

The Legacies of the foremost patriots of African nationalism

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Abstract

Following the official sanction for the colonization of Africa, given by the Berlin Conference, Western Nations such as Britain, France, Portugal and Spain scrambled for, and shared, African nations among themselves. Nigeria, for instance, was colonized by Britain. Then in the first half of the twentieth century, it took the bravery of some young Africans who had just returned from their overseas studies to oppose colonialism. They did this by initiating nationalist movements in the various colonized countries of Africa. With time, nationalism became a Pan-African project. Due to the vigorous fight put up by these men, all hitherto colonized African nations are today free from colonialism, albeit that many of them now face internal bondage, in some cases orchestrated by what has been described as neo-colonialism. This work is an exposition of the legacies of the men who dedicated their lives to the liberation of African nations. Some of them, through their works and activities, played major roles in winning independence for their nations. Part of the conclusion of this work is that those who leave legacies for their generation succeed in becoming perpetual contributors to posterity.

Introduction

To start with, who is a patriot? The BBC English dictionary defines a patriot as one who loves one's country and feels very loyal towards it. Similarly, the Oxford advanced learners dictionary defines a patriot as a person who loves his/her country and who is ready to defend it against an enemy. Although the above two definitions are similar, the latter is more apt in the sense in which the word, patriot, is used in this work. This is with reference to the emphasis of readiness to defend one's country against an enemy or any external intruders. The foremost patriots of African nationalism were those young Africans who confronted the colonial masters of African countries.

Another important question here is: what is nationalism? Nationalism as defined by Hans Kohn (1965) as "...a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state. A deep attachment to one's native soil, to local traditions and to which established territorial authority has existed in varying strength throughout history." Historically nationalism was born in the questioning minds of some of the first mission-educated Africans.

At a time, a few Africans ceased to think in terms of merely tribal institutions. They began to think of imitating or of capturing from the inside, Western-type churches and states of a wider than tribal kind. Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, (1967:223) report:

...some of the earliest generation of Africans to receive a secondary education in colonial schools during the inter-war period later went overseas to continue their studies. Those who then went to America made contact with a large progressive modern state which had thrown off European colonialism a hundred and fifty years before. They also made contact with a stream of Negro racial consciousness and political discontent which had grown up in the days of slavery and gained strength after emancipation. Those who went to Europe made contact with socialism and communism.

These foremost patriots of nationalism in Africa dedicated their lives to the liberation of African nations. The essence of history is to serve as a guard for the present and a guide for the future. The reminiscences of the past are crucial for present day decision-making. However, this work was necessitated, not only by the importance of past events to present day decisions, but also by the need to give honour to whom it is due. These men include Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Nelson Mandela of South African, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Patrice Lumumba of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo). Although space would not allow for an elaborate elucidation of the biographies, literary works and the activities of all these great men, an attempt will be made to do a sort of brief exposition of prominent issues in the lives and works of a select few of them. These are: Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Julius Nyerere.

Kwame Nkrumah

Kwame Nkrumah was born on September 21, 1909, and named Francis Nwia-Kofi Ngonloma. He would change not only his name but the course of African history during his lifetime. When he completed the famous Achimota School in Accra, he took courses at the Roman Catholic Seminary, Amisano. Teaching at the Roman Catholic school in the historical Akan state of Akyem, he became enamored with education. Nkrumah by all accounts, was a magnetic teacher, often demonstrating the characteristics that would make him one of history's most charismatic leaders. (Molefi Kete Asante, 2014: 300-301)

Before becoming the president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah had worked tirelessly for the independence of Ghana in particular and the liberation of Africa generally. In fact, while working towards the independence of Ghana, Nkrumah had in his mind the liberation of the entire Africa. This is evident in the note at the back page of his work, *I speak of freedom*: The political independence of Ghana in 1957 became the catalyst of freedom in many other African countries. In the midnight pronouncement of independence 5-6 March 1957, Kwame Nkrumah declared: 'The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of African continent'.

