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History, Public Morality and Nation-Building: A Survey of Africa since Independence

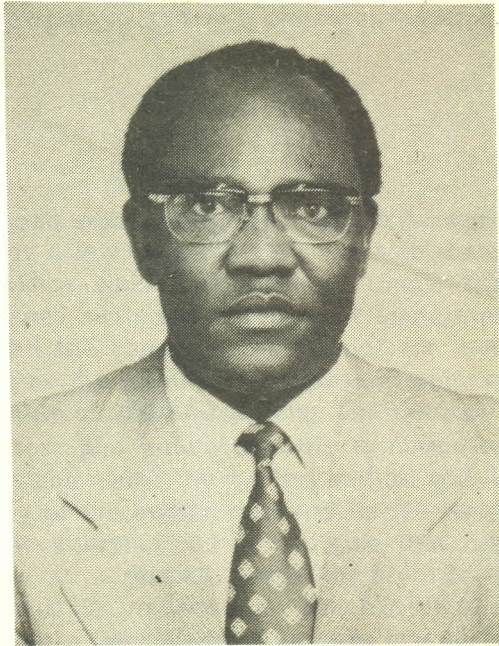
Professor Gideon S. Were

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HISTORY, PUBLIC MORALITY AND NATION-BUILDING: A SURVEY OF AFRICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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On this august occasion of my apostolic succession, I would like to share with you a few ideas, my reflections on the condition and performance of Africa since independence. Since these thoughts are primarily concerned with the conduct of leaders and individuals in public service and the consequences thereof for their nations, I have decided to examine the whole issue within the wider context of history and public morality in nation-building. The decision to focus on the relevance of history and public morality in nation-building is at once logical and justifiable since, by its very nature and definition, history is a critical study of the human past and its relevance for the present. It is through the study of the human past that man has been able, through the ages, to appreciate better his abilities and limitations in relation to those of his predecessors. This historical knowledge has, in turn, enabled man to improve upon, rectify and even modify the great heritage of past civilizations.

It is thus evident that history is a branch of knowledge which stretches back to the beginning of time in human civilization and which logically culminates in, and contributes to, the shaping of the present. It is this unique ability on the part of the historian to reconstruct the human past and to merge it harmoniously with the present that has earned history the much-fancied description of a "living subject". And the subject is living in the sense that it gives man power to discern, understand and analyse the impact of the human past on contemporary cultural, linguistic, economic, religious, military and socio-political institutions.

However, this interpretation is in sharp conflict with the conventional notion of history according to which a historian is one who is intrinsically preoccupied with the past and who, therefore, is incapable of feeling at home in a contemporary situation. According to those who subscribe to this idea of history, the principal task of a historian lies in his meticulous ability to remember the past, especially place names, events, characters and dates in the right chronological sequence. Indeed, there are many people who still regard a historian as a mere chronicler who is expected to be ready with an answer for every minute question pertaining to the past, human or otherwise.

Needless to say, this is a simplistic and outmoded interpretation of the role of a historian. For a historian is, first and foremost, a thinker. And a thinker cannot possibly be equated with a chronicler whose sole distinction lies in, and depends upon, his rare ability to remember certain aspects of the human past. In other words, a chronicler solely relies on the power of his memory, in order to discharge his responsibility in society. In contrast, a historian selects his historical evidence which he then proceeds to examine critically, with a view to analysing and understanding the historical problem that he sets out to investigate. Now, in order that he may achieve all this, a historian has to do a lot more than merely to remember and recite the past, parrot-fashion, as though it was something totally life-less and unintelligible. Having identified the problem he wants to investigate, a historian proceeds to analyse it systematically and methodically, paying special attention to the coherence, unity and intelligibility of his work. This is what is meant by trying to provide a historical explanation for a historical problem by means of a methodical investigation.

In all this, however, a historian has to be strictly guided by available historical evidence, and not by his own unaided inspiration. Such historical evidence could take the form of documents, artefacts, oral tradition, landmarks, linguistics, music, place-names, etc. Furthermore, in the course of his work, a historian should not succumb to his personal or group bias, through emotional and other forms of association, in defiance of all the available evidence. For reputable historians cannot but dismiss any work that is biased as subjective and propagandist and, so, unworthy of a historian. This is the essential distinction between a historian and a propagandist and it is applicable to various shades of historians, Marxists and pluralists alike. Thus any scholar who ignores or distorts historical evidence should be rightly seen for what he is — a mere writer of propaganda or fiction but certainly not a historian.

It is because of this unique ability to investigate and reconstruct the human past, by means of a critical and systematic examination of historical evidence, that a historian must be seen as an expert in a class of his own, above that of a chronicler. For unlike a chronicler, a historian is a systematic and conscious thinker. Again, unlike a chronicler, a historian always starts from a position of ignorance and then proceeds with his inquiry, methodically and systematically, towards a position of knowledge, guided by his evidence. That is why every competent historian starts off with a brief statement of the historical problem that he wants to investigate, i.e., he proceeds from a position of ignorance to one of knowing. And this he does by asking pertinent questions such as, 'why?', 'when?', 'by whom?', 'how?', and 'where-

fore?'. It is this critical ability and liberal tradition on the part of a historian which places him in a class of his own as a thinker from, say, a natural scientist who has to accept and subscribe to certain universally held basic assumptions about his discipline without question.

