not but represent a narrow aspect of the totality of the continent's vast population, which presently is largely under-educated, rural, pure and unexposed to the negative effects of extra-African tradition, influence, culture, comportment and opinion. The socio-pathological effects of this shall be the subject of our analysis especially as it is concerned with the interpretation of the concept of racism and ethnicity to the African societies.

SOCIO-PATHOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Cultural traditions serve as important instruments upon which civilizations are built and solidified, the more so when such traditions are positive and could considerably enhance inter-ethnic, inter-racial and communal harmony. Such is the case with the innate cultural disposition to friendliness, openness, warmth and acceptance within the traditional African set up and socio-pathological human nature. This in-built system of values have been regarded as the "unique system of values" dominating in a given society not susceptible to comparison with the culture of other peoples with different sets of social values. These traditions have been considered by cultural relativists as the 'biophysics structure' of the typical personality of a given society, (Bromley Y. V. 1987) and its socio-psychological tendencies could be quantified especially in cultures presenting similar facets or particular attributes. From this, it could be deduced that the psycho-social dynamics of inter-cultural intercourse in Africa allows for the recognition of what is positive in the collective psyche of those whom history and geography have been condemned to share a common space and polity. According to Blumer (1966), the socio-psychological appraisal falls within the construct of what he called "prejudice discriminating axis", which stipulates that racial discrimina-

tion is based on prejudice and that this prejudice is not innate but arises from the process of socio-political and patho-physiological socialization of the individual or group.

From this, a skewed socialization could produce the phenomenon of stereotyping. Within the traditional African system, this form of stereotyping is considered antagonistic to the very essence of the human personality which breeds hatred, jealousy, intercommunal strife and discord. Spillmann K. and Spillmann K.R. (1991), identified similar concepts as falling under seven characteristics *viz.*, distrust, guilt, negative anticipation, identification with evil, zero-sum thinking, deindividualization, and refusal of empathy, all as positive reaction that could be extended to someone that does not belong to the race, the group or the clan. This covers the whole process of socio-pathological socialization and can be related to the phenomenon of negative or positive perception of his immediate as well as the human capacity to understand, based on personal experiences, expectations, group relations, ethnic, race or clan dispositions to tolerate the other, outside the usual group.

However, the individual perception of his immediate and distant environment is a function of complex cerebral chemistry whereby the stimulants of the nature of society, its values, aspirations and norms are transmitted to the person long before reaching the intellectual rational capacity for reconstruction. The innate characteristic is acquired and developed further through interaction and other emotional links with the environment and as such its future manifestations is stored in the subconscious, thereby making it less accessible to manipulation, but at the same time putting it outside the scope of critical examination. Through the informal socialization of these qualities, a deeply anchored common value is created which forms and determines the perception of social reality and which explains the collective subtle non-aggressive attitude to foreigners and foreign ideas within the complex matrix of the traditional African culture.

Given, therefore, that one's own group, clan, racial or tribal opponents within the larger African family can be defined through this differentiation or by perceiving that one is different from the group, such emotional representation of one's ethnic, racial specific values, through which one distinguishes his group from the other, becomes an integral component of the general process of socialization, from whence the socio-pathological manifestation of the self and group perception *vis-à-vis* other groups or races as a permanent source of identity. Considering, therefore, the level of the development of intra-group and intra-communal interactions as well as the level of 'external knowledge' of the outsiders, 'the strangers' and of course what Murphree (1985) describes as stunted civilization, it is being admitted that the concept of the self and group within the traditional African societies is not likely to be favourably disposed to "racism" or rejection and intolerance of the stranger, the unknown or the foreigner, since intrinsically, self or group reaction and relationship to the other is founded on the cooperative collectivist plural pattern of warmth and attention to the outsider.

MANIFESTATION OF RACISM AND ETHNICITY AS GENESIS TO CONFLICTS AND WARS

The contextual and attitudinal manifestation of racism and ethnicity as well as the regional character will be different between the traditional African societies and the 'modern', often times externally influenced, local and foreign African communities. Exposure and quantifiable data have demonstrated that at the very local traditional African society in its pure "uncontaminated" state (Benoit, Gaetant, Moka 1985), racial discrimination is almost non-existent and thus, racism as a psycho-social process is considered evil. At this level, racism debases the fabric of the traditional African society and human character. It empties the African of his ancestral sense of generosity, destroys his communal pluralistic genetic sense of sharing, accommodation, tolerance, openness, naivete, crudeness and sincerity.