It is of common knowledge that bribery and corruption are among the major vices that have been bedeviling socio-economic growth in many African nations today. Kwame Nkrumah had known about the dangers of bribery and corruption. Hence, while he was the chairman of the Convention People's Party (C.P.P.), he expressed his determination to rid the organization of bribery and corruption, in these words: "I have maintained and I shall continue to maintain that I will fight bribery and corruption whenever I find it. Wherever I find it, I will expose it, even if it is within the Assembly" (Kwame Nkrumah, 1976: 23-24). Nkrumah also played a role

in changing the name of his country from Gold Coast to Ghana. This fact plays out here in his own words:

The Government proposes that when the Gold Coast attains independence, the name of the country should be changed from 'Gold Coast' to the new name of 'Ghana'. The name Ghana is rooted deeply in ancient African history especially in the history of the western portion of Africa known as the Western Sudan. It kindles in the imagination of modern African youth the grandeur and the achievements of a great mediaeval civilization which our ancestors developed many centuries before European penetration and subsequent domination of Africa began (Nkrumah, 1976:67).

In any case, the attainment of independence for Ghana is among the greatest legacies of Nkrumah. He was the first president of Ghana. For him, the achievement of independence was a dream come true. This is evident in his speech on that eventful day:

It is my pleasant task to welcome, on behalf of the Government, the overseas guests who are here today and who have come to celebrate with us our independence. We consider it a great tribute to our country that no less than 36 nations should have sent delegations, many of them led by statesmen of the world renown. It is a great pleasure to us to welcome these delegations because we realize that their presence here is not only a tribute to our country but is a mark of the importance which world opinion attaches to the emergence of an independent state in Africa. (Nkrumah, 1976:95).

Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, died in exile in 1972, six years after his regime was toppled via a military *coup d'etat*. *One of his famous works is his Consciencism*. Nkrumah was a socialist revolutionary philosopher who was very critical of capitalism which, for him, is a refined form of feudalism and feudalism, a refined form of slavery. By Logical inference, capitalism, as far as Nkrumah was concerned, is a refined form of slavery. (Omoregbe, 1990) in Nkrumah's view, originally, men lived in communities and practiced communalism in which case all things, including land and other means of production, were owned by the community. All men worked for the good of the community and had their fair share of the community wealth. Traditional African society was not capitalist but egalitarian and communalistic. But after sometime, some people began to claim ownership of private property, communalism gradually disappeared, while capitalism crept in with the concomitant individualism. Nkrumah admonishes African nations and peoples to go back to communalism and egalitarianism of traditional African society. For him, the developed form of communalism is socialism. Hence, by adopting socialism, Africans would not only be going back to their roots but would also be adopting a developed form of their traditional system. For Nkrumah, conflict, tension, struggle and strife are not only tolerable but are also necessary conditions for social progress (Nkrumah, 1974).

Nnamdi Azikiwe

Zik (as he was popularly called) was born on 16th November 1904 in Zungeru, Niger State. He was born to Onitsha parents, Obedom Chukwuemeka Azikiwe of Ogbeabu village and Rachael Chinwe Azikiwe of Ogboli-Eke village. The young Zik started his elementary education at CMS Central School, Onitsha. Between 1915 and 1918, he attended the Methodist Boys High School, Lagos. In 1919, he became a pupil teacher at St. Jude's CMS Central School, Oraifite, Anambra State. He later became a pupil teacher at CMS Central School, Onitsha. In 1924, Zik enlisted in the Police Force of the then Gold Coast (now Ghana). In 1925, he entered Storer College, Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, USA. In 1927, due to financial

constraints, he changed from Storer College to Howard University. In September, 1929, Zik got admitted into Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, from which he got a Bachelor of Arts degree by June, 1930. In 1930, Zik began to pursue two Master's Degrees – one, in Religion and Philosophy at Lincoln University which he got in June 1932; and the other, in Anthropology (with Political Science as a minor field) at the University of Pennsylvania, which he got in February, 1933. In 1930, while reading for his Master's Degrees, he was employed as a Graduate Assistant at Lincoln University, and in 1933, he got full-time appointment as a lecturer. His PhD dissertation was later published as "Liberia in World Politics." Zik founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944 and became its secretary while Herbert Macaulay was its President. Zik became the first Premier of Eastern Nigeria in 1954 and in 1959 was elected into the Federal House of Representatives. In January 1960, he became the President of the Senate and on October 1, 1960, when Nigeria had her independence, he became the first indigenous Governor-General. He founded the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960 and became the Chancellor and Chairman of its Governing Council until 1966. When Nigeria became a Republic in 1963, Nnamdi Azikiwe became its first president. He founded the Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP) in 1979 and headed it. Zik died on Saturday 11th May, 1996 (Ogene, 1996).