This, then, is a plea to historians of Africa to become more innovative by exploring new academic pursuits instead of sticking to orthodox studies and familiar grounds. During the 1960's and 1970's African historians were primarily and rightly concerned with trying to trace the genesis and evolution of African polities, institutions, languages, cultures and economies. Another important area of concern has been the impact of colonialism on African polities and African nationalism. These and many others are legitimate historical research concerns and should, therefore, continue to receive the attention of historians. Nevertheless, African historians should diversify their interests and make their discipline more flexible and more relevant to contemporary African needs. More specifically, on the broad theme of development, there are three important aspects which have, so far, tended to elude the attention of historians. One of these is the role of democratic institutions and governments in promoting development. The second one is the role of alcohol in African societies — the long-term effects of alcohol on society; the changing role of alcohol in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial situations; alcohol as a barometer of the economic trend; and alcohol as an incentive for technological innovations, especially in the manufacture of brewing equipment, and the evolution of new techniques of brewing. Furthermore, what changes are discernible in drinking habits, and what is the explanation thereof?

Finally, with regard to the local or illegal brewers, the following questions are pertinent: What has been the contribution of their 'industry' in terms of the creation of gainful employment and the generation of income? To what extent has the 'industry' made a positive contribution to the national welfare by promoting the material well-being of the families of the brewers and middlemen and, equally significant, by enabling them to educate their children? The contribution of commercial licensed brewers to the national economy ought to be a lot easier to analyse and so there is no need to go into it here. The third aspect of the theme of development is connected with the adverse impact of corruption and tribalism on national development. This is the concern of the present lecture.

From the foregoing it ought by now to be clear why I consider it important for historians to analyse the twin-problem of corruption and tribalism, and how independent Africa's developmental strategies and targets might be hampered by this evil. By undertaking research into the adverse effects of corruption and tribalism on national deve-

lopment in independent Africa, historians would make a valuable contribution to an understanding of the continent's developmental problems. There are many reasons why historians are uniquely placed to play a vital role in the study of the subject. First of all, their training as well as the nature and functions of their discipline are a clear asset to any researcher who would like to attempt a study of this kind of problem. This is further strengthened by the fact that history equips one with the necessary tools for examining a problem in a long-term perspective as part of one broad process. This is of great advantage to the researcher since it gives him an insight into a reservoir of extensive as well as intensive knowledge of the human society. Indeed, as already noted, history is for man's self-knowledge.

Furthermore, historians should undertake research in this area because of the disintegrative effects of corruption and tribalism at the national level. This is especially important in Africa where practically all African states owe their modern political as well as territorial boundaries to European imperialism and colonialism. The suggestion is that because independent African states owe their territorial boundaries and political unity to the former colonial powers, and also because of the relatively short time that they have been in existence as nation-states, they have not yet succeeded in evolving a strong and coherent concept of national identity. Neither, for that matter, have they successfully developed a clear sense of national loyalty. Indeed, in practically every independent African state the concept of nationhood is still largely vague and emergent. Moreover, the problem is compounded by the fact that in partitioning and colonising Africa, European powers were solely guided by their own national considerations and commercial interests.

In practice what this meant was that peoples were split up among the colonising powers without any significant regard for geography or the indigenous socio-political set-up. In fact the present political map of Africa is, in every respect, identical with the colonial map of Africa, the only significant difference being that a few names have changed here and there. Thus in quite a number of cases whole communities were split up between two or more European powers. This process had the effect of making it difficult for the local people to identify themselves with their new political entities and for a long time many of them continued to cherish their traditional ties and ethnic affinities as if the new colonial borders never existed. The Maasai occupying the country across the Kenya-Tanzania border are a case in point. Another one is the case of the Samia across the Kenya-Uganda border. The same applies to the Iteso across the Kenya-Uganda border. Another excellent example is to be found in the Horn of Africa where territorial

disputes between Somalia, on the one hand, and Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti have been instigated by Somalia which is intent on extending her hegemony over all Somali-speaking peoples in the region.

The contention, therefore, is that owing to their recent colonial experiences, African states have yet to evolve into viable political entities in which a national identity surpasses parochialism and ethnicity. Indeed ethnic loyalties are more often than not constantly, and sometimes on very crucial occasions, in conflict with national loyalties, thereby jeopardising positive and desirable processes of national evolution. Whenever this has assumed extreme proportions, it has resulted in centrifugal tendencies with adverse consequences for national solidarity and stability. That is precisely what happened in the case of the Congo (Leopoldville) in the early 1960's. After the attainment of independence Tshombe and Kalonji declared the secession and independence of their respective parts of the republic, i.e. Katanga and Kasai. More recently there was the case of Biafra temporarily seceding from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Other similar tendencies have been experienced in the Sudan, in Ethiopia (in the case of the Eritrea), and in the former Spanish Sahara where the Polisario forces are locked-up in a nationalist confrontation with Morocco which is occupying part of their territory.

The submission is that a systematic historical study of these and similar problems would be an asset to Africa owing to the important lessons which they entail. For if, as I firmly believe, it is necessary, if not mandatory, for African states to work conciously and consistently towards the attainment of national cohesion and identity, then the people of Africa need to be well-informed about their past and its implications for the present. In doing so they will also come to value the role which can be played by more positive and unifying national forces. Moreover, unlike the older nation-states which have achieved a decisive measure of national culture and identity, and where the task of development is not largely the responsibility of the state, in Africa the reverse is the case. In independent Africa the bulk if not all of the development effort is essentially initiated by governments which alone have the necessary resources, though not always in adequate quantities.

