

# Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement

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This paper argues that the experiences of colonialism in Africa have led to the emergence of a unique historical configuration in modern post-colonial Africa: the existence of two publics instead of one public, as in the West. Many of Africa's political problems are due to the dialectical relationships between the two publics. I shall characterize these two publics and attempt to explain some of Africa's political features within the matrix of these publics. In order to give some empirical content to the distinction drawn here, I shall illustrate the issues raised with examples from Nigeria.

## THE PRIVATE REALM, THE PUBLIC REALM, AND SOCIETAL MORALITY

Perhaps the best definition of politics is the oldest one: politics refer to the activities of individuals insofar as they impinge on the public realm made up of the collective interests of the citizenry. As Wolin (1960:2–3) has pointed out, 'one of the essential qualities of what is political, and one that has powerfully shaped the view of political theorists about their subject-matter, is its relationship to what is "public"'. The distinction between the private realm and the public realm delimits the scope of politics. Not all the everyday activities of an individual are political. To the extent that he acts in his household or practices his religion in his home, he is acting in the private realm. Furthermore, the distinction tells us when changes do take place and may define the characteristics of political regimes. The publicization of the private realm—that is, the conversion of private activities and resources into material for the public realm—is characteristic of absolutist regimes. On the other hand, the privatization of the public realm—that is, the 'sublimation' of politics in which what is traditionally private swallows up the public realm—may

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well, as Wolin (1960) contends, be a major characteristic of the age of organization.

But the distinction between the public and private realms as used over the centuries has acquired a peculiar Western connotation, which may be identified as follows: the private realm and the public realm have a common *moral* foundation. Generalized morality in society informs both the private realm and the public realm. That is, what is considered morally wrong in the private realm is also considered morally wrong in the public realm. Similarly, what is considered morally right in the private realm is also considered morally right in the public realm. For centuries, generalized Christian beliefs have provided a common moral fountain for the private and the public realms in Western society. There are anomic exceptions, of course. For instance, the strong appeal of Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* is that it provides a striking case of an exception in which the same morality does not govern the private and the public realms. But this is a case where the exception proves the rule. Banfield's (1958) observation of amoral politics in the southern Italian village has drawn so much attention precisely because it violates the Western norm of politics without reproach.

When one moves across Western society to Africa, at least, one sees that the total extension of the Western conception of politics in terms of a monolithic public realm morally bound to the private realm can only be made at conceptual and theoretical peril. There is a private realm in Africa. But this private realm is differentially associated with the public realm in terms of morality. In fact there are two public realms in post-colonial Africa, with different types of moral linkages to the private realm. At one level is the public realm in which primordial groupings, ties, and sentiments influence and determine the individual's public behavior. I shall call this the primordial public because it is closely identified with primordial groupings, sentiments, and activities, which nevertheless impinge on the public interest. *The primordial public is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm.* On the other hand, there is a public realm which is historically associated with the colonial administration and which has become identified with popular politics in post-colonial Africa. It is based on civil structures: the military, the civil service, the police, etc. Its chief characteristic is that it has no *moral* linkages with the private realm. I shall call this the civic public. *The civic public in Africa is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public.*<sup>1</sup> The most

<sup>1</sup> This distinction borrows from a parent distinction between 'civil' and 'primordial' realms in individual behavior, introduced into sociological analysis by Shils (1957) and popularized and strengthened by Geertz (1963). Ultimately of course, it dates back to Tönnies' classic distinction between association-type *Gesellschaft* and community-type *Geinschaft*.

outstanding characteristic of African politics is that the same political actors simultaneously operate in the primordial and the civic publics. The dialectical relationship between the two publics foments the unique political issues that have come to characterize African politics. The two publics are amenable to observation. But they will gain their full meaning in the context of a theory of African politics. Having identified the two publics, there are two lines of theoretical approach that one can attempt. The first is politico-historical: how did this unique political configuration emerge in Africa? The second is sociological: how does the operation of the publics affect African politics? I shall discuss both theories in this paper.

#### IDEOLOGIES OF LEGITIMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE TWO PUBLICS

Modern African politics are in large measure a product of the colonial experience. Pre-colonial political structures were important in determining the response of various traditional political structures to colonial interference. But the colonial experience itself has had a massive impact on modern Africa. It is to the colonial experience that any valid conceptualization of the unique nature of African politics must look.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, we can still narrow the issue and focus on the two critical bourgeois groups that influenced colonial Africa and continue to influence post-colonial African politics. These are the cadre of colonial administrators, mostly drawn from the rising bourgeois class in Europe, and the African bourgeois class born out of the colonial experience itself. It is my contention that the emergence and the structures of the two publics owe their origin first and foremost to these two groups, especially to their ideological formulations intended to legitimate their rule of the ordinary African. This is not to say that the ordinary African had nothing to do with the emergence of the two publics. He was the target of the intellectual workmanship of the two bourgeois groups in their formulation of ideologies.

It is chiefly to emphasize the lack of firm legitimacy on their part that I have used the term 'bourgeois' to characterize these groups. The term connotes the newness of a privileged class which may wield much power, but have little authority; which may have a lot of economic influence, but enjoy little political acceptance. I have not, unlike Hodgkin (1956), preferred the term middle class because it connotes (a) that those thus referred to have established value linkages with the other layers of their society, and (b) that the class thus referred to occupies a middle layer in a social stratification system. In my view, the European colonial rulers

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ekeh (1972:93): 'Colonialism is to Africa what feudalism is to Europe. They form the historical background from which Africa and Europe advance to modernity. As such, they have determined the peculiar characteristics of modernity in each of these areas.'

of Africa and their African successors in the post-colonial period do not fit readily into the same social stratification system with other segments of the societies they ruled and now rule. The African bourgeois class especially does not have an upper class, an aristocracy, over and above it, although it does have a defeated traditional aristocracy whose bases of power have been weakened by the importation of foreign techniques of governance. Nor have I used the term African 'elites' because it connotes to me a class of men who enjoy autonomy in the formation of their values and in their decision-making processes, independent of external sources. The emergent ruling class in Africa clearly lacks such autonomy.

