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A Past for the Future?

Watchers of international statistics of development know that the evolution of the countries of tropical Africa north of the Limpopo and south of the Sahara including Ethiopia and Sudan differs from what is happening elsewhere in the world. The various measures of gross national income, per capita income, national debt burdens, trade or production, literacy, education or health are dismal and getting worse. By these yardsticks there is no other block of countries in the world that is in as bad a shape. Certainly there are isolated dirt-poor countries (or LDC) elsewhere: Bangla Desh, Bolivia, Haiti for instance. But even Haiti, the poorest country in the Caribbean, is still better off than 26 countries in tropical Africa. This situation is all the more remarkable precisely because this is not a negligible portion of the world. Its size exceeds the size of Europe, or of South America or of Canada and the United States combined. Whatever the defects of such global statistics or of the philosophy that underlies them, and there are many, they certainly tell us that this large part of the world *is different* from the rest, that it is economically less integrated into the world economy than any other part. This first major message of such statistics, the uniqueness of Africa today, is often overlooked in favor of its second major message: the relative poverty by international yardsticks of the people in the area. Spectacular evidence of failure such as famine, civil war, epidemic and *apartheid* in South Africa have drawn the attention of the media and are the basis of the new clichés about the continent. Countless commentators discuss who is to blame for the situation while countless experts discuss how to remedy it. Capitalist relations of production, and Underdevelopment born from the industry economy, Colonialism and Neocolonialism, are often the main villains. Corruption and a lack of public ethics are often cited. But all these

explanations forget the uniqueness of the region. Let us remember: it is different from the rest of the world.

Should we blame all of it on capitalism, the industrial economy, colonialism or neocolonialism? Why then is the situation different in other parts of the world where these forces have existed and exist? Should we blame it on corruption? This too is common elsewhere in the world. Moreover the term describes a practice: it does not explain it. As to "a lack of ethics" that is just an ethnocentric judgment. Should we blame all of it on specific historical accidents different from each of the states involved as some analysts do? But why then are all these countries in the same boat, even though their specific historical accidents differ? Should we blame all of it on faculty systemics as the social engineers of development theories do? Buy why would the tried formulas not work if they work elsewhere?

No, none of these explanations will do although all contain obvious grains of truth. The uniqueness of the region in relation to the rest of the world forces us to consider that there is something more fundamental at work here. Some as yet faceless force is involved that is active in the area and not elsewhere. It is easy to see that this force cannot be due to climate, general health conditions, general population patterns the presence or absence of natural resources and so on, on the grounds that these conditions, taken separately and even in conjunction are not unique to the area. The faceless force is something else. It must be something that has to do with commonalities in the ways of living and thinking of people of this area that differs from any other area. In clear language it deals with culture and society, perhaps not with local societies or cultural particularities of the kind anthropologists report on but with major configurations, with common traditions.

My thesis is that the uniqueness of Africa south of the Sahara and its difficult situation today flows from problems with its basic cultural traditions. First there is no longer a single cultural tradition to which all the people within each country or larger region subscribe. This means that even the basic criteria for perceiving reality are not commonly held by all let alone that there would be consensus on the existing choices, objectives, priorities, standards, ethics, and legitimacy on any issue. This situation is the fruit of a cultural history unique and specific to the region as a whole. Indeed the past conditions the future and so on must present an outline of the relevant past before the present can be understood and the future discussed. But first we must pause to clarify what we mean in this context by the key notion tradition?