In any case, development as a concept and reality can only be meaningfully applied in a human context and situation, and not in a vaccum. This in turn necessitates a proper understanding of the socio-economic values of the people for whom the development is being planned and who, therefore, are expected to benefit from such development. We cannot, therefore, seriously talk about development or, for that matter, raising the standard of living of a people without relating it to their cultural values, customs and traditions. Only thus can

relevant development really be achieved. Otherwise one might end up with the sort of development which is essentially growth-orientated but basically irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the people. The contention, then, is that historians should try and address themselves quite squarely to the twin-problem of corruption and tribalism as an important contributory factor in retarding the political, social and economic development of the continent.

The role of history in nation-building cannot, therefore, be minimised. For any nation that is ignorant of its past, or which is scared of that past and all its great lessons is bound to be ignorant of its very present as well. Neither is such a nation capable of forging ahead into a robust and confident future. In cultural terms such a nation is bound to be rootless and a slave of alien cultural values which are at once distant, incomprehensible and irrelevant. It is for these reasons that the teaching of history and literature ought to be made compulsory in all the schools and universities of Africa. For if literature can rightly be regarded as a mirror of society, history is the principal bridge between the society of today and the society of the past. The suggestion that the teaching of history be made compulsory in Africa's educational system is thus based upon sound as well as pragmatic considerations. This is largely because one of the primary concerns of history is to show how human societies, institutions, cultures and other fundamental values have gradually evolved, through the process of continuity and change, and to explain the reasons for, and effects of, such developments. History, therefore, teaches man to ask and answer the questions 'who are we?'; 'whence are we?'; and 'what have we been doing since we got here?'

It is for these very reasons that, throughout the history of mankind, all colonial powers have found it necessary to keep colonial subjects in ignorance about the local history and indigenous cultural values by imposing their own history and culture upon colonised peoples. By deliberately keeping them ignorant of their own history, i.e. civilization, and by encouraging them to become contemptuous of their native cultural values, the colonising powers thereby ensure the total psychological, cultural and political enslavement of colonised peoples. This is attained gradually as a ruthless and systematic war is waged against the languages, culture, history and national identity of subject peoples until they lose faith in traditional values and begin to identify themselves with the culture and values of their alien rulers. Needless to say that this is a throughly disruptive and inhibitive process, for no man can really succeed in life, nor be intellectually productive, if he forgets his own identity and spends all his life hopelessly trying to ape another. That really explains the fact that independent Africa is uniquely lacking in originality, innovation and relevance in its everyday life.

Such is the de-humanising experience to which colonised peoples have been subjected throughout the history of mankind. For example, under the Holy Roman Empire, imperial values superseded parochial ones to such an extent that Latin became not only the official language but also the medium of expression of all educated people in the Empire. At the same time all Roman citizens were subject to Roman Law which, therefore, became a strong imperial bond overriding the existing judicial systems of diverse component subject nationalities. Furthermore, Roman citizenship was extended to all subject peoples with the usual obligations and rights. Equally significant was the role of the Christian Church as the official religion and a unifying imperial bond. Moreover, by teaching the duty of submission to authority based on the thesis that "the powers that be are ordained of God", Christianity proved to be a formidable tool for absolute loyalty to the Emperor, who was the head and embodiment of the Empire, and to Rome which was the capital and centre of the Empire.

More recently, 19th century imperialism transplanted European values in Africa so much so that they are still secure, virtually unscathed, despite about two decades of political independence. With very few exceptions, European languages are still the official languages of independent Black Africa while indigenous ones are relegated to the humble status of "national" or vernacular languages. European cultural values are further manifested in the religious, political, judicial and educational systems of independent Africa which, therefore, remain largely distant and incomprehensible to the vast majority of the ordinary people. Indeed, in these basic areas of life, there is irrefutable evidence of disturbing wholesale continuity of European institutions and values, which is adequately indicative of the effectiveness of the cultural enslavement of Africa by Europe.

The whole process of colonisation was preceded and facilitated by the accumulation of capital which necessitated the acquisition of new markets abroad for industrial products; the expansion of industries which in turn intensified demand for raw materials from tropical countries; and technological improvements in communications, by sea and rail, which made travel faster and more efficient. Additionally, scientific advances equipped European explorers, missionaries, traders and, later, settlers with the necessary anti-malaria medicine without which prolonged white settlement would have been well-nigh impossible. In the final analysis, therefore, it was European technological advance which facilitated the conquest and colonisation of Africa. For one whiteman armed with a machinegun was more than a match for a thousand and one African spearmen, even if reinforced with an

equal number of bows and arrows and inspired by patriotism and exceptional valour. The argument is that it would be practically impossible to understand the political, social, economic and religious condition of Africa to-day without some knowledge of her past connections with Europe against the background of imperialism. Indeed, it is owing to Africa's past colonial experience that I stand here to-day, dressed like a medieval monk, and addressing you in English and not in any other language.

The relevance of history to the present may further be illustrated with one issue on which the contemporary international community attaches a high premium, but which would be virtually unintelligible and inexplicable without a historical perspective and awareness. The current international concern with the theme of human rights, which is firmly rooted into the past is, in fact, as old as mankind's civilization. It would be virtually impossible to appreciate fully the real significance and implications of the human rights movement in our times without some awareness of its genesis, progress and vicissitudes through the centuries.

