UGRC
Lecture Two

Political Geography of Africa

AK Awedoba 2016
Objectives

• To explore political organization and administration in pre-colonial Africa

• To appreciate African political institutions from pre-colonial through to contemporary times

• Explain the diversity of Africa within and outside Africa

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What is the Political Geography of Africa?

The physical & conceptual presence of Africa - its cultures, political systems and values across time and space.

– Physical: This refers to Africa as depicted on the map - its peoples, traditions, & political institutions.

Sub-regional Dichotomy

– Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) - Africa south of the Sahara;

– North Africa [the Maghreb].
Political Geography of Africa cont.

The Conceptual: African presence through its people, cultures, traditions, & practices on the continent and in the diaspora.

African Diaspora—Europe, Caribbean, North America & South America.

Time & Space: Historical & contemporary expansion of Africa: its values, political & religious systems in the diaspora and on the continent.
Important Facts: Did you know?

- Africa is second largest continent, after Asia.
- The land area: a little over 11,700,000 km².
- Africa stretches about:
  - 5000 miles: From Cape Town to Cairo,
  - 3000 miles: From Dakar to Mogadishu.

From the most eastern point to the most western point is about 4,600 miles.

The population: at 2013 - 1,110,635,000 (1.11bn)
2015 estimate: 1.166 bn. The population growth is rapid.

Source United Nations' World Population Prospects
Important Facts

• Africa land size is about USA, Argentina, Europe, India, China & New Zealand combined or About $3\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of the United States of America.

• Africa has 54 [56?] modern states including island republics off its coasts.
  – Countries that are members of AU - 54
  – Recognised states, including Morocco - 55
  – Recognised states and de facto states including Somaliland - 56
Key facts on African States

• Most African states are multi-lingual except for a few: Somalia, Swaziland, Lesotho, & Botswana.

• Nigeria has over 500 languages, Kenya has over 100.

• Africa is the cradle of humanity as the first humans lived on African soil (the ancestors of homo sapiens).
Ali Mazrui’s View of Africa

“Africa is the first habitat of man but it is the last to be made habitable; Africans are not the most brutalized of all people but probably the most humiliated in modern history; African societies are not the closest to the West culturally but have been experiencing the most rapid pace of westernization; Africa is not the poorest of all the regions of the world in resources but it is the least developed of the inhabited continents; Africa is not the smallest of the continents but it is probably the most fragmented; and Africa is the most central of all continents in geographical location, but politically and to some extent militarily, it may be the most marginal.”

Making of the African Diaspora

• Ancient Voluntary Migration
  From Africa to populate the rest of the world including remote islands

• Forced Migration/Forcible dislocations
  - Trans-Saharan & Trans-Atlantic ‘slave trade’ (Maafa)
    – Conflicts (escaping conflicts)
    – Colonialism (French Policy)

• Voluntary /Manipulated Migration
  – Pursuit of economic interests
  – Education (and self improvement)
  – Diplomatic postings
Maps showing the slave trade routes & the making of the African diaspora
Indigenous State Development & Government

• States and kingdoms come into being as people from different communities come together for purposes of commerce, trade, or for defence and protection or through conquest and annexation;

• Those living under jurisdictions of such confederations or kingdoms found that the breadth and complexity of their political consciousness increased;
Indigenous State Development

• Large scale empires (states) initially ‘rose’ out of smaller kingdoms through military expansion/diplomacy; but they eventually fragmented into their component parts at a later time;

• Such large scale empires usually recognized legitimacy and autonomy of local leaders and communities;

• The ‘small’ traditions of such local communities usually remained vital and resilient, even during serious disruptions when the ‘great’ traditions of imperial civilizations were abandoned or destroyed.
Examples of Ancient, Medieval, & Early Modern African states

• Ancient Egypt
• Kush/Nubia
• Axum
• Ghana
• Mali
• The Dahomey Kingdom
• Songhai
• Kanem Bornu
• Buganda
• The Oyo Empire
• The Zulu Kingdom
• Malawi/Maravi
  [In central & southern Malawi, parts of Zambia, and Mozambique coast]
African Indigenous State Systems
Indigenous State Structures and Forms of Authority

State Structure took two forms:

A. Centralized State forms

Centralized states had well defined political authority with institutionalised bureaucracy for collecting taxes, supervising ceremonies, maintaining law and order and carrying out the general orders of the political heads E.g. Old Ghana empire, Mali Empire, etc.