Tradition As A Cultural Phenomenon

Tradition is a term with which we are all familiar from expressions such as "the Judeo-Christian tradition" or "the Buddhist tradition." The term refers to the existence of a pervasive fund of perceptions, concepts, beliefs, values, norms, expectations and practices common to the people within a community or a set of communities. Note that tradition is not just limited to collectively held representations such as ideas or beliefs, but also includes practices. Thus the practice of a form of agriculture belongs as much to tradition as collectively held beliefs about human conception. Contrary to the popular usage of the term as a synonym for "lack of change," a living tradition constantly changes. But it changes within a preset framework or core. The principles and basic choices immanent in that framework remain constant even while derivations and particular expressions of earlier choices alter all the time. The core then consists of collectively held principles about ultimate reality, or "the real reality." It includes the sum of fundamental choices that have once been made and are now perceived as so natural that they are beyond question. Thus once agriculture or metallurgy was adopted, very few traditions later chose to forego them altogether. Once kinship and the state became the common social formation, this complex of institutions became "natural." Even if, as happened, states later decayed, the experience remained to influence the following social formations.

Fundamental choices and principles do not deter change but give meaning to proposed changes. For a tradition is a worldview: it makes sense out of the world and out of proposed innovation. Tradition then determines what will be acceptable or desirable and what will remain unacceptable and sometimes unimaginable. In sum, a tradition determines its own future, and continues to do so for as long as the societies which carry it retain their self-determination.

Traditions can continue for very long periods of time. Buddhist, Confucian, Jewish or Christian views of life are two thousand years old or more and yet they still mould societies and cultures today. Such tenacity is due to the continuous transmission of a tradition from adult to child through language, knowledge and example. The process always occurs because it is synonymous with socialization but it is greatly facilitated by the acquisition of techniques such as writing and the provision of formal education, which make for more literal and careful transmission as the importance of Holy Scriptures and schools attest. Secondly, tradition is not a vague abstraction. A given tradition

can at any moment be described in a concrete way. Traditions are not just a product of the scholar's mind; they are phenomena, really out there. Thirdly, given the continuity of change, traditions have their own history. Because traditions come to encompass large areas and perdure for such long periods of time it is not surprising that variants arise. Thus the Islamic tradition is a later variant of the Christian on which itself is a variant of Judaism. In fact all traditions are rooted in previous traditions. Hence the origin of a given tradition is a matter of definition. In practice though there are short periods during which a major rearrangement of basic choices and principles is being made and then long periods of stability. Thus it is valid to talk of an Islamic tradition that began with the major upheaval in worldview proposed by the Prophet, even though the elements of this worldview are clearly but a variant of an older tradition. By the same procedure the older traditions of Africa began at the time of the last major rearrangement of basic choices and principles before the colonial period.

Older Traditions of Africa

Having gained a clearer view of tradition it is time to present an outline of the traditions in Africa South of the Sahara that have gone into the makeup of this region of the world as it is now. Many a book, lecture or course and almost all travellers and journalists say that "Africans" do this or think like that, giving the mistaken impression that there is but a single African tradition. There is no such thing as "The African." Almost no generalizations really hold for any and all Africans. One does not respect this either when one remembers that one is talking about the second largest continent in the world. In precolonial times Africa was home to several major streams of tradition. The most obvious distinction is between the northern part of the continent and the rest, and it is a very old one. Hence there is a certain justification in speaking of Africa South of the Sahara as opposed to northern Africa even if it is wrong to label that unit Black Mediterranean world of classical Antiquity first, Christianity later. Beginning in 640 A.D. the area was conquered by Arabs and converted to Islam, leaving in the end only Ethiopia as part of the former Christian tradition. The establishment of a stable solid homogeneous Islamic tradition took time. It took a half millennium or so from 640 to about 1100 for the Sunni variety of Islam to become dominant in the whole region and for the Maliki school of law to triumph over all others, at least West of Egypt. But from then on the tradition remained stable. Meanwhile

Ethiopia acquired its typical form of the Christian tradition as the result of militant opposition to Islam in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Islamic and Christian traditions covered large parts of the old world and cultural links were maintained by trade, travel, the copying of books, the exchange of learned teachers and holy men. No event or trend later was to change the dominant place of these traditions not even colonial rule which came to most of the area in the guise of protectorates. The colonizers did not dare to attempt to suppress language, religion and educational institutions here even in the case of outright conquest as in Algeria or Lybia. So today Northern Africa is still part of the great Muslim tradition. Of course this tradition is not monolithic. By 1100 already Egyptian and Northwest African variants were discernible, and in the Northwest separate Moroccan and Tunisian strains appeared while a specific Algerian variant followed well after 1500. But compared to the massive substance of what is held in common, the content of such variants remains minor. And yes, by the gauge of modern statistics of development Northern Africa is not part of the dismal African block of least developed nations. It forms a block of its own.