For the purposes of this lecture, I would like to focus on a few landmarks in the long but tortuous struggle for human rights. In England the Magna Carta of 19 June, 1215 which sealed the contest between King John and the barons, clergy and other subjects was crucial for the future of individual or civil rights. Though it was not a revolutionary document, the Charter is important because it re-stated, in writing, the respective ancient rights of the nobility, the Church of England and other citizens. It recognised and guaranteed security of life and property to all freemen in the kingdom:

No freeman shall be arrested or imprisoned or deprived of his freehold or outlawed or banished or in any way ruined, nor will we take or order action against him, except by the lawful judgment of his equals and according to the law of the land*

The Charter had, therefore, the effect of at least temporarily restraining the monarchy from dictatorship by providing a written constitutional document enshrining a measure of individual rights. These rights were further entrenched by a specific clause which guaranteed justice to all citizens: "To none will we sell, to none will we deny or delay right or justice."** Though the spirit of the Charter was not always respected by the monarchs, for the next two centuries it served as "the authoritative expression of the rights of the community against the Crown."*** However, in the final analysis, the real significance of

* J.C. Dickinson, *The Great Charter*, 1955, p.24.

** J.C. Dickinson, *Op.cit.*

*** *Ibid.*

the Charter lay in the fact that for the first time the feudal services and dues were explicitly defined in order to prevent their possible abuse through arbitrary increases or extortion. The cause of human rights was extended still further by the 17th century English revolution which culminated in more constitutional guarantees for freedom of worship and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

The struggle for human rights ought, however, to be rightly seen as a continuous process though occurring in different countries at different times and in different forms. Thus, in 19th century Russia, it was manifested in the events which resulted in the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and other relevant aspects of the reforms of Alexander II. In North America it received partial expression in the Declaration of Independence Act of 1776 which stated *inter alia*: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable (sic) Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed."* The cause of human rights was pushed a stage further by the Bill of Rights which, among other things, guaranteed freedom of worship; freedom of speech; freedom of association; and freedom of the press.

In the case of 18th century France, the cause of human rights found expression in the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens which stated *inter alia*: "Men are born, and always continue, free and equal, in respect of their rights. The Nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty . . . law is an expression of the will of the community . . . liberty consists in the power of doing whatever does not injure another."** Like the Bill of Rights, the Declaration specifically provided safeguards for certain fundamental rights — freedom of speech; freedom of the press; and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention.

Finally, the contemporary international concern for human rights with emphasis on safeguards for the rights of all individuals regardless of race, sex, creed or language ought to be seen as part of the long, diffuse and unco-ordinated process to which some allusion has just been made. In more immediate terms, however, it is directly attributable to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10th

* W.A. Barker, G.R. St. Aubyn and R.L. Ollard Documents of English History 1688—1832.

** L.S. Stavrianos, *The World since 1500*, London, 1966, pp. 260—261.

December, 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War. Since then this charter has become the cornerstone of the constitutions of numerous independent countries and regional organizations. This is because of its guarantees for, among other things, human life; freedom from torture; fair trial; political expression and conviction; education; health; employment and shelter. The universal adoption of the charter by independent countries since 1948 is a living testimony of the extent to which the society of to-day is moulded by the society of yesterday. However, only a historian can shed the necessary light on the intrinsic historical connections in man's past, and between the human past and the human present.

Before we proceed, however, a word or two are necessary about the terminology. For the purposes of this lecture public morality means the proper conduct of people in public service, governed by certain fundamental and universally recognized values which form the code of conduct within a particular society. By far the most important of these basic societal values or qualities are integrity, honesty, justice, dedication and trustworthiness. In contrast, corruption thrives in a situation that is devoid of trust, honesty and integrity. Corruption is, therefore, incompatible with public morality and involves the deliberate use of one's position for wrong ends, motivated by private considerations.

In the words of M. McMullan a "public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under a duty to do anyway, that he is under duty not to do, or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reasons."* Like corruption, tribalism is incompatible with public morality since it involves the use of one's position for wrong ends, motivated by private and ethnic considerations and calculated to promote tribal chauvinism to the detriment of the wider and legitimate national interests and the principles of fair play and merit.

Whilst still on the terminological issue, as used in this lecture, by nation-building is meant the process by which a country ensures a positive transformation of the material and spiritual life of her people, guided by the principles of social justice, equality and happiness. In this respect, nation-building is actually synonymous with national development. And to be meaningful and relevant, the development of a nation has to be essentially seen in terms of an improvement in the standard of living of her citizens in all aspects of life. For that reason any grandiose physical projects and economic growth that are not directly related to, and principally designed to improve, the quality of

* M. McMullan, "A theory of corruption", *Sociological Review*, 9, New Series, July 1961, p. 183.

life among the citizens must be seen as irrelevant development-wise. Furthermore, nation-building calls for the conscious fostering of a viable and relevant national identity which is, in turn, founded upon and enhanced by common national interests, cultural values and aspirations. So much for terminological explanations.



The history of independent Africa is characterised by a persistent tendency by many national leaders and governments to disregard the necessity and relevance of public morality in their actions and conduct. This is often done by resorting to tribalism and corruption. Apart from a few exceptions, many African leaders generally behave and act as though their countries and national resources were little more than their private or family property. In such circumstances relatives, friends and ethnic colleagues generally get appointed to positions of responsibility and high income regardless of merit. Similarly, in the commercial and economic fields, special treatment is given to these favoured few who are accorded credit facilities, business licences and access to various types of property, again without any respect for merit. In due course the family, relatives, friends and members of the ethnic groups of such leaders become dominant, feudal-style, in the social, economic, political and security sectors of national life.