- Forms of **indigenous authority** under this system:
  - Hierarchical systems
  - Federated systems
Hierarchical Systems

• Highly centralized: Had powerful political figures (kings) presiding, with efficient bureaucracy and military arrangement [Coercive force].

• Political heads often had subordinates/officials who assisted in the day-to-day administration of the society, via delegation of authority.

Examples: Buganda Kingdom (in Uganda); Dahomey kingdom (in Republic of Benin); Ankole (in Uganda), etc.
Federated Systems

• A federation consisting of different levels of semi-autonomous groups with their own chiefs. One of these is ‘*primus inter pares*’ or first among equals.

• Place on the political structure based on seniority; higher chiefs may or may not have the right to interfere directly in the affairs of lower chiefs.

• In such instances, lower chiefs are expected to show deference to higher ones. E.g. Yoruba of Nigeria.
B. Decentralized Societies

• Politically, decentralized societies lacked bureaucracies but authority was often based on kinship. Maintenance of law and order was deferred to elders, age-set groups and other groups.

• It includes a gradation from societies without any state structures at all to transitory forms of state organizations.

  – The indigenous authority found in these societies was diffused & segmented with no one really in charge.
Segmentary Systems

- Some societies do not act as a unit, but were segmented on clan/lineage or territorial basis.
- Power & authority were not held by any one person. No single powerful political figure whose word was law.
- Segments of the society could be managed by elders, age-sets or councils, associations, etc.
  - No collective response to community crises
  - Feuds & self-help could existed in such societies.
    - E.g. Tallensi & Konkomba (Northern Ghana), Igbo & Tiv (Nigeria), and Nuer (Sudan).
Basic Features of the Indigenous Political Systems

• Indigenous African political institutions were largely based on kinship and descent/ancestry.

• Rules of procedure were established through custom & tradition (no written constitution/law)

• In some of such societies women played active political roles as office holders - queen mothers, queens, royal advisors, ritual experts, even fighters, as in the case of the ‘Amazons’ of Dahomey, etc.
The Lovedu /Balobedu Queen

Makobo Modjadji descended from a female royal line stretching back more than 200 years;
Said to have inherited rain-making powers.

The Balobedu are one of a few in Africa whose leader is from a female line of succession.

Balobedu believe their queens communicate with the gods and have magical powers to make rain.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4089050.stm
Basic Features of Indigenous Political Systems cont.

• The indigenous political system had some democratic features. E.g., succession was regulated according to descent and merit in some cases.

• Checks & balances existed as well as consensus-building.

• Power and authority in the indigenous political system was both secular and sacred.

• The village or kin-group constituted the basic unit of the indigenous political system.
EUROPEAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA
Exploration, Colonisation & Exploitation

• In 1471, Portuguese arrived on Gold Coast shores; they had visited other West African shores.

• Other Europeans, incl. the Dutch, Danes, the English, French, etc. followed.

• It led to trade between Europeans and Africans.

• They traded in gold, ivory, beads, slaves, etc. They brought in manufactured goods – cloth, alcohol, guns, beads, etc. They also introduced Christianity.

• See – labels: Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, Slave Coast.
Treaties in African Societies

The encounters between the Europeans and the local people were formalised in treaties such as the ff:

• **The Bond of 1844** signed between Fanti Chiefs and The British.