Zik was a socio-political philosopher, a politician and a great orator. He later became the first president of Nigeria. Zik was a 'peace maker' both in practice and in theory. In one of his last books, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism?*, Zik also demonstrated his preference for the 'via media' (that is the way of compromise) as the best way to handle issues. After a critical examination of the existing politico-economic systems - Capitalism, Socialism and Welfarism, Zik observed that each of them has got both good elements and bad elements. He therefore stated that the best thing to do is to eliminate all the bad elements in these systems, and then to harmonize the good elements in them. The outcome of this harmonization process is what Zik referred to as Neo-Welfarism.

A capitalist society is one in which the major means of production are owned and controlled by individuals. The proponents of capitalism hold that it encourages competition which brings about an increase in the quantity and quality of goods and services. They also claim that capitalism is more in keeping with human nature. The major criticism against capitalism, however, is that it encourages exploitation and brings about a situation where the poor get poorer and the rich, richer (Azikiwe, 1979).

Socialism is the belief that the state should own industries on behalf of the people and that everyone should be equal. A socialist state, therefore, is one in which the major means of production are owned and controlled by the state. The advocates of socialism contend that it aims at controlling the means of production and distribution to secure freedom and justice for the individual and to eliminate social inequality, which is the root of poverty. Critics of socialism, however, contend that the state is generally inefficient in the management of business, and that socialism is opposed to human nature (Azikiwe, 1979).

Communism is a system in which the state controls the means of producing everything on behalf of the people, and where there is no ownership of private property. In Zik's work, he mixes up socialism and communism. However, he rejects the prohibition of private property in these systems. A welfarist state, according to Zik, is one which prescribes minimum standards of living and provides equal opportunities in education, health, housing, rehabilitation, etc. Such a state tries to bring the greatest good to the greatest number of its citizens through the provision of essential services almost free of charge. Zik commended the goal of welfarism, but warned that its failure could arise from the provision of these essential services being free of charge. Naturally, there will be a mad rush for them because man, by nature, wants free things. According to Zik, 'Any social service which is free is bound to be inundated with drop-outs, idlers and adventurers, apart from the genuine sector of the population concerned (Azikiwe, 1979)'. Even when government tries to meet up with the increase in demand, the demand will

keep escalating both in quantity and in quality. The situation will eventually become uncontrollable and that will, according to Zik, 'bring us back to square one' (Azikiwe, 1979).

Every one of the political systems discussed above contains both desirable and undesirable elements. Zik, therefore, proposes that we neglect the undesirable elements and try a harmonization of all the desirable elements in capitalism, socialism and welfarism. The result of this 'eclectic harmonization of opposites' would be called "neo-welfarism" (i.e. new welfarism). Zik holds that the traditional Nigerian political system was actually a combination of capitalism and socialism. He is therefore optimistic that since our ancestors had practiced a combination of capitalism and socialism and it worked for them, that neo-welfarism is practicable. All that needs be done is to update it to fit into the complexities of contemporary society. A neo-welfarist society will contain ingredients of capitalism, socialism and welfarism, "but it will not be capitalist; it will not be socialist, and it will not be welfarist. Rather it will be a harmony of opposites atop of our 'external family system' to further the frontiers of state responsibility for the welfare of all its citizens". (Azikiwe, 1979)

Julius Nyerere

Julius Nyerere was born on April 13, 1922. His father, Mzee Burito, was a sub-king of the Zanaki. When Nyerere was born, the country was called Tanganyika and it was under the British, who had managed to wrest it from the Germans during the First World War. He was a born teacher. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed that one answer for the development of Africa was the education of the masses. When Nyerere went off to study economics at the University of Edinburgh, the community expected great things. Upon his return to Tanganyika, he joined politics. Tanganyika achieved independence in 1961 and Nyerere became prime minister. When the government merged with Zanzibar to form the new state of Tanzania, Nyerere was elected the first president of Tanzania. Soon after coming into power, Nyerere implemented a socialist agenda. He sought closer ties to the Chinese than to the Russians, Americans or British. (Molefi Kete Asante, 2014: 306)