A few examples of the foregoing should suffice by way of illustration. Up to 1972 Africa experienced 114 regime changes in 40 countries, 36 of them through coups and assassinations.* Invariably the new regimes charged their predecessors with all sorts of crimes such as tribalism, corruption, mismanagement and dictatorship. Furthermore, it is evident that in the case of Morocco, where corruption is reportedly rampant from top to bottom, the situation became so critical that in 1971 "senior army officers sought to overthrow the main figure in the distribution of spoils, the king himself. They acted not out of resentment, for they had benefited themselves, but in anticipation of what the junior officers corps might do on the strength of their [junior officers] resentment."** Other states which have been identified with corruption are the Central African Republic, the Congo, Gabon, the Ivory Coast and Dahomey where, however, investigations into corrupt practices never reached the topmost echelons of the hierarchy.***

Turning now to Kenya under the first presidency, so far, it is difficult to be precise about cases of corrupt practices and tribalism

* V.B. Khapoya, "The Politics of Succession in Africa", *Africa Today: Kenya after Kenyatta*, Vol. 26, no. 3, 1979, pp. 7-8.

** John Waterbury, "Corruption, Political Stability and Development: Comparative Evidence from Egypt and Morocco", *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 11, no. 4, autumn 1976, p.428.

*** Rene Dumont, *False Start in Africa*, New York, 1966, p. 86.

high up on the hierarchy. This is partly because, as yet, no investigation into abuse of power has taken place. Neither is concrete documentary and other forms of evidence readily available, though allegations to that effect abound. Nevertheless, something that seems to answer to the description of corruption and tribalism as contained in the preceding paragraphs would appear to have been in evidence at one time or another during at least part of the period. For, as Godfrey Muriuki has observed, it is 'generally true' that during the period in question one particular community quite clearly 'dominated the political and economic life of Kenya', the civil service and para-statal bodies. Muriuki adds, however, that it was really one particular section of that community, rather than the entire group, which was dominant: "It is also true to argue that . . . due to their easy access to Kenyatta and his henchmen, [they] were able to gobble up other perquisites, particularly in the economic field. Indeed access to him was the gateway to the acquisition of a farm or business not to mention the granting of the lucrative import-export agency or even a loan from a bank A vacant senior post generated intense . . . competition which normally culminated in a desperate effort to ensure the support of Kenyatta himself."*

Nevertheless, it is probable that in a number of cases such abuse of power took place in the name of President Kenyatta and not necessarily with his approval or knowledge. At any rate, that is the impression one gets from Joseph Karimi and Philip Ochieng' when they state: "References have . . . been made to the effect that farms changed hands in the name of President Kenyatta; that millions of shillings of public money found its way into the pockets of individuals in the name of President Kenyatta . . . that spooky characters who slept with women members of the Family ['the group around the late President'] became directors of wealthy companies in the name of President Kenyatta."** The same source further asserts that during the first presidency, well-known criminals who were related to influential people in the government became wealthy through their criminal activities such as bank robberies and the grabbing of private and public property with impunity.

The foregoing analysis of the Kenyan situation during the first presidency is further corroborated by other independent sources. According to these sources the apparent decline in Kenyatta's popularity during his last years is attributable to two principal factors — the

* Godfrey Muriuki, "Central Kenya in the Nyayo Era", *Africa Today: Kenya After Kenyatta*, Vol. 26, no: 3, 1979, pp. 39-40.

** Joseph Karimi and Philip Ochieng', *The Kenyatta Succession*. Transafrica, 1980, p. 68.

spiralling prices 'which have not been matched by income rises' and the 'alleged government corruption and extreme acquisitiveness for land and other wealth by some members of Kenyatta's entourage.'^{*} It is further evident, from the same sources, that before his death in March 1975, J.M. Kariuki 'had decided to make specific corruption charges together with the names of individuals in parliament.' Finally, on the practice of tribalism M. Tamarkin has ably demonstrated how after the 1964 army mutiny Kenya's first presidency systematically extended that ideology into the crucial areas of policy-making and decision-making; the composition of the cabinet; and the upper echelons of the civil service, the police, the G.S.U. and the army.^{**}

In contrast to the apparent vagueness of the Kenyan case which is yet to be adequately investigated and documented, Nkrumah's presidency in Ghana seems to have been quite clearly riddled with corruption. This conclusion is corroborated by the findings of more than 40 commissions of enquiry conducted after his ouster. According to these findings, both the President himself and his ruling Convention People's Party were centrally and systematically involved and benefited from corrupt practices.^{***} Furthermore, the same sources indicate that corruption at the top was so routine that a kickback of 5-10 percent was automatically expected in return for government contracts. This source of revenue accounted for some 90% of the C.P.P.'s income, roughly \$5 million during 1958 - 1966. It is further evident that Nkrumah freely used this revenue 'for his own purposes.' For example, in 1962 the properties of A.G. Leventis were purchased at an inflated price on the understanding that Nkrumah would receive \$2.4 million of the loot for his private use. Even the National Development Corporation which was set up in 1958 for insurance purposes was primarily used by him as 'an avenue through which commissions and other moneys could be collected.' For the same reasons, the Ministry of Trade usually issued import licences only when a bribe of 5-10 per cent of the value of the licence required was paid.

It goes without saying that a corrupt and unjust national leadership is a liability to any nation as it is incapable of making a positive contribution to nation-building in the context of the present lecture. Corrupt leaders cannot really be expected to promote and protect national interests as they tend to be preoccupied with their private concerns. Furthermore, such leaders are a liability to their nations,

^{*} *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 16, no. 6, March 21, 1975, p. 2.

^{**} M. Tamarkin, 'The roots of political stability in Kenya', *African Affairs*, Vol. 77, no. 308, July 1978, pp. 297-320.