Because of the repeated use of the term 'ideologies' in this essay, it would seem fair to the reader to explain as clearly as possible the use of the term, and the context of that use. By 'ideologies' I refer to unconscious distortions or perversions of truth by intellectuals in advancing points of view that favor or benefit the interests of particular groups for which the intellectuals act as spokesmen. That is, ideologies are interest-begotten theories. The invention of aesthetically appealing interest-begotten theories, or ideologies, that detract from scientific truth is, as Werner Stark (1958) has emphasized, different from socially determined thought in which the writer's cultural world view and his more immediate social background condition and define his perception of social reality. It is when bias in favor of an identifiable group is introduced into theories that I refer to them as ideologies. Needless to add, this specialized usage leans on a tradition of the conceptualization of ideology as an abnormal element in social theory construction—so fully expounded by Werner Stark (1958)—rather than on Mannheim's broad view of ideologies as constituting essential elements in social theories.

My view of ideologies does not then imply a Marxist or Paretean assumption of pan-ideologism—that is, the assertion that all ideas and theories in society are biased in favor of either the ruling class or the emerging class. My position does imply that the particular groups that benefit from ideological distortions of truth must be identified in any analysis that claims perversion and abuse of scientific truth. My assumption—that is, the unexamined hypothesis in this analysis—is that ideological distortions and abuse of truth usually indicate a degree of insecurity on the part of the group promoting such ideologies. This is the case with the European bourgeoisie, not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, but also in the colonial administration of Africa. A sense of insecurity also dominates the emergent African bourgeoisie.

The European bourgeois class of course has a well known history in domestic European economic and political life. Not so well known is its influence in the European expansion to Africa. Although the history of the 'scramble' for Africa is filled with the names of nobility, the motive

force of the expansion must ultimately be traced to the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe:

The central inner-European event of the imperialist period [between 1884 and 1914 and ending with the scramble for Africa] was the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, which up to then had been the first class in history to achieve economic pre-eminence without aspiring to political rule. The bourgeoisie had developed within, and together with the nation-state (Arendt, 1951:123).

Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant growth, it had to impose this law upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be an ultimate political goal of foreign policy (Arendt, 1951:126).

In large part, the European expansion to, and colonization of, Africa must be seen as a result of the bourgeois attempt to acquire political power, via colonization, that would be commensurate with, and further consolidate, its economic power at home.<sup>3</sup> Arendt (1951:133) was pointing to an important matter in colonization when she remarked that 'The conflict between the representatives of the imperial "factor" [i.e., the home government] and the colonial administrators [largely recruited from the ranks of the bourgeoisie] runs like a red thread through the history of British imperialism.' As Hobson (1902:46) so bitterly complained, 'Although the new Imperialism has been bad business for the nation, it has been good business for certain classes and certain trades within the nation.' The British bourgeoisie, like some other European bourgeois classes, who gained the most from expansion and colonization, attempted to justify such imperial expansion as being beneficial to all the colonizing nations and to every taxpayer in them. I call the theories that emerged from such rationalization and justifications addressed to the taxpayers and citizens of the colonizing nations *imperial ideologies*.<sup>4</sup> Although they constitute an important area that must be examined in any intellectual history of colonialism in Africa, I shall not deal directly with such imperial ideologies in this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, the bourgeois influence varied a great deal from nation to nation in internal European politics. It was more significant in France and England than in Germany and Portugal (cf., e.g., Moore, 1966). There is a possibility that the different colonial policies in Africa—e.g., as between the Germans and the Portuguese on the one hand and the British and the French on the other—reflected the varied domestic influence of the bourgeois class in European national politics. My characterization of the bourgeois class seems truer of the English and French cases than of the Portuguese and German bourgeoisie.

<sup>4</sup> Such imperial ideologies include the moral appeal to Europeans in terms of 'the white man's burden' and the fanciful flattery to Europeans that there were 'noble savages' somewhere in the non-European world that could imitate them. For good sources of such imperial ideologies see Arendt (1951) and Curtin (1964). European nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature is suffused with imperial ideologies. In English, the works of Rudyard Kipling and Rider Haggard are especially effective in upholding the moral superiority of Europeans, especially Englishmen, and the evangelical call for imperial expansion. In the academic sphere, Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*, depicting Africans as naturally dependent and Europeans as naturally dominant, remains one of the most subtle examples of these imperial ideologies dressed up in academic 'objectivity'.

The European bourgeois colonizers of Africa were also confronted with formidable problems in their conquest and rule. Although their superior technology plus the fact that African political life had been softened by the slave trade that ravaged the continent in the previous three centuries facilitated their conquest, the successful colonization of Africa was achieved more by the colonizers' ideological justification of their rule than by the sheer brutality of arms. I shall call the ideologies invented by the colonizing Europeans to persuade Africans that colonization was in the interest of Africans *colonial ideologies*. The impact of these colonial ideologies on the emergence of the two publics in Africa is of major concern for me in this essay.

In the course of colonization a new bourgeois class emerged in Africa composed of Africans who acquired Western education in the hands of the colonizers, and their missionary collaborators, and who accordingly were the most exposed to European colonial ideologies of all groups of Africans. In many ways the drama of colonialism is the history of the clash between the European colonizers and this emergent bourgeois class. Although native to Africa, the African bourgeois class depends on colonialism for its legitimacy. It accepts the principles implicit in colonialism but it rejects the foreign personnel that ruled Africa. It claims to be competent enough to rule, but it has no traditional legitimacy. In order to *replace* the colonizers and rule its own people it has invented a number of interest-begotten theories to justify that rule. I shall call the ideologies advanced by this new emergent bourgeois class in Africa *African bourgeois ideologies of legitimation*. Their impact on the development of the two publics in Africa is also of major concern for me in this essay.