• **The Treaty of Butre**, between Netherlands (the Dutch) and the people of Ahanta.
Missionaries in Africa

• There were many Christian Missions in Africa. Those active in the Gold Coast were:
  
  – **The Protestants** (The Anglicans, The Basel Missions, Wesleyan Methodist, etc.)
  
  – The Catholics

Their main aim was to preach the Gospel and to convert people.

For some missionaries, their main job was to gather information and lay the groundwork necessary for the subsequent imperialistic ambitions and colonization of Africa by first colonizing minds.
Berlin Conference & Africa’s Partition

• In 1879, France by her activities in the interior of Senegal, began the European partition of Africa. In November 15, 1884 at the request of Portugal, German Chancellor Otto von Bismark called a conference of major western powers to discuss and end the confusion over the control of Africa.

• 14 Western countries attended: Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, Gt. Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Turkey, the United States of America and Sweden-Norway (unified from 1814-1905).
The Partitioning of Africa cont.

Major Players: France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal

• The conference ended in February 26, 1885 - a three month period during which the colonial powers negotiated geometric boundaries in the interior of the continent, often disregarding the cultural and linguistic boundaries already established by the indigenous African population.
European Holdings & Colonialism

Great Britain desired a Cape-to-Cairo collection of colonies and almost succeeded. It got:
Egypt, Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian Sudan), Uganda, Kenya (British East Africa), South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), and Botswana. The British also controlled Nigeria and Gold Coast (Ghana).

France took much of western Africa, from Chad (French West Africa) and Gabon and the Republic of Congo (French Equatorial Africa) to Mauritania.
European Holdings cont.

• Belgium and King Leopold II claimed the Democratic Republic of Congo (Belgian Congo).

• Portugal took Mozambique in the east and Angola in the west.

• Italy claimed Somalia (Italian Somaliland) & a portion of Ethiopia.

• Germany took Namibia (German Southwest Africa) & Tanzania (German East Africa), Togo, Cameroon.

• Spain claimed Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni)
Then and Now

Colonial

Post-colonial

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Nature of Colonial Rule

• The European colonial powers shared one objective in their African colonies: *exploitation*. However, they differed in their styles of governance over the colonies.

  – The **British** established a system of *indirect rule*.
  – France and the other colonial powers ruled the colonies directly from the metropolitan centres in Europe

  – The **French** notably sought to create *culturally assimilated* elites to represent French ideals in the colonies.

  – King Leopold II, who had financed the expeditions that staked **Belgium**'s claim to the Congo, embarked on a campaign of *ruthless exploitation* associated with mass **torture** and **death** of the African people.
Nationalism and Struggle for Independence

• Necessitating factors:
  – a. exploitation, discrimination and neglect of the colonies by colonial authorities;
  – b. the world wars;
  – c. western education;

What about Christianity?
Political Legacies of Colonial Rule

a. New State Structures came into being

- Carved out without regard to pre-existing conditions.

- Mostly centralized

- Subordination of indigenous political institutions & systems of authority. How?
Political Legacies cont.

b. Different Systems of Governance [bequeathed]
   Presidential Systems
   Parliamentary Systems
   Hybrid Systems

c. Different Political Institutions [bequeathed]
   Legislature
   Executive
   Judiciary
   Competitive Elections
Pan-Africanism & The Pan-African Movement

What is pan-Africanism?

It is a perception by some Africans (at home and abroad) that they share a common destiny and interest as a people of African descent.
Origins of the Pan-African Movement

• Undoubtedly the result of slavery and colonialism in Africa.

• As a socio-political movement, it can be traced to the first pan-African conference of July, 1900, in London.

• The conference was convened by Henry Sylvester Williams and the African Association (AA) founded by him in 1898.

The conference set up the Pan-African Association (PAA) which later metamorphosed into the Pan-African Movement (PAM).
THE PAN-AFRICAN MOVEMENT

Goals

• Formation of the United States of Africa (USA); which would including Caribbean countries.

• Ensure closer ties between peoples of African descent the world over.

• Bring about friendlier relations between people of African descent and other races.