^{***} Herbert H. Werlin, "The roots of Corruption - The Ghanaian Enquiry", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 2, 1972, pp. 247-266.

which they deliberately and systematically impoverish either through sheer exploitation or neglect. Sometimes this is done by developing only those parts of the country where the leader happens to believe that he enjoys local support; or by misappropriating the resources of the country for the benefit of the leader, his relatives and friends; or by deliberately neglecting the development of those parts of the country regarded by the leader as disloyal, a sort of enemy territory; or it could be by a combination of any of these and other tactics. Moreover, some of the scholars who have studied the problem believe that such leaders often drain the national economy by keeping their loot in numbered accounts in Swiss and other overseas banks, instead of investing it at home for local development.*

The submission, then, is that a corrupt and tribalistic leadership is detrimental to national solidarity and nation-building. And in a situation where corruption and tribalism are the criteria in public life, public morality and national pride are often replaced by chaos and instability. And here I would like to illustrate with a quotation from my reflections in a different context:

Such a situation prevailed in Uganda where the thoroughness, grim efficiency and callousness of the Amin regime's human-slaughter machinery were unrivalled in the history of modern Africa . . .

In Zaire, a corrupt and inefficient leadership has turned a deaf ear to all the great lessons of the past, with the result that rampant economic mismanagement has ruined what is otherwise potentially one of the wealthiest nations in black Africa. And in the former Central African Republic after 13 years of barren leadership, President Bokassa at last came to the conclusion that if he was incapable of a progressive and enlightened leadership which alone could develop the nation, at least he could give something else to the country, presumably on the assumption that something was better than nothing at all. And so on 4th December, 1977 the republic was transformed into the Central African Empire and Bokassa was crowned the first Emperor before personally crowning his own wife the first Empress of the impoverished empire.**

* Cf. Colin Leys, "What is the problem about corruption?", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 2, 1965, p. 229, John Waterbury, *Op.cit.* p. 445.

** G.S. Were, "History and national development: some hints to African states", *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. XIX, no. 1, April - June 1979.

However, any study on corruption and tribalism in Africa which is confined only to the top of the hierarchy is bound to be incomplete and, so, misleading. To be meaningful the exercise has to be extended to the public service, the hotbed of the malaise in many African states. Indeed the malpractice is so prevalent that virtually all scholars on the subject are unanimous that developing nations and, in particular, African states are a fertile and natural breeding-ground for this evil. Poverty, low standards of living, lack of the tradition of leadership among many of the first leaders of independent Africa, inexperience, the universal African tradition of hospitality and gift-giving, laxity, the burden of the extended family, the disappearance of traditional values and standards, and unfamiliarity with Western values have all been cited as the reasons for the prevalence of corruption in the new states established after 1945.*

It would, however, be wrong to jump to the simplistic conclusion that, in view of the foregoing, corruption is an exclusively African problem or, for that matter, the problem of new states. After all, corruption is as old as the human society itself and is known to exist, in varying degrees, in all countries, including the developed countries of Europe, North America, the Soviet Union and Japan.** But in these latter instances the nature and level of corruption is such that the ordinary citizens are not significantly or directly affected. In contrast the ordinary citizens are the victims of corruption in Africa where public funds are at stake and the public service is by far the biggest employer. The situation is so pathetic that in the case of Nigeria it has been confirmed that a patient has to bribe the doctor for attention and the nurse for bringing the bed-pan! According to the Storey Report entitled *Commission of Inquiry into the Administration of Lagos Township*, the situation in Lagos was at one time so pathetic that corruption was rampant even

in hospitals where the nurses require a fee from every in-patient before the prescribed medicine is given, and even the ward servants must have their 'dash' before bringing the bed-pan; it is known to be rife in the Police Motor Traffic Unit . . . pay clerks make a deduction from the wages of daily paid staff; produce examiners exact a fee from the produce buyer for every bag that is graded and sealed; domestic servants pay a proportion of their wages to the senior of them, besides often having paid a lump sum to buy the job.**

* Cf. Colin Leys, *Op.cit.*, pp. 224-228; S.E. Finer, 'The Year of Corruption', *New Society*, 26th Feb. 1976, p. 12; Herbert H. Werlin, *Op.cit.*, pp. 253-265; Ronald Wraith and Edgar Simpkins, *Corruption in developing countries*, 1964, p. 13; John Waterbury, *op.cit.*, pp. 427-445; and Rene Dumont, *Op.cit.*, p. 84.

** Cf. Colin Leys, *Op.cit.*, p. 218.

According to Colin Leys (1965), cases of corruption were also prevalent in Port Harcourt, where there were people employed on the recommendation of the various councillors, and in Kampala, where in August 1963 a member of the majority party in the city council was awarded a certain tender though he offered only \$4,000 while the highest offer was for \$11,000. Later the successful candidate reportedly sold the plot at a profit of \$8,000! In the case of Ghana, Herbert H. Werlin (1972, p. 251) has shown that corruption was rife in the public service, politics, commerce, local authorities and in statutory bodies during Nkrumah's period. We have already alluded to other aspects of the problem in Ghana, Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Camerouns, the Congo, Dahomey and the Central African Republic. Other well documented cases of a highly corrupt public service are to be found in Morocco and Egypt. According to John Waterbury (1976, p. 431), though the malpractice is not officially condoned, it is as widespread as it is routine. It is evident in the educational and examination systems; in the procurement of official documents; zoning laws; and in the enforcement of criminal and commercial law.

In the case of Kenya's public service, though allegations about corruption, nepotism and tribalism are rife, concrete evidence of their existence is by no means easy to come by. However, the existence of widespread corruption and allied social evils in the country can partly be confirmed by public statements made by leaders castigating the malpractice. Indeed, during the first week of May 1975, Parliament expressed its concern and that of the entire nation by setting up a Select Committee, chaired by Mr. Martin Shikuku, to probe into corruption, nepotism and tribalism. Unfortunately, however, the Committee never functioned.