### *Colonial Ideologies of Legitimation*

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European colonization of Africa owes a measure of its effectiveness to the ideological justifications of the efforts of the colonizers. The more successful colonizers, particularly the British and the French, attempted to create ideologies that not only backhandedly justified their penetration into Africa but also justified to their fellow countrymen their continuing actions. In addition, and more to our point here, they also tried to persuade Africans to accept European rule as beneficial. These latter attempts aimed at colonized Africans are what I have called *colonial ideologies*. They were wrought jointly by the colonial administrators and their close collaborators in the colonial enterprise, the Christian missionaries.<sup>5</sup> What were the ideologies invoked by the colonizers to legitimate their rule of Africa?

<sup>5</sup> For a dramatic case history of Christian missionary involvement in colonization see Padmore's (1949:70–73) discussion of the religious wars between the *Ba-Ingleza* (English) and the *Ba-Fransa* (French) parties in Uganda. For a well-argued sympathetic interpretation of the role of Christian missionaries see Neill (1966).

*The backwardness of the African past.* One of the most successful ideologies used to explain the necessity of colonial rule was the heavy emphasis placed on what was described as a backward ahistorical past. Africans, according to this view, should be ashamed of their past; the only important thing is in the present. Missionaries openly told Africans that ancestor-worship was bad and they should cut themselves loose from their 'evil' past and embrace the present in the new symbolisms of Christianity and Western culture. Indeed, Africans were virtually told that the colonizers and missionaries came to save them, sometimes in spite of themselves, from their past.

The point of emphasis here of course is the ideological distortion of what is after all a partially correct observation, namely that Africa was and is, in many ways, backward. 'Nowhere', Warner Stark (1958:50) once warned, 'are [ideological influences] more dangerous than where they make use of, and abuse, undeniable scientific truths.' That abuse is what is at issue here. It consisted of defaming the African past—including important city-state civilizations—and exaggerating the achievement of the African present. Africans who were 'Western' educated—and they mattered in the colonial situations in Africa—were sharply differentiated from the 'natives' on the principle that the former were those of the 'Europeanized' present and the natives belonged to the backward past.

*The lack of contributions by Africans to the building of Africa.* A related ideological weapon employed by the colonial administrators in emphasizing the necessity of their rule in Africa consisted of downgrading the contribution by Africans to the building of African nations and to history generally. History is to a large extent the selective emphasis of events from a national point of view. Americans talk a great deal about their relations to England; but it would be a rare American teacher or writer who says that England built or founded the U.S. In colonial, and even in post-colonial, Africa, the emphasis on contributions made by the colonizers to the building of Africa is extravagantly presented in favor of colonialism. The essence of colonial history is the demonstration of the massive importance of the European 'intervention' in Africa and of the 'fact' that African contributions to the building of Africa have relevance only when seen in the context of a wider and more significant contribution of the European colonizers. Every schoolboy in colonial Africa, and many in post-colonial Africa, read in history books that Africa and especially its important landmarks and waterways were 'discovered' by European explorers. The mental outlook here is important. To say that River Niger or Kano was discovered by European explorers is to invite the African to see his own people from the point of view of the European. Many Western educated Africans took this point of view. As Jahoda (1961:115) puts it, the Western educated African



'now comes to look at Africans and African culture to some extent through the eyes of those European educators who determined the manner and content of the teaching he received'.

Again, of course, it enhanced the legitimacy of Europeans to downgrade African contributions to the building of Africa and hence to make the European colonizer a benevolent ruler who graciously filled a void and brought Africa 'into light and history'. The most effective vehicle here is the teaching of colonial history, although the very use of the language of the colonizers as the medium of education has much the same effect of legitimating foreign rule. Mungo Park, an adventurer, becomes a 'discoverer' in colonial history taught in British colonized nations.<sup>6</sup> A rather sensitive African historian once complained that Bishop Ajayi-Crowther's—the first Nigerian bishop's—contribution to the documentation of history was underrepresented: 'Crowther's narrative is an important document on the early stages of the Yoruba Wars of the nineteenth century. It is in fact surprising that while so much has been made of the accounts of the journeys of Clapperton and Lander through western Yoruba, so little attention has been paid to this account of a journey through the central part in 1821–22' (Ajayi, 1967:291). Professor Ajayi would be less surprised if he recognized that history is in large part the selective biography of nations, not an 'objective' interpretation of *all* documents. Certainly colonial history as taught in African schools and universities had a primary purpose: to legitimate the European colonial rule of Africa.

*Inter-tribal feuds.* Ideological distortions also exist in the characterization of political life in pre-colonial Africa. 'Tribe against tribe' is the common theme in colonial accounts of African struggles. 'Inter-tribal', rather than 'intra-tribal', struggles are given the accent in interpretations of African political strife. It is only recently that African historians like Ajayi (Ajayi and Smith, 1964) and Dike (1956) have pointed to the scope and even the significance of 'intra-tribal' struggles in Africa. By carefully emphasizing 'inter-tribal' disharmonies in pre-colonial Africa, European colonial administrators had two things to gain at once. First, the principle of *divide et impera* was effectively employed to create disharmony between groups in the colonial situation, a strategy especially apparent in the declining days of colonialism in virtually every African nation; second, it gave the colonial administrators the image of benevolent interveners, who came to Africa *because* they wanted to establish order.

*Benefits of European colonial rule.* The argument that European rule brought benefits is the common justification for the presence of Europeans in Africa, from the Portuguese rape of Angola to the godfather image of

<sup>6</sup> It is not an insignificant matter that French colonized Africans knew nothing of these British explorers and that British colonized Africans were unaware of the French 'explorers'.



the French in the Ivory Coast. But it is significant that little is ever said in the same context about the disadvantages of European colonial and missionary activities in Africa. There are indeed benefits deriving from colonial rule. But it may well be the case that in the long run the crushing psychological and social implications of colonialism have disadvantages that far outweigh the heralded advantages. (It is often unnoticed, for instance, that the only non-Western nations to have successfully modernized—Japan and China—are those that have not been colonized. Is it an accident that all Asian and African nations formerly colonized by Europeans have a uniform history of failure in attempts to modernize?)