• Secure civil rights of all Africans in the world.

• Promote African businesses globally.
Some Leaders of PAM

Some of the leaders of the Pan-African Movement:

• **H. S. Williams** (1869-1911)

• **W. E. B. Du Bois** (1868-1963)
  - the father of pan-Africanism.

• **Marcus Garvey** (1887-1940)
  - “Africa for the Africans”

• **George Padmore** (1902-1959)
Some other Leaders cont.

• **Kwame Nkrumah** (c. 1909-1972)- the father of pan-Africanism on the African continent.

• **Haile Selassie I** (1892-1975)- first Chairman of Africa Unity 1963/64

• **Cheikh Anta Diop** (1923-1986)- Negro origins of pre-historic Egyptian Civilization.

• **Julius K. Nyerere** (1922-1999)- founding member of OAU

• **Malcolm X** (1925-1965)
LEGACIES OF PAM

• The Independent African/Caribbean states
• Formation of the OAU [its successor - AU]
• Global civil rights for people of African descent.
• African Studies/Afrocentrism
• Etc.
A. The Early Debate

- Regionalism vrs. Continentalism

– Despite broad agreement among African leaders about the importance of pan-Africanism as a foreign policy goal, there was disagreement about the proper path to achieve such unity.

Three different opinions emerged as a result:

The Brazzaville Group; Casablanca Group; Monrovia Group
The Brazzaville Group

• Named after the capital of what was Congo-Brazzaville,

• Members were mainly the francophone countries,

• Its approach was minimalist and advocated use of standard diplomatic means/practices to coordinate national economic policies.

• Little consideration paid to possibility of creating continent-wide institutions (Gordon & Gordon, 2001).
The Casablanca Group

• Named after the Moroccan city,

• Led by Nkrumah,

• Argued that the success of pan-Africanism required a political union of all independent African countries, patterned after the federal model of the United States.
Third, the Monrovia Group

Named after the capital of Liberia.

- Led by Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, Prime Minister of Nigeria,

- Rejected political union as both undesirable and unfeasible.

- The group argued that African leaders would jealously guard their countries’ newfound independence.
The Monrovia Group

• The Monrovia Group, however sought a greater degree of cooperation than that espoused by the Brazzaville Group.

• It called for the creation of a looser organisation of independence African states that would promote growing cooperation in functional areas such as economic, scientific, educational and social development.
Formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)

On May 25, 1963, thirty-one African Heads of State largely embraced the Monrovia vision of African international relations by launching the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the first Pan-African, intergovernmental organisation of independent African countries based on African soil, with the determination to gain freedom and liberation from colonial rule.

(Gordon and Gordon, 2001)
Contemporary Efforts: AU, NEPAD

• The AU was launched in 2002 to replace the OAU.

• AU is inspired by the ideals of Pan-Africanism to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among Africans.

• NEPAD, is a merger of the Millennium Partnership for the Africa’s Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA Plan (mooted by Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal as a new partnership under UN supervision).
The Merger of OMEGA and MAP

The merger of OMEGA & MAP was finalized on July 3, 2001.

• Out of the merger, the New African Initiative (NAI) was born.

• Its policy framework was finalised on 23rd October 2001, forming NEPAD.

(NEPAD = The New Partnership for Africa’s Development)
A partnership with the rest of the world, managed by a "global authority" under the responsibility of the UN Secretary General. Aims at securing financing for priority areas such as educational, health and agriculture. The hope is that this would help reduce disparities between Africa and the developed world.
• NEPAD provides a strategic framework for the socio-economic upliftment of Africa, integrating the continent into the global economy and placing it on the path to sustainable development.

Question

1. Why did the Casablanca group advocate a strong continental government, given Africa’s political, social, historical and ethnic diversities?

2. Why did the Francophones opt for a loose association?
References I


• John Iliffe, Africans: the History of a Continent (New York, 2007), Ch.4.


References II


• Film by Basil Davidson