Nevertheless, the situation would seem to have so drastically deteriorated as to warrant a public admonition of civil servants by none other than the then head of the civil service, Geoffrey Kariithi. Addressing members of the Kenya Union of Civil Servants in 1977, Mr. Kariithi stated: "It is disturbing and regrettable that there are civil servants who have been tempted to allocate government resources, contracts and services over which they have control to further their own personal interests or that (sic) of their friends or relatives. This is moral corruption."* The views of the then Secretary General of the Kenya Union of Civil Servants, Mr. Kimani wa Nyoike, on the same subject are equally illuminating. In his view corruption and tribalism were a national problem and not merely a peculiarity of the civil service: "The ills that you find in society, you can expect to find in the civil

* *The Weekly Review*, August 15, 1977p. 7.

service. For example, the rest of society has not been able to deal with the question of tribalism. Corruption is both in the public and private sectors. I am told that in many private companies you cannot be employed unless you have done certain things which are corrupt. . . . If you like, the country is corrupt or is becoming more and more corrupt, and the civil service is part of this country.’**

It was against this background that a top leaders' conference was held twice at the Kenya Institute of Administration in January 1978 and July 1980. On both occasions the leaders condemned corruption and tribalism. In his keynote address at the second leaders' conference, President Moi voiced his strong concern over anti-social activities and laxity when he told the delegates: 'I am somewhat disappointed by the performance of some of you.' He added that there was "evidence that some people in our republic have involved themselves in corruption and other anti-social activities such as use of one's influence for private gain instead of using that influence for the welfare of our people. How can we have leaders who do not respect themselves and recognise their responsibilities to the nation?"***

Though none of the foregoing makes any mention of specific cases of corruption and other social ills, it is quite evident that the Kenyan society under consideration is one that is morally sick. The seriousness of the malady may partly be illustrated by reference to the Auditor-General's inspection report on the Central Medical Stores of the Ministry of Health, which was tabled in Parliament in early 1980. The report is a forthright condemnation of the Ministry's tender system which was apparently characterised by "possible fraudulent manipulation of stores procurement procedure which in turn may have resulted in or contributed to the frequent shortages of essential drugs and equipment in the country's hospitals."**** Apart from shortages of essential drugs and equipment, the report shows that 'the Government paid out an extra 1,062,975/- for supplying items at higher prices than those provided for in the contract'***** with Anpi Pharma. Furthermore, the report suggests that 'Anpi Pharma appears to have received preferential treatment from the Ministerial Tender Board.'*****

What, then, are the probable dangers of this malpractice, this cancer which has transformed many African nations into pathetic, insecure and unhappy polities? To a significant degree an answer to

* Ibid., p. 8.

** *The Weekly Review*, 25th July, 1980, p. 9.

*** '*Nairobi Times*', 30th March, 1980.

**** '*Daily Nation*', 26th March, 1980.

***** '*Nairobi Times*', 30th March, 1980.

this question ought also to constitute a justification for a systematic scholarly study of the subject by historians of Africa. As I have already tried to show, corrupt practices and tribalism flourish in a situation that is either devoid of public morality or where the value of this noble principle is minimised or both, especially by the leadership.

Though the problem has two dimensions, i.e. tribalism and corruption, they are intimately intertwined in their operation and effects. On the whole both social evils have adverse effects on society. The major criticism of a tribal-oriented national leadership is that it is tribal in outlook, motivation and action and, so, incompatible with real national interests. And because it practises and promotes sectionalism and regionalism, it is inconsistent with basic national integrative forces which, therefore, it undermines. It is this kind of leadership in Africa which has encouraged people to think and act as members of a tribe first and last as citizens of one nation. In view of such circumstances, it is not surprising that the citizens of practically every African state feel that they have much more in common with members of their respective tribes than with the rest of other nationals. This is disastrous in terms of nation-building for it hinders the development of a viable and robust national identity. For a meaningful national identity can only thrive in a situation where a high premium is, as a matter of principle and functional policy, attached to the common values, interests and aspirations which bind the citizens together. Moreover, as I have shown elsewhere in this lecture, tribal discrimination can lead to political and social instability.

The African situation is as paradoxical as it is confusing partly because of the factor of tribalism. And the paradox may be illustrated by the fact that, over most of independent Africa, comments have been made to the effect that during the colonial period Europeans generally discriminated against Africans as a whole, and not between one African group and another; and that with regard to employment and promotion opportunities for Africans within the African sector of the colonial context, the colonialists were generally guided by the principle of merit. In contrast, so the argument runs, after independence, a new type of discrimination has set in based purely on tribal, clan and lineage associations. This malpractice is so powerful that it has excluded members of many ethnic groups from employment and other economic and commercial opportunities, which are regarded as the preserve of ruling tribes.

The significance of all this is that by drawing attention to the injustices and adverse effects of tribalism, a systematic historical study of the subject would be an asset to the national leaders of Africa in

their tasks of nation-building. It would, furthermore, assist them in promoting genuine national identities sustained by indigenous cultural values and common national norms and interests. Indeed it is the existence of such an identity and cultural heritage that has sustained nationalities such as Poland, Turkey and the Jews as viable polities throughout their long and chequered histories.

The effects of corruption are generally as negative as those of tribalism. This is because the sole criterion in making appointments and promotions as well as in other aspects of public life is anything but merit. For example, though appointments and promotions in the Moroccan public service sometimes depend on academic and professional qualifications, in practice corruption is a crucial factor in facilitating someone's appointment. According to John Waterbury (1976, p. 430) entrance to the requisite interviews and examinations "is negotiated through the payment of increasingly stiff 'fees'". And because of this trend, the whole national system is paralysed by inefficiency, incompetence, and mediocrity. The economy of a nation in such conditions tends to become unproductive and even stagnant owing to the prevalence of mediocre managerial personnel and executives.