Here, to the African racism is criminal, as it is the very essence of ethnic, tribal, group or collective discord from whence hatred, dishonour, barbarism, intolerance, conflict and wars degenerate into societal and communal anarchy, capable of destroying the fabric of the society, its plural character and context: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi cases present glaring examples.

Anthropologists and sociopsychologists have concurred that one of the racial discriminating tendencies is to convince people within the society that racism does not exist, but if indeed it does not exist, the society through exposure and 'pollution' do and have created it. Racism, at the other facet of the societal matrix, that is the 'informed educated group' is considered atavistic mystery which cannot systematically and scientifically be defended. It is brutal, vague, horrible, elusive, and could be destructively subtle. It is 'seen' by its circumstantial differentiation and attitudinal manifestations, could be brutally, symbolically, emotionally and outrightly expressed. The forms of racial reactions that are often expressed could include:

- (a) Inter-state--from country to country, sometimes from region to region and including the issue of Anglo, Franco, Arabo, Lusphone or Otochtonic differences.
- (b) Inter-ethnic--from one ethnic group to the other, a kind of intra and extra cousinage and snaps, and
- (c) Inter-racial--as between people from completely different origin.

The list of these type of reaction is quite long and will not be discussed here but at the innate intrinsic psycho-cultural level, one could say that the phenomenon of prejudice, education and disregard, no doubt affects the value judgments and could be concluded that this is an informed class reaction, the correctness or erroneosity of which is better imagined in its pure forms. At the socio-economic and political level, ethnic stereotyping and pre-mature judgment is experienced.

It should be made clear also that whatever the nature of these judgments, neither were they critically or scientifically founded, nor were they rigorously morally defensible. In sum, it could be submitted that ethnic and group perceptions outside the traditional African system is more a function of circumstance, deliberate fear, jealousy, ignorance, outright discrimination and mundane witchhunting, the intensity of which, when viewed against the colonial history and the development of 'Nation-State' becomes ridiculously and manifestly a factor of inter and intra group judgment, different from region to region and state to state.

At the nation-state level, here, racism is anyone outside tribe, the clan, the town, the state the region or the country. Its ingredients could be translated into discrimination, identifying others from 'that' country as 'evil', categorising them as a class, a pack of aliens vividly 'foreign' and undoubtedly worthless. When heightened or judged against the prevailing economic, social and political situation of the African countries, one could appraise its invidious and destructive character. Racism and racial discrimination becomes the expression of evil hardened into the absolute, a disease phenomenon attractive only to its practitioners.

Encouraged by strangulating economic difficulties, it is this that explains the expulsion and counter expulsion of certain nationals from one country to another within the continent. For instance the tendency to reject "those Nigerians, Malawians, Ethiopians, Angolans, Zaireans, Liberians, Burkinabes, Mozambicans, Kenyans, Libyans, Guineans Djiboutians etc." and to categorize them as a class, a pack of aliens vividly "foreign" and undoubtedly "not from our country" can be labelled as the success of colonialism and independence.

In the first instance, it demonstrates that there is a transfer of intra-European and Arab acrimony during the slavery and colonial times to the present. The Franco-Anglophonic differences, Euro-Arabo suspicion and acrimony have simply been transferred wholesale to the

continent. It also explains such reactions as "Oh! Those African Muslims, Christians! Do you know that black Islam, Black Christianity is very strong?". "I don't like Nigerians, they behave like the English, I prefer to live in Kenya". Little wonder then, and perhaps this explains why Huxley (1964) took it upon himself to suggest that the whole of East Africa should be conserved as a vast tribal reservation for the benefit of tourists from the industrialised countries of the West!". Some ambitions!, "Others snaps like the Ivorians are Frenchmen; "the Sudanese are Arabs!", "Oh! les Camerounais, ils ont tous parails!", are the manifestations of post colonial segregation, ethnicity and intolerance in Africa. This kind of blanket judgment is referred to as transfer stereotyping, and idiopathic blind prejudice of the worst order.