*The administrative cost of colonization to Europeans.* One of the most pronounced examples of double-talk in colonization (and one suspects here that what was involved was a deliberate lie rather than an unconscious ideological misrepresentation of truth) is with respect to the accounting of the cost, financial and otherwise, of colonization. While the cost was de-emphasized to the 'imperial factor' (i.e., the government) and the taxpayers in the colonizers' home countries, it was clearly exaggerated in the colonial situation. The financial benefits that the colonized nations derived from the colonizing nations were shown to outweigh the wealth that might have been taken out of the colonies. Indeed, colonial accounts were always presented in ways that showed that goods and produce in the colonies were 'bought' at good prices, when in fact the colonial market was monopolistic. On the whole the colonized were led to believe that they gained a great deal, and that they gave very little in return, in the colonial arrangement. As I shall emphasize later, when interpreted in the idiom of this essay, this posture amounts to an undue emphasis on rights and an undue de-emphasis on duties. Indeed, this ideological distortion invariably led to an exaggeration of the riches in Europe in the view of many Africans.

*Native vs. Westernized.* Standing somewhat apart from the rest, but central to the ideological promotion of the legitimacy of the colonizers in Africa, is the pervasive emphasis on the distinction between 'natives' (that is Africans who have no Western education) and Western educated Africans. Most colonized Africans had the perception of the European as a man blessed with much, who did nothing much more than acquire literary education to earn such luxury. To become a Western educated African in the colonial situation was for many an avenue for escaping hard work. Hard work was meant for the 'natives'. At least it was believed that the European, having acquired an adequate education, could not work with his hands. To send one's son to school was to hope that he would escape the boredom of hard work (cf. Jahoda, 1961: 78).

Many of these perceptions of Europeans and of Western education

were encouraged by the European colonial administrators and missionaries themselves. They were in part promoted to preserve the aura of charisma which formed the basis of legitimacy for European rule. A supreme strategy of colonial administrators was to separate 'native' from Western institutions and define the 'native' in terms of what is low (cf. Arendt, 1951:131). This condescending distinction between Westernized and 'native' sectors gained maximum expression of course in the doctrine of indirect rule. But the Western educated African did not completely escape the 'native' sector. Indeed his greatest difficulty was, and remains, the simultaneous adaptation to two mentally contraposing orders. One solution to this problem formulated by the educated African is to define one of these orders in *moral* terms and the other in *amoral* terms. The native sector has become a primordial reservoir of *moral* obligations, a public entity which one works to preserve and benefit. The Westernized sector has become an *amoral* civic public from which one seeks to gain, if possible in order to benefit the *moral* primordial public.

#### *African Bourgeois Ideologies of Legitimation*

The colonial ideologies have had a major impact on Africans. The absence of a strong traditional ethos, for instance in the form of a pan-African religion, made Africans easy targets of these ideologies. But there was considerable variation in the spread of their effects on Africans. The Western educated African was a greater victim of their intensity than the non-literate African. The acceptance of the colonial ideologies in many ways led to the creation by the African bourgeois class of its own ideologies. The purpose behind the colonial ideologies, wrought by colonial administrators and missionaries, was to legitimate an alien domination of Africans; African bourgeois ideologies were formed to achieve two interrelated goals. First, they were intended to serve as weapons to be used by the African bourgeois class for *replacing* the colonial rulers; second, they were intended to serve as mechanisms for legitimating their hold on their own people. Both types of ideologies were largely directed at the African masses. However, in terms of timing, the first set was used during colonialism and was an attack on alien rulers. I shall call this set *anti-colonial ideologies*. The second set of ideologies is more directly related to the issue of legitimation and is involved in post-colonial politics in Africa. Its appearance coincided with the departure of the alien colonial rulers. I shall call these *post-colonial ideologies of legitimation*.

(1) *Anti-colonial Ideologies*. What I call anti-colonial ideologies here refer to the interest-begotten reasons and strategies of the Western educated African bourgeoisie who sought to *replace* the colonial rulers. Anti-colonialism did not in fact mean opposition to the perceived ideals

and principles of Western institutions. On the contrary, a great deal of anti-colonialism was predicated on the manifest acceptance of these ideals and principles, accompanied by the insistence that conformity with them indicated a level of achievement that ought to earn the new educated Africans the right to the leadership of their country. Ultimately, the source of legitimacy for the new African leadership has become alien. Anti-colonialism was against alien colonial personnel but glaringly *pro* foreign ideals and principles.

I shall now discuss some of the ideologies used to justify this form of anti-colonialism:

*African high standards.* In every post-colonial African nation, Western educated Africans, that is the African bourgeoisie, have bent over backwards to show that their standards of education and administration are as good as those of their former colonizers. The point of reference in such demonstrations is to prove that they are the 'equals', but never the betters, of their former rulers. At least if they judge their standards of education and administration not to be as high as those prevailing in the capitals of the former colonizing nations, they rue the fact of their 'low' standards and make attempts to raise them. Nowhere does one come across the statement that the prevailing standards, say, in England are not high enough or too high for the problems in, say, Nigeria. These 'high' standards are invariably defined in terms of the prevailing, that is ordinary, standards in the former colonizing nations.

This ideology of African high standards had its origin in the fight for independence. Most African leaders in the fight for independence boasted to their followers that they were as qualified as the English or the French colonizers; that their rule could be as 'democratic' as that in England or France; that Africans could attain as high a degree of efficiency in bureaucracy as that in Britain or France, etc. In his manner of speaking the English language and of pronouncing English words, the Nigerian 'been-to',<sup>7</sup> for instance, wants to demonstrate to the common man that he is as good as an Englishman in the use of the English language.

