

BOOK REVIEW**GUY MARTIN'S AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT.**

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The contention that the bulk of what Africa parades today in terms of scholarship was completely a heritage from their colonial encounter has lingered. In fact, some scholars of the European origin such as Seligman (1930), Hegel (1956), Trevor-Roper (1963), Sabine and Thomson (1973) etc. maintain that Africa's history and civilization begins and ends with the history of the Europeans.

Trevor-Roper in Iheduwa (2018) bluntly asserts that "Africa had no history prior to European exploration and colonization, that there is only the history of Europeans in Africa, the rest being darkness". Trevor-Roper's ultimate goal was to convince his readers that hundreds of thousands of years prior to her encounter with the colonialists, Africa was a land of inactivity, occupied by a people with no form of organization and leadership, without any form of cultural, political, agricultural and commercial activities. To Hegel (1956: 99), while the rest of the world was making history and recreating themselves, "Africa was no historical part of the world; it had no movement or development to exhibit". Europeans' conception of Africans as a 'race' incapable of identifying and resolving any of their societal challenges without their assistance strongly suggests that African natives have no autochthonous political thought prior to her colonial encounter.

However, the above skewed conception of the rich African heritage by the Europeans have generated series of reactions among notable African scholars such as Fanon (1967), Rodney (1972), Ake (1983), Afigbo (1984), Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011), Martin (2012) etc. While Fanon (1967) avers that the Europeans through cultural imperialism destroyed African heritage by portraying it as most undeserving evil and forcefully integrating the natives into the Western socio-cultural systems which resulted in the psychic-alienation of the natives; Afigbo (1984) contends that the Europeans tactfully took the paucity of written documents to mean that Africa had no history and exploited same to distort obvious facts.

Ihediwa (2018) also decried what he termed the “use of Periodization of History” by European scholars to create information blackout vis-à-vis African history and thought system. The above substantiates the earlier assertion by Ake (1982) that indeed “the bulk of Western Social Science scholarship on Africa, with the exception of the Marxist tradition, amount to imperialism”. Efforts have also been made by some African political theorists such as Onyewuenyi (1994) and Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011) among others, to prove beyond reasonable doubt that contrary to the skewed accounts of Western scholars, what is today known as Classical Political Thought originated among the Ethio-Egyptians. In line with the foregoing, Martin, Guy (2012), in his efforts to bridge this gap in literature with emphasis on periodization, thematically assembled the original ideas, values as well as aspirations of some notable African scholars and statesmen in one book ‘African Political Thought’ which is the subject of this review.

The eight chapter book ‘African Political Thought’ was written by one of the foremost contemporary African political theorists- Guy Martin and was first published in 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan United States. African Political Thought being a relatively new field of study that emerged from other (mostly Western) systems of thoughts in the late 1960s and being mostly neglected field, has suffered paucity of literature over the years.

This book therefore represents one of the very first attempts to thematically harmonize the original ideas, values and blueprints of various notable African scholars and statesmen, hidden in their respective speeches, autobiographies, writings as well as their policy statements. These ideas, values and blueprints autochthonous to Africa were various attempts by the articulate sections of the African societies to provide practical solutions to the political, economic, social and cultural problems of their time.

By the way of introduction, the author distinguished between the African political thought developed during the so-called golden age of African history which refers to the governance of ancient kingdoms and empires and the thoughts which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The former was termed ‘Indigenous African Political Thought’ because the thought system focused on the indigenous African political system while the later was termed Modern African Political Thought probably because the thoughts emerged during the era of decolonization and independence in Africa. This distinction becomes too vague because not all autochthonous African political thoughts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were pro-modern African political systems and institutions. This owes to the fact that some of the African leaders and indeed scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries were at some points immersed in the thought of returning Africa to her original indigenous political systems and institutions prior to her colonial distortions. However, the author in an effort to circumnavigate through such error emanating from his distinction should have conspicuously periodized African political thought thus: From cradle to 19th century and from 20th century till date.

Chapter one of this book stressed on the political ideology of indigenous African political systems and institutions from antiquity to the nineteenth century. The author notes that there existed highly

advanced and sophisticated civilizations, cultures, societies and states which emanated from the original Africans between 9th and 19th centuries and very traceable to the ancient Egypt, Kush, Nubia, Axum, Ghana, Mali, and Asante. These political systems and institutions were traditionally organized on the basis of ancestry (kinship and lineage) where leaders were chosen on the basis of age, maturity and relations to ancestors. Mostly, the leader lacked absolute power being surrounded by the elders in council who acted as effective checks on the powers of the leader to avoid abuses. The village Assembly remained the most important as well as the basic political unit where major decisions were taken on the basis of majority rule.

The leader was the political head as well as the religious head and as such represented a link between the living and the dead; that is a link between the present, the past and the future. The author narrated how checks and balances were placed on both the political, legal and religious powers of leaders in the ancient African political societies such as the Asante society of Ghana. Citing the reign of four women Pharaohs in the ancient Egypt, the book noted that women occupied a special position in the ancient African political system and in some cases were more powerfully revered than men.

Chapter two of this book centered on the influence of Islamic values and ideas exerted on the indigenous African political systems and institutions between 7th and 15th centuries, being an assimilative religion. The conquest of Egypt by Arabian merchants led to the Islamization of North Africa and the injection of the Islamic form of governance (Caliphate system) into the African political system. Islamic religion which originated in the commercial society of Mecca provided a set of ethical and practical rules closely related to business activities. However, with the exception of North African which became Islamized by conquest, every other region in Africa became Islamized through peaceful penetration by Islamic merchants and missionaries. The author noted that Islam as a religion and way of life was one of the fundamental aspects of African civilization.