In the second instance, the idea of categorizing countries created wholesale from the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 is to forget that there are no homogeneous 'Nation-State' in Africa. A 'cousin', a 'brother', same ethnic group or race exist across the international boundaries inherited at independence, (Asiwaju, A I. 1985). A Togolese farmer, a Malian trade, a Zambian carpenter whose chicken might have run across the border may need a passport to retrieve it! Nigeria, the most populous African nation, with its 80-100 million population, has over 400 ethnic groups, often grouped into three major groups: Hausas/ Fulanis; Yorubas; Ibos. Ccian all of them, despite their cultural differences be bad, devious, and dangerous? A large number of Yorubas are found in Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, separated from modern day Nigeria either by international boundaries or are second generation Yorubas. The same applies to the Hausas/ Fulanis and Kanuris in Niger or Tchad; Bazombos, Bankongos, Balubas, Ewes, Fangs and Ovambos among others, scattered between two or three countries across the continent, courtesy of imperial fiat.

In its regional character, the totality of ethnic group and clan manifestation of rejection, distrust, jealousy, hatred and prejudice could be related to what has been classified as the socio - cultural,

political, economic and historical causes of conflicts between ethnic and racial groups ; in some countries of the subregion. This is largely because the phenomenon of the post colonial state created a forced 'cohabitation' of different cultural, ethnic, tribal, clan and religious groups and it also mangled polities, peoples, traditions, systems and moeurs into an incongruous "Nation-state" heightening the more issues of fear, hatred, intolerance, and stereotyping among different groups that would normally have been in conflictual healthy harmony. Such is the case in Western Europe where Spanish, Italian, English or French fishermen, divers etc. are involved in competition and do fight among brothers. With these few research constructs, we shall present our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Commitment to succinct analysis would not allow us repeating the earlier constructs on this subject. It is of course clear that at the very traditional undiluted level, racism, ethnicity or clanism are completely insignificant, because the social structure and the communal group collectivist character of the society accommodate favourably differences of character, ethnic or racial appurtenance. At this level, differences be they of opinion, race, religion, power etc., do not pose significant problem and could be better underplayed in the interests of communal peace, and collective harmony. Significantly however, when transformed to a "different higher plain of interests", where education, family background, occupation, district, region, state, country, colour, sect, opinion, religion play important roles as within the larger cities and among the 'elite class' of whatever calling, the phenomenon of racism and/or ethnicity could be noticed, relatively and at times, blatantly and ignominiously expressed, varying in time place, degree and intensity. In sum, one may conclude that, measured from this viewpoint, racial, clan, tribal, group or ethnic relations have five important characteristics. First, racial and/or ethnic groups are defined by their boundaries, producing majority and minority phenomenon in some situations. Secondly, groups, ethnic, racial, tribal etc.,

are identified by signs, traditions, languages, religious or facial marks as distinct features inherently indisputable within the family. Thirdly, such classification also is possible by the way group members are constituted, by their force, culture, outward appearances, number, etc. Fourthly, ethnic, clan, racial and other groups exist in historical times, their power and character being influenced by the privilege enjoyed by their class, their ancestors etc., and with the modern state, such group may not be willing to give up such power, Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Algeria, Liberia etc. Fifthly, groups are homogeneously kept by their values, moeurs, circumstantial and traditional specifics of their members which outrightly could produce some measure of observable and sometimes imbalanced judgment about the concept of racism or racial and ethnic discrimination as a significant human rights issues, at the origin of most wars and conflicts in Africa.

Finally, it must be mentioned that, it is the recognition of the complex nature of these issues that led the UN to encourage the development of preventive diplomacy, peace making, conflict resolution and confidence building as integral components of the global multilateral diplomacy, as contained in the Agenda for Peace. It is in this perspective that we submit, that this important subject would need concerted efforts of multidisciplinary nature, to which UNESCO, in the light of its fields of competence, in past efforts has been quite in the forefront, using education, science and culture as instruments meant to foster peace and intercultural understanding among peoples in the global planetary village.

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