There is logic to these over-zealous attempts by the African bourgeois class to prove the equal, but never the better, of the former colonizers. They are a message addressed to the masses that educated Africans have attained the level of the colonizers and therefore can replace them permanently. It is not required to prove oneself the better of the former colonizers to do so, since their behaviors represented the very best in the view of Africans.

<sup>7</sup> 'Been-to' is a Nigerian term used to refer to those who have *been* overseas, usually to England, Europe, and the U.S.A. or Canada, and who overdo their imitation of Western manners. Also cf. Fanon's (1967:17-40) discussion of this issue with respect to French-speaking Africans and West Indians.

Anyone who has studied in a leading university—at Berkeley, Harvard, or Oxford—will have noticed that very little is ever said about high standards. It is the less distinguished institutions that want to appear to be as good *as* Berkeley, Stanford, or the Sorbonne. The same is true of the African bourgeois class. In many ways they are at a considerable disadvantage in attempting to do things *as* Englishmen in what Englishmen do best: speaking the English language. To take the example of the most successful non-Westerners in history, the Japanese do not strive to speak English or French as well *as* an Englishman and an American or *as* a Frenchman. They see themselves as *different* from them. The African bourgeois, born out of the colonial experience, is very uncomfortable with the idea of being *different* from his former colonizers in matters regarding education, administration, or technology. One suspects that he is unconsciously afraid that he may not be qualified to be an effective replacer of the former colonizers. If he does reject an English model, he wants to take an American model; but the point is still that he wants to validate his replacement of the colonizers by accepting the standards of the Americans who were after all potential colonizers in Africa.

*Independence strategies.* The notion, promoted by the African bourgeois class, that Africans had high standards and that educated Africans were as qualified to rule as the former colonizers constituted the principal basis of the claim of the African bourgeois class to gain independence from the alien rulers and thus to rule its own people. The ‘fight’ for independence was thus a struggle for power between the two bourgeois classes involved in the colonization of Africa. The intellectual poverty of the independence movement in Africa flows from this fact, that what was involved was not the issue of differences of ideas regarding moral principles but rather the issue of *which* bourgeois class should rule Africans. The colonizers did resist a great deal by discrediting the African bourgeois class and by creating divisions within it. In the long run, however, it is the African bourgeois class which had the advantage in the struggle by persuading the lay African that it had finally acquired the charismatic qualities with which Western education endowed its recipients.

The struggle entailed a necessary but destructive strategy: sabotage of the administrative efforts of the colonizers. A great deal of the anti-colonial activities by the African bourgeoisie consisted of encouragement to their followers to be late to work, to go on strikes for a variety of reasons,<sup>8</sup> etc. The African who evaded his tax was a hero; the African laborer who beat up his white employer was given extensive coverage in newspapers. In general, the African bourgeois class, in and out of politics,

<sup>8</sup> Thus the Nigerian trade union leader Michael Imoudu became a hero in colonial Nigeria for encouraging strikes against the British, a practice that earned him strong resentment from his former collaborators, now in government, when he repeated it against his own independent nation, with the British gone.

encouraged the common man to shirk his duties to the government or else to define them as burdens; in the same breath he was encouraged to demand his rights. Such strategy, one must repeat, was a necessary sabotage against alien personnel whom the African bourgeois class wanted to replace.

The irony of it all, however, is that the ordinary African took the principles involved in such activities quite seriously. There is clearly a transfer effect from colonialism to post-colonial politics. As should be apparent to anyone who is acquainted with the history of peasants and the ordinary man in other parts of the world, the line of distinction between allegiance to alien rulers and to the new African bourgeois rulers was a thin one in the mind of the lay African. Given the historical context of colonialism in Africa, it is the case that the African bourgeoisie had no basis of legitimacy independent of colonialism. In a sense then, they contributed directly, although unwittingly, to undermining their own legitimacy by encouraging the abrogation of duties and obligations to the colonial government and the demand for rights in excess of the resources available to meet them.

*The promise of independence.* A related strategy in the fight for independence was to raise the hopes and expectations of the ordinary citizen in two different directions. First, and rather forthrightly, the ordinary man was promised increased benefits, benefits that were characterized with extravagance. Second, and less forthrightly but not less impressive in the mind of the ordinary man, was the promise to lower the 'colonial burden' which when translated into other terms means the duties of the common man, taxation for sure. Again it should be pointed out that such promises were generalized to mean that in the colonizing nations—in England, in France—the rights of the ordinary man were abundant while his duties were meager. These promises may have been honestly made in some cases because of the limited experiences of the African bourgeois class; but in many other instances they were made to discredit the alien colonizer, and to win the allegiance of the ordinary man.

(2) *Post-colonial Ideologies of Legitimation.* The African bourgeois class has a precarious foundation. It fought alien rulers on the basis of criteria introduced by them. Moreover, the alien rulers were seasoned fighters, at least judging by the success of the bourgeoisie in Europe, and they were always prepared to use that ancient weapon of 'divide and rule'. In the waning days of colonialism in many African nations two sorts of divisions were created or at least encouraged by the colonizers. The first was deliberately encouraged to undermine the African bourgeois class by reviving tradition as the basis of legitimacy, i.e., by restoring the defeated chiefs and kings to power. At best this was a delaying tactic on the part of the colonizers; the traditional rulers were much too enfeebled

from the pre-colonial and colonial days to survive a struggle with the emergent African bourgeois class. In any case, the colonizers had implanted a new concept of legitimacy in matters relating to the civic public. Traditional kingship and chieftaincy has always been defined in moral terms, and the new attempt by the colonizers to drag it into the muddle of amoral civic public politics was bound to fail. A more serious division was suggested by the colonizers to the African bourgeois class, and it remains the red thread that runs through the whole of post-colonial African politics. It is a division within the bourgeois class along primordial ethnic lines. Both divisions—between the bourgeois and the traditional chiefs and within the bourgeois class itself—have led to two sets of ideologies promoted by the African bourgeois class to legitimate its threatened status in post-colonial politics. They are as follows:

*Education as guarantee of success.* Education is at least as much needed in Africa as anywhere else. But this need has been subverted by the African bourgeois class in a curious way. In many human societies, attaining an educational standard is treated as an *avenue* to success. But in post-colonial Africa, attaining the requisite educational standard, usually phrased in terms of high-sounding university degrees, is now deemed a *guarantee* of success. There is an important difference here. To say that education is an avenue to success is to invite the benefactor of the educational system to *earn* his success by treating his educational achievement as a baseline for advancement. To treat education as a guarantee of success is to invite the benefactor of the educational system to *demand* advancement once he has successfully achieved the requisite standards in education. This latter definition of what education is intended for with respect to the individual recipient is, I suspect, an ideological invention of the Western educated bourgeois class to legitimate its rule, based on colonial education, vis-à-vis the legitimacy of the traditional chiefs. The ‘first-come-first-promoted’ logic in public service and in university professorial politics is a direct consequence of this ideology.

*Ethnic domain-partition ideology.* A fact of life in post-colonial Africa is the emergence of strong primordial ethnic groups in politics. What is interesting about them is that objectively they gained their significance only within the context of the various African nations in which they are implicated. In fact many of them have been created by modern politics. But almost everywhere separate sections of the African bourgeois class have backhandedly attempted to justify them as primordial entities that not only antedate the African nations in which they are implicated but in fact as corporate groups that have always existed. It is in this sphere that the ideology-creating achievements of the emergent African bourgeoisie approach their intellectual heights. While successfully demoting tradition



as a basis of legitimacy in the new Africa and insisting that Western education provides that legitimacy, the African bourgeois class has at the same time divided Africa into domains of influence along traditional lines.

The dimensions of this problem can most profitably be illustrated in the context of Nigerian politics. As we know them today, Nigerian ethnic groups developed their boundaries and even their character only within the context of Nigerian politics. But ideologies and myths do have reality-creating functions, and the corporate character now attributed to the various ethnic groups is the reality that flowed from the ideologies and myths invented by the bourgeoisie to consolidate their parcels of influence in the new Nigeria. No ethnic group existed before Nigeria as a corporate entity with the boundaries now claimed for them and the loyalties now directed at them. What existed before Nigeria were amorphous polities: many were organized around city-states, others in kingdoms and quasi-kingdoms, and yet others with the narrowness of villages with no conceptions of wider political entities within which they were implicated. Even the languages by which some claim to identify the ethnic groups in modern Nigeria (cf. Awolowo, 1966) are to a large extent a product of this domain-partition ideology.

Perhaps we will benefit from our discussions of this domain-partition ideology by referring directly to the two ethnic groups in Nigeria whose political and intellectual leaders are most adept at promoting this ideology. Beginning with the ranks of the 'officers' of the Ibo State Union and Egbe Omo Oduduwa to Ibo and Yoruba professors in Nigerian universities, many resources have been expended in order to *prove* that their ethnic groups have always been identifiable corporate ethnic groups. It was such an ideological assertion by Professor Biobaku (on behalf of the Yoruba bourgeois class) that led the British historian Hodgkin (1957:42) to remark, 'Everyone recognizes that the notion of "being a Nigerian" is a new kind of conception. But it would seem that the notion of "being a Yoruba" is not very much older.' The ideology of corporate Ibo ethnicity has been pushed even more vigorously by the Ibo bourgeois class. B. O. N. Eluwa, for many years the 'General Secretary' of the Ibo Federal (State) Union, told Abernethy (1969:110) that he, apparently among other Ibo bourgeois leaders, toured 'Iboland' from 1947 to 1951 to convince 'Ibo' villagers that they were in fact Ibos. In Eluwa's own words these villagers 'couldn't even imagine all Ibos'. Abernethy adds:

In the 1930's many Aro and Onitsha Ibos consciously rejected identification as Ibos, preferring to think of themselves as separate, superior groups. The very term 'Yoruba' was popularized by Church Missionary Society leaders during the nineteenth century who were anxious to produce a Bible in a uniform language for several city-states that were warring against each other at the time (Abernethy, 1969:110n).



## THE STRUCTURE OF THE TWO PUBLICS

Taken by itself, each of these sets of ideologies of legitimation may amount to little. But taken together, they point up a major characteristic of African politics: the existence of two publics. The structure of modern post-colonial politics in Africa owes a great deal to these two publics that exist side by side and that tend to grow together. I shall now develop the implications of these ideologies further by examining the structure of politics in Africa and by doing so in the idiom of the concept of citizenship. As I shall use it here, its meaning takes as a point of departure T. H. Marshall's (1949) incisive analysis of citizenship in England and Bendix's (1964) subsequent generalization and elaboration of T. H. Marshall's and de Tocqueville's conceptions of citizenship. To put the matter rather directly, these various sources suggest that there are two distinct elements in the concept of citizenship. The individual as a member of a political community has certain *rights* and privileges which he may claim from it. Similarly he has certain *duties* and obligations which he has to perform in the interest of the political community.

The political problems of the age as well as the historical context of politics determine to a large extent the aspects and issues of citizenship that are sorted out for emphasis in a given society. It is thus the case that the conception of citizenship in the West has led to a rich analysis of rights (cf. T. H. Marshall, 1949; Bendix, 1964), whereas scant attention is paid to the analysis of duties. This is because the historical context of politics in the West led to a situation where rights and their resulting egalitarian ideals were problematic issues in the conception of citizenship, while duties were for the most part assumed as given. Similarly, it may be noted that one eminent attribute of citizenship in the West is that the two elements of citizenship are closely associated. That is, rights and duties are conceived in a transactional manner: the demand for rights implies some willingness to perform the concomitant duties, and vice versa.