Moreover, men and women with proven ability, dedication and training, who are crucial in nation-building, sooner or later lose interest in their work owing to frustration and discriminatory practices. This interpretation is in sharp conflict with that by Ronald Wraith and Edgar Simpkins (1963, p. 16) who argue that corruption and inefficiency are not necessarily correlated since large-scale corruption has not led to inefficiency in the more developed countries. But, as has already been noted, African states are more dependent on their governments and public resources for development than the more developed countries with a robust private sector. The impact of a corrupt and mediocre public service cannot, therefore, be minimised.

The argument is that corruption in the government is disruptive in its operation and consequences. It is wasteful of public resources and retards economic and social development. Furthermore, it discourages enterprise and promotes injustice. At the political level, corruption is equally disruptive and inimical to national solidarity and peace. Hence the conclusion by M. McMullan (1961, p. 182) that where corruption is prevalent, "the political history of some unfortunate countries could be told as the 'ins' being accused, correctly, by the 'outs' of corruption; popular indignation at the corruption causing the replacement of the 'ins' by the 'outs', who in turn become corrupt and are attacked by a new group of 'outs'." In other words, in extreme cases, a corrupt leadership or government is a major cause of political instability which, as already noted, characterises most African states.

The harmful effects of a corrupt leadership are not, however, confined to the foregoing economic and political areas of national life. They also encroach into the education of young people. For, just as competent and dedicated citizens are demoralised by lack of respect for merit and social justice in public life, so also young people in educational institutions tend to be demoralised by all sorts of adverse pressures. Consequently, students have tended to display a disturbing element of indifference and lack of drive in education, the very instrument that is crucial for nation-building. One of the reasons for the dwindling of motivation among students is connected with the lowering of standards. This happens when influential people use their positions to gain the admission of their children, or those of their friends and relatives, into educational institutions for which they are quite clearly unfit on the basis of their inferior examination results.

Moreover, as John Waterbury's findings (1976, pp. 429—430) on Egypt clearly indicate, when corruption creeps into the educational system, standards tend to decline in secondary schools and universities. It is normal for secondary school teachers and university lecturers in Egypt to offer private tuition for their students in return for a fee which varies according to the level of instruction and the nature of the subject. Furthermore, 'passing and failing critical examinations has come increasingly to hinge on whether or not one takes the instructor's private course.' What this means, in effect, is that teachers and lecturers in Egyptian institutions deliberately reduce their in-put and the quality of instruction during normal contact hours in order to create and raise demand for private coaching.

By far the most important reason for the decline in the students' motivation is the low premium generally attached to merit by society. In years gone by, when a child went to school he was told and soon got to know, that education was the key to a successful life. He was told that the acquisition of a good education would enhance his chances of leading a good life. It was generally believed, and for good reasons, that once somebody had a solid education, nothing could stand between him and his rightful place in society. This was because qualification, ability, experience and good conduct were the recognised criteria in public life. A person could therefore rise as high as he could aim subject, of course, to normal colonial constraints, based on race rather than tribalism or corruption.

As has already been explained, merit has generally been devalued in independent Africa. The consequence of this has been that both young people and their parents are not always aware of the norms and criteria in operation at any one time. This uncertainty surrounding the criteria by which one shall be judged in various situations has in turn

cast some doubt on the relevance of educational and professional qualifications. The paradox is further compounded when young people see their former colleagues at school or the university, with inferior qualifications, being appointed to important positions. At that juncture they lose their confidence in society as well, which they hold responsible for their predicament.

As Ronald Wraith and Edgar Simpkins (1963, p.13) have rightly observed, this malpractice has the effect of undermining young people's faith in the entire system to such an extent that those who join the public service "do not see a clear road ahead, along which they will travel as far as their abilities will take them, in the knowledge that merit will be rewarded and integrity will be their greatest asset. They see a jungle of nepotism and temptation through which they must hack their way unaided." And so, in this way, young people's enthusiasm and energy, which ought to be a useful asset in the work of national reconstruction, is transformed into frustration and cynicism in their formative years.

To recapitulate then; my primary concern in this lecture has been to try and explain the special role which historical knowledge and public morality could play in the crucial process of nation-building in independent Africa. An attempt has further been made to demonstrate the relevance of public morality and indigenous cultural values as an integrative and therapeutic force in national development and in forging a viable national identity. Concurrently, it has been shown that corruption and tribalism are incompatible with genuine nation-building as they are disruptive and chaotic in their operation and consequences. Indeed, corrupt leadership and tribalism are a powerful cause of social and political instability over much of independent Africa.

In view of all this, it is being suggested that historians of Africa have a vital role to play by researching into and highlighting some of the major historical constraints on development, and indicating in what way such problems may have adversely affected African nations. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that historical knowledge coupled by public morality can be a powerful tool in nation-building, and could enable independent Africa to arise from her long slumber and transform herself into a prosperous, just and peaceful abode. Given Africa's enormous economic potential and human resources, and provided there exists a leadership that is willing to exploit historical knowledge and experience, guided by the high values attached to public morality, it should be possible for the continent to achieve great successes. Thus will Africa be transformed into a land of integrity, rather than moral

deprivation; of hope, rather than despair; of tranquillity, rather than turmoil; of abundance and social justice, rather than abject poverty and injustice: a continent where an individual's talents can fully develop and be fully utilised.

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