Nyerere based his Ujamaa philosophy on the communalism of traditional African society. Nyerere agrees with Nkrumah and Senghor that capitalism and the concomitant individualism are alien to Africa, and that traditional African society is communalistic. Communalism is the authentic African Socialism which, according to Nyerere, is based on *Ujamaa* (meaning *familyhood*). The familyhood in question is not meant to be limited to the confines of the extended family; but it is one that extends to the tribe, to the whole country, the whole of Africa and the whole human race. It is on this *Ujamaa* that African socialism has to be built (Nyerere, 1970).

Nyerere imagined a society made up of small family units, which co-operated and collaborated amongst themselves. The society will be devoid of the exploitation of man by man, individualism, the capitalist spirit of wealth acquisition, class struggle and conflict. There will be equality and everyone will be ready to work for the good of the community. Even the rulers will identify with the people and work with them. It is in such a society that the individual feels liberated, and for Nyerere, liberation is an essential ingredient of development. In fact, he equates liberation with development; and this can only be achieved in a communalistic society founded on *Ujamaa*.

Leopold Sedar Senghor

Leopold Sedar Senghor was born in 1906 in Joal-la-Portugaise, a small fishing village about 70 miles south of Dakar. His father, a wealthy merchant, was of noble descent among the Serere. His mother was Peul, and he was proud of his heritage, combining two of the many groups of Senegal in his heritage. The first seven years of his life Senghor spent in Djilor with his mother and maternal uncles and aunts, learning many of the traditions and customs of the Peul. At the age of 12, he attended the Catholic Mission School of Ngazobil, where he excelled

in literature. He also studied at the Libermann Seminary and Lycee Van Vollenhoven, completing secondary education in 1928. He won a scholarship and was sent to Paris to attend the Lycee Louis-le-Grand in 1931. He created the idea of Negritude, which has received international attention. He obtained the aggregation degree in grammar in 1935 and in 1944 appointed a professor of African languages. When Senegal joined with Sudanese Republic to form the Federation of Mali, Senghor became president of the Federal assembly. In August 1960, Senegal separated from the federation and Senghor was elected its first president. Senghor was a great teacher, writer and poet. His poems, written in French, have been translated into several languages: Spanish, English, German, Russian, Swedish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and others. Like Nyerere before him, Senghor demonstrated that not all of the independence presidents wanted to be presidents for life. He died in France, on December 20, 2001. (Molefi Kete Asanta, 2014:308-309)

Senghor's philosophy of Negritude is best seen against the background of the French colonial policy of assimilation. The French people aimed at assimilating Africans into the French culture and citizenship, expecting Africans to consider this an honour and a great opportunity to become better human beings. But Senghor, in his philosophy of Negritude, rejected the French policy of assimilation, asserting the value of the African culture and identity. Africans have their own culture, values and identity which are peculiar to them and distinct from the culture, values and identity of Europeans (Senghor, 1975). Like Nkrumah, Senghor rejects the capitalism and individualism of the west and maintains that the African way of life is communalistic. Negritude is, therefore, a philosophy of cultural restoration or cultural reawakening. It is a philosophy of emancipation aimed at giving Africans a sense of pride and dignity as Africans. Suffice it to say that negritude is a philosophy which sees goodness in anything black. Such statements as 'Black is beautiful' and 'Am black and proud' would readily fit into Senghor's Negritude.

Conclusion

The greatest good a man can do for his country is to defend it against external aggression. Therefore, the greatest legacy that these patriots left behind is Independence for Africa. Other great legacies which they left behind are their scholarly works which have remained great points of reference for many leaders and scholars - Africans and non-Africans. The legacies of the foremost patriots of African nationalism are numerous and the greatest reward Africans and African leaders should give to these patriots would be to ensure that the African identity is not lost. Another way to appreciate the great sacrifices of these patriots would be to keep the African spirit burning, by retaining African unity. Hence, the xenophobic crises in South Africa and other such crisis should be addressed as they contradict the spirit of pan-Africanism to which the foremost patriots of African nationalism were committed. Those who leave legacies for their generation succeed in becoming perpetual contributors to posterity.

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