The historical context of African politics, especially as it emerged from colonialism, has given a different character to African conceptions of citizenship from this Western model. In effect citizenship has acquired a variety of meanings, which depend on whether it is conceived in terms of the primordial public or the civic public.

The primordial public in Africa may indeed be fruitfully seen in terms of the elements of citizenship. The individual sees his duties as *moral* obligations to benefit and sustain a primordial public of which he is a member. While for the most part informal sanctions may exist that compel such obligations from individuals, duties to the primordial public have a moral side to them. The foci of such duties may of course vary

from one setting to another, but in most of Africa they tend to be emergent ethnic groups. Informal taxation in the form of 'voluntary' contributions to ethnic associations and different other types of obligations to help out with ethnically-owned community programs are a prominent feature of modern Africa.

But what is the obverse side of the duties to the primordial public? What are the rights that the African expects from the primordial public in return for his duties to it? It is here that one must be cautious and not assign economic equations to the operation of the primordial public. Although the African gives *materially* as part of his duties to the primordial public, what he gains back is not material. He gains back intangible, immaterial benefits in the form of identity or psychological security. The pressure of modern life takes its toll in intangible ways. The cost of the rapid advance in urbanization and the sudden emergence of several individuals from a rural, non-literate background to as high as the leadership of prestigious departments in the universities and the civil service may not be measured in tangible economic terms. In all of post-colonial Africa, new men with non-literate parents and brothers and sisters—from non-chiefly families ungrounded in the ethics and weight of authority—are emerging to occupy high places. Behind the serenity and elegance of deportment that come with education and high office lie waves of psychic turbulence—not least of which are widespread and growing beliefs in supernatural magical powers. The primordial public is fed from this turbulence. For it is in the primordial public, whether it be narrowly defined as limited to an extended family of some two hundred individuals or, far more likely, to a whole emergent ethnic group ranging from half a million to some ten million people, that gives security to many first-generation educated Africans. The material manifestation of the duties of the educated African to his primordial public may or may not be balanced by the psychic benefits of security, benefits that flow from close association with the primordial public. But the point is, like most moral spheres, the relationship between the individual and his primordial public cannot be exhausted by economic equations. There is more to all moral duties than the material worth of the duties themselves.

The citizenship structure of the civic public is different. Because it is amoral, there is a great deal of emphasis on its economic value. While many Africans bend over backwards to benefit and sustain their primordial publics, they seek to gain from the civic public. Moreover, the individual's relationship with the civic public is measured in material terms—but with a bias. While the individual seeks to gain from the civic public, there is no moral urge on him to give back to the civic public in return for his benefits. Duties, that is, are de-emphasized while rights are squeezed out of the civic public with the amorality of an artful dodger.

These differing stances toward the primordial public and the civic public make sense in the historical perspective of colonialism. The ideologies of legitimation invented alike by the alien colonial rulers of Africa and their African successors have given credence to the myth among the ordinary African that the civic public can never be impoverished. On the other hand, the primordial public is pictured as needful of care—in fact from the civic public.

#### THE DIALECTICS OF THE TWO PUBLICS

Most educated Africans are citizens of two publics in the same society. On the one hand, they belong to a civic public from which they gain materially but to which they give only grudgingly. On the other hand they belong to a primordial public from which they derive little or no material benefits but to which they are expected to give generously and do give materially. To make matters more complicated, their relationship to the primordial public is moral, while that to the civic public is amoral.<sup>9</sup> The dialectical tensions and confrontations between these two publics constitute the uniqueness of modern African politics.

A *good* citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return; a *lucky* citizen of the civic public gains from the civic public but enjoys escaping giving anything in return whenever he can. But such a lucky man would not be a good man were he to channel all his lucky gains to his private purse. He will only continue to be a good man if he channels part of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public. That is the logic of the dialectics. The unwritten law of the dialectics is that it is legitimate to rob the civic public in order to strengthen the primordial public.

The issues which the inevitable confrontation between the two publics foment are varied.<sup>10</sup> I shall limit myself to three areas here:

*Tribalism.* Tribalism is a term used in most of post-colonial Africa to denote animosities between members of different ethnic groups. By its very nature, tribalism is a de-radicalized construct. That is, it is a term that has lost its root. Tribalism emerges only in situations where tribes and tribesmen are vanishing. Tribalism is robust in Lagos, where there are no tribes or tribesmen; it is absent in the most hinterland villages in Nigeria. Tribalism flourishes among professors and students in Nigerian universities (cf. van den Berghe, 1971, 1973), many of whom rarely visit their villages of birth in the interior; it is minimal in the secondary schools in the backwoods of Nigeria. The truth of the matter

<sup>9</sup> The amoral conception of the duties of the government was decried by Okoi Arikpo (1967:112–13) as follows: 'Everybody expects the government to provide modern social amenities—[but]—Few expect the government to provide sound moral leadership.'

<sup>10</sup> For an attempt to explain the Nigerian civil war in these terms see Ekeh (1972).

is that the degree and scope of tribalism in Africa are negatively correlated with the predominance of 'tribal' life.

Needless to say, this is because tribalism emerged from the colonial situation. It is the direct result of the dialectical confrontation between the two publics. Tribalism arises where there is conflict between segments of the African bourgeoisie regarding the proportionate share of the resources of the civic public to differentiated primordial publics. The leaders of the primordial public (who should not be confused with traditional ethnic leadership) want to channel as great a share of these resources from the civic public to individuals who are in the same primordial public as they are—in part, one suspects, because a significant proportion of them will eventually find their way into the coffers of the primordial public.