Chapter three captioned ‘ African Theories and Ideologies of Westernization, Modernization and Liberal Democracy from Early West African Nationalism to Humanism’ focused first on the overview of the European image of Africa around 16th century as the dark continent, harboring highly primitive and backward people. The author agreed that branding Africa as a continent engulfed in darkness and evil and in dire need of light as well as humanitarian assistance was a mere guise to rid the continent of her numerous human and natural resources for the maximum economic profit of the metropolis. The chapter also highlighted some of the efforts made by Africans to reclaim Africa from then Europeans such as Edward Wilmot Blyden’s (1832-1912) political thought (African Personality and African Regeneration).

James Africanus Beale Horton (1835-1883), the father of modern African Political thought came up with the idea of African Nationality. In his thoughts on African civilization, national development and independence, he argued that Africa, having been opened to the western society, should develop along European lines, utilizing Western education, science and technology- an idea later opposed by Claude Ake (1982) in his ‘ Social Science as Imperialism’ as well as Walter Rodney. For Rodney (1972) “African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system...the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa...”.

The likes of Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita and other Pan-Africanists advocated for radical as well as absolute cultural (Negritude), political and economic integration of African states as the only solution to all the problems facing Africa. The likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyetta, Julius Nyerere and other Gradualist-Functionalists advocated for a gradual step-by-step integration in areas of less-controversy; a step that later produced a very weak European Union Prototype African Union(chpt. Four).

Chapters five and six incorporates the individual ideas of certain African leaders/Nationalists such as Patrice Lumumba, Samora Machel Cabral, Nyerere, Nkrumah, etc. otherwise known as the Socialist-Populists. They believe in the primacy of ideologies as the harbinger to successful socialist revolution and the emancipation of man from undue hardship orchestrated by socio-cultural cum economic dominations and exploitations. Having the people at the center of their ideologies, the Socialist-Populists were preoccupied with the search for the best way to implement direct-popular democracy (democratic centralism) based on African culture which must take off from and penetrate the village councils and regional assemblies.

Their major goals were to cure the African man of the traumatic effects of colonialism, return the African man to his origin (the source), to retain the African culture and history and to create a self-reliant 'new man'. Although these African Nationalist leaders differed in their conception and application of the socialist ideology, they had common areas of agreements such as the primacy of political freedom, ideology as well as state control over the economy. However, Julius Nyerere conceived African Socialism in a different way as Kwame Nkrumah, Modibo Keita and Sekou Toure who were close allies. Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa (African Socialism) is different from both capitalism and socialism (scientific socialism) and it's rooted in the extended family system.

Chapter seven consists of the Populist-Socialist ideas of theoreticians and practitioners of African descent whose major burden was to create political, economic cum socio-cultural conditions that would improve the living conditions of their people. This chapter x-rayed the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Thomas Sankara and Muammar Quaddafi. The whole gamut of their thoughts centered first on the essential nature of ideology as the driver of human development. Secondly, they emphasized the ultimate need for Africa to do away with western ideologies (be it capitalism or socialism) and develop ideologies that are autochthonous and suitable for African culture, tradition, environment and economy. Thirdly, the emphasis on the people, as the major beneficiaries of any ideological, political cum economic revolution, hence the clamor for the creation of 'the new African man'. To them, whatever ideology that is not centered on the general welfare of the people is not supposed to see the light of the day, hence Muammar Quaddafi advocated for direct democracy as the only system of government that affords real sovereignty to the people.

Stressing on the alternative path to western ideologies, mostly liberal democracy and capitalism, the author in chapter eight examined the ideas of emerging African scholars such as Daniel Osabu-Kle, Claude Ake, Godfrey Mwakikagile and Mueni Wa Muiu otherwise known as Africanist-Populists. These scholars were with the opinion that Africa can only grow and the dream of "the new man" achieved only when the solutions to African problems are sought for within Africa. While Ake (1982) argued that the bulk of western social science on Africa and indeed Third world countries are nothing but imperialism in disguise, Rodney (1972) contended that Africa can only have a breath of fresh air after she must have achieved a successful radical break with the Western capitalist system.

The book “African Political Thought” arguably the first of its kind represents an unusual attempt to thematically assemble most of the previously dispersed ideas of Theorists and Ideologues of African descent into a single book. The Author meticulously selected and assembled the ideas of these African thinkers under common themes with much emphasis on the thoughts rather than the individual thinkers. End-of-chapter summaries as well as all-chapters summary were provided to enable the reader refresh on the issues and lines of thoughts of the scholars reviewed.

One may argue the suitability of the title of this book to the content- whether it should have been titled “African Political Ideology”. A review of this book shows that it consists of the ideas of both Political Theorists and Political Ideologues (Practitioners) of African descent. According to Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2013:86), political ideology remains a subset of political theory which in turn is a subset of political thought. With the above in mind, we observed that the book consists of ideas of African scholars who are theorists as well as scholars who are indeed Ideologues. In line with the foregoing, this review agrees with the author on the appropriateness of “African Political Thought” as the most suitable title for this volume.

Few typographical errors were identified on the following pages: pg. 4 figure instead of feature, pg. 59 mantel instead of mantle, pg. 67 Arika for Africa, pg. 71 Theses for these, pg. 99 literary instead of Literacy and hesitated for hesitate. However, these errors are minor and do not alter the meaning of any of the sentences as the reader can easily identify and fix the words appropriately.

The book “African Political Thought” is therefore recommended as a bible, not just for students of African political thought but also for every student of politics and by further extension, social sciences and history across Africa.

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