

# Nationalism and decolonization in africa



A scholar, a journalist and a political activist, Basil Davidson has made exceptional contribution to the development of modern African history. His books have been widely recognized due to their scientific reliability and forceful presentation related to the most problematic aspects of African history, notable the relationship of the past to the present. His book, “Modern Africa: A Social and Political History” presents a review of the political and social history of Africa in the twentieth century, from the colonial era through the liberalization movements to independence and beyond.

He believes that Africa’s economic, sociopolitical and environmental development is a product of its historical experiences and interaction between local and global forces. But according to Saul Dubow (1995) this book offers a mixture of political analysis, historical surveys and personal opinions but does not cohere in a convincing fashion. In his book Davidson demolishes the assumption of Africa’s inherent primitivism, pervasive in the Western imagination and proves that indigenous democracy did exist in Africa before colonialism.

He provides compelling narratives contending that colonialism was not just the expropriation of African land, but massive exploitation of Africans and violent assault on African communities and colonial atrocities that many historians prefer to gloss over. Davidson also analyses and anticipates the future political developments and sociopolitical developments in appropriate context of global history. He reflects his views on African colonial history during the interwar period and unfolds the crisis of postcolonial era.

Thus as a result of two world wars, major economic and technological advances, the great depression and the political turmoil in other regions under colonial control, all provided the impetus for decolonization in African colonies. Decolonization According to Lipset, "... of equalitarian values holds out hopes for the rest of the world. For prosperity, freedom and equality cannot be for white men only. If they are, then they will prove to have been as illusory and impermanent as the slave-based democracies of ancient Greece." (1967, p. 395. )

Since colonialism was justified by racism and superiority of the whites over the blacks, the African culture and innovation was systematically debased. The democratization project in Africa has not been faced with any sense of consistency by the industrialized countries of the West. While the European colonial rule tried to stifle the indigenous democracies in Africa, the decolonization process and neocolonialism called for democratization despite the West supporting African dictators during the Cold War conflict.

Similarly, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the tensions of the Cold War and the new era of globalization, gave new impetus to democracy and democratization. As postwar pressures in Africa and the aftermath of war in Europe, made the European powers became aware of the need to democratize their African colonies. Thus they began to forge a new type of relationship that would help them maintain their influence in Africa, in the event of actual independence.

According to Basil Davidson this became know as neocolonialism, " a many sided attempt by outside powers to tie the new nations closely to the interests and needs of those outside powers" (1994, p. 197). This new

influence or control called for political and socioeconomic transformation of the colonized people and in accordance with the colonizers. Africa, although hardly a major actor in world politics, has been largely affected by the ambitions and interests of external powers. The ideological interests of the West during and after the era of decolonization promoted efforts for democracy in Africa between 1945 and 1990.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, diminished the value of Africa and transformed the African states of Cold War pawns into irrelevant international clutter. And despite the breakdowns and disappointments which hampered the early successes of the post-colonial era, it shows how much the country has achieved since decolonization. Nationalism In the historical context, nationalism in colonial Africa was seldom an independent variable but rather a form through which a variety of interests, aspirations and responses were expressed.

Thus it meant different things to different people and that there was some sort of experience or sentiment generally referred to as nationalism, national liberation movements and social movements in colonial Africa. With greater information and rising expectations, the radical nationalist started mass oppositions against colonial rule. They insisted upon independence and mobilized social organizations such as ethnic unions, progressive associations, labor unions, religious groups and professional associations against colonialism.

Consequently the popular discontent against European colonial authorities, nationalism as an anti-colonial doctrine grew in magnitude, but proved

inadequate due to ethnic and deep social divisions, following the attainment of political independence in the 1960's. "Nationalism" in its diverse significations has proved to a notoriously difficult issue to analyze, let alone to pin it down. In contrast to the deep influence that the anti-colonial nationalism has exerted on the history of African modernity, plausible analysis on this historical phenomenon, encompassing its spatial and temporal diversity seem meager.

Nationalism therefore, means African role in freeing itself from formal colonialism through a variety of responses to it in the context of "imperialism," to provide a historical, political and cultural workings of imperial and colonial power and their impact in shaping the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. It also evaluates related historical development within Africa, which helped shape the diverse form of resistance in Africa along with its successes and failures.

Conclusion Thus inherent in pre-colonial Africa were democratic values and mechanisms disrupted by European colonization, while it is assumed by Western writers that Africans were helpless bystanders in the face of impetus democratization. Whereas, it was the Africans themselves who initiated much of the political demands and reforms in the 1990's in response to both local and global phenomena. Davidson believes that for a more viable and sustainable solution of democracy and democratization in the continent, there should be new workable syntheses that derives firmly from the African past, yet fully accepts the challenges of the African present.