A fuller meaning of tribalism will emerge from the discussion of a concrete case. It is now commonplace knowledge that tribalism is *the* perennial and undying problem in our universities. Van den Berghe (1971, 1973) is perhaps a unique spokesman in setting forth his observation of this phenomenon, but he is by no means the only foreign visitor to our universities to be struck by it. What is so remarkable here is that tribalism is more prominent in the Federal universities in Nigeria than in the state and regional universities. This is clearly because the civic public is most operative in the Federal universities and comes into most violent confrontation with the primordial public in them. To concentrate on one example: in our Nigerian Universities confrontations continually occur between professors and lecturers from different ethnic groups in matters regarding especially appointments of new members and the promotion of old ones. But there is logic to these conflicts. They are mostly promoted by mediocre Nigerianization<sup>11</sup> professors who seem to feel insecure. Insecurity is in fact the stuff of which tribalism is made. That it involves and indeed hurts more efficient Nigerians is only part of the consequences of tribalism. But eventually it is the civic public that is hurt most deeply: efficiency and quality are sacrificed for expediency and, what is perhaps worse in the long-run, the amorality of the civic public deepens. Such is the source of the plight and restlessness in our universities in Nigeria today. Behind the show-case suavity of professorial pretensions lies the deep havoc wrought by the dialectical tensions between the civic public and the primordial public.

*Voluntary Associations.* If tribalism is an amorphous ism, ethnic 'voluntary' associations are its visible operational arm. Again, voluntary associations emerge in the big urban centers and are nourished in our

<sup>11</sup> It was a deliberate policy at one time in our Federal Universities to 'Nigerianize' top positions by replacing foreigners with Nigerians. Such windfall promotions brought some competent Nigerians into top positions, but they also dragged up some very incompetent Nigerians into key positions.

universities. Like tribalism, they have developed with the civic public and in fact feed on it. That these 'voluntary' associations grow out of urbanization, that they attract well-educated Africans, that indeed they are the invention of the African bourgeois class: these are facts that have been well documented. What has not been fully emphasized, however, is that these associations do not belong to the private realm in the same sense as political sociologists conceive of voluntary associations in the West. They are an integral part of the primordial public. As such they do not complement the civic public; they subtract from it.

The tenacity of voluntary associations in the face of attempts to regulate and even ban them (as was attempted in Nigeria) indicates that they have underlying dynamics. So long as the primordial public survives—and it survives on the insecurity of the African bourgeoisie thrust into unwonted places of authority—so long will voluntary associations retain their strength. In spite of outward appearances the emergent African bourgeoisie lacks 'introspective' strength. Voluntary associations, tied to the primordial public, give a sense of security to those who have not achieved maximum differentiation from societal constraints—those, that is, who have not experienced the 'introspective revolution' that was a feature of the modern age in the West (cf. Weinstein and Platt, 1969).

*Corruption.* The acme of the dialectics is corruption. It arises directly from the amorality of the civic public and the legitimation of the need to seize largesse from the civic public in order to benefit the primordial public. There are two forms of corruption that are associated with the dialectics. The first is what is regarded as embezzlement of funds from the civic public, from the government, to be more specific. The second is the solicitation and acceptance of bribes from individuals seeking services provided by the civic public by those who administer these services. Both carry little moral sanction and may well receive great moral approbation from members of one's primordial public. But contrariwise, these forms of corruption are completely absent in the primordial public. Strange is the Nigerian who demands bribes from individuals or who engages in embezzlement in the performance of his duties to his primordial public. On the other hand, he may risk serious sanctions from members of his own primordial public if he seeks to extend the honesty and integrity with which he performs his duties in the primordial public to his duties in the civic public by employing universalistic criteria of impartiality.

Thanks to the de Tocquevillian skill of one English sojourner in Nigeria who has discussed this issue with limpid richness, we can look at this matter for a moment through the eyes of a foreigner. Wraith contrasts the integrity with which Nigerians handled matters of primordial ethnic character with 'the dragging footsteps and exiguous achievements of the local [government] authorities'. He notes that, while the local

government authorities, with their civic structure, have 'a sad record of muddle, corruption and strife', the 'ethnic unions are handling sums of money comparable to those of many local authorities; that they are spending it constructively, *and that they are handling it honestly*' (italics in original). As Wraith rightly emphasizes, 'To put your fingers in the till of the local authority will not unduly burden your conscience, and people may well think you are a smart fellow and envy you your opportunities. To steal the funds of the union would offend the public conscience and ostracise you from society' (Wraith and Simpkins, 1963: 50).

This differentiated attitude extends to African habits of work. Africans are extremely hard-working in the primordial public, as anyone familiar with the operation of ethnic associations will testify to. The man-hours spent in the service of the primordial public are enormous—but it would be profane to count and emphasize them, such is their moral character. On the other hand, Africans are not hard-working in matters connected with the civic public. At least one does not feel guilty if one wastes one's time in the service of the civic public. The same individual would be terribly embarrassed were he to waste time or make claims for work he has not done in the primordial public. It is not unknown that some individuals treat their duties in the civic public as an opportunity for rest in preparation for their tougher assignments in the primordial realm.

#### CONCLUSION

Modern comparative politics partially emerged with the widening interest of American and European social scientists in modern, especially post-colonial, Africa. The tools of comparative politics inhere in the traditional conception of politics in the West. That by itself seems appropriate. But the tools sometimes appear dull from overuse and cry out for sharpening. Certainly, if we are to capture the spirit of African politics we must seek what is unique in them. I am persuaded that the colonial experience provides that uniqueness. Our post-colonial present has been fashioned by our colonial past. It is that colonial past that has defined for us the spheres of morality that have come to dominate our politics.

Our problems may be partially understood and hopefully solved by the realization that the civic public and the primordial public are rivals, that in fact the civic public is starved of badly needed morality. Of course, 'morality' has an old-fashioned ring about it; but any politics without morality is destructive. And the destructive results of African politics in the post-colonial era owes something to the amorality of the civic public.

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