The separateness of northern Africa, including Ethiopia has been long accepted. Indeed the problem usually has been to convince the public that historically his region is part of Africa and not of the Middle East. The debate about the single African tradition focuses rather on the huge "rest" of the continent. Many subsaharan African intellectuals are convinced that there was but one. Poets such as Leopold Sedar Senghor and Césaire have sung Africanness or *négritude* in this sense. The scholar Sheikh Anta. Diop defended the *Cultural Unity of Black Africa* already in his *Unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire* in 1959. These authors were ardent and romantic nationalists living the colonial experience. They do not really document and carefully prove this single African tradition. There was in fact none. There were at least three major streams of tradition. Even if we accept remote connections between these there was no single tradition shaping the cultures and societies of all of subsaharan Africa on the eve of colonial conquest, even if we leave aside minor traditions such as those of the hunting, gathering, and pastoral societies of southwestern Africa, the pastoral societies of northern East Africa and Madagascar.

Beginning with the sub-continent lying south of a line from the Atlantic coast near the Cameroon-Nigerian border to the Indian

Ocean shore of southern Somalia one encounters a different situation. Peoples in this area speak related languages called Bantu and their cultures are all derived from a single ancestral culture developed in south eastern Nigeria in the third millennium B.C. But this ancestral culture underwent a major change in East Africa. Therefore, we distinguish between a Central African Bantu tradition after 2000 B.C. and an Eastern Bantu tradition. Central Africa remained culturally the most homogeneous part of subsaharan Africa although even here there are two different economic and political facets: one in the rain-forests of the north and the other in the southern Savannas. But they continued to hold the same basic concepts, practices and values.

The earliest Eastern Bantu speakers had moved to the great Lakes area some time before 1000 B.C. There they mixed with people from other cultural backgrounds and developed a new basic tradition. This included many features alien to the original Bantu way of thought and of life. The most striking among these was the adoption and the use of cattle as both the tool to forge unequal social relations and the record of such relations. Equally important as compared to Western Bantu was the extreme importance of human relationships in the Eastern Bantu perception of the supernatural. In the course of the first millennium B.C. two different variants developed. One group living in dispersed settlements under chiefs with divining and curing powers, was to be the progenitor of a subsequent impressive tradition of monarch is in the great Lakes area. The other adopted life in circular villages governed by a group of equal leaders. People of this group spread over all of east and southeast Africa down to Natal in the first few centuries of our era. Later, from the eighth century onwards, four different new stable daughter traditions sprang up in this huge area. The most spectacular of these are those of Zimbabwe and Botswana, and of the Swahili on the East coast. Scholars have tended however to over-stress the cultural differences between the five major and several minor variants of the Eastern Bantu. The fundamental outlook on reality and basic practices in all these societies, as compared to other parts of the world, including even Swahili urban and Muslim society still remained remarkably similar and they can arguably all be seen as variants of a single tradition.

The situation of West Africa was different. It is striking that West Africa's internal social, political and economic diversity appears to have been almost as great as that which obtained in the rest of subsaharan Africa and yet, paradoxically, we find a common tradition here as well. The framework which carried it consisted of a set of towns linked

into a single network of trade. The cities and their trade developed between the seventh and the thirteenth century, when they covered all of West Africa except for the rainforests of the present Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Ivory Coast. But, despite this network of communication for ideas as well as for goods, the cultures of the region did not become unified. The local history of Islam here is a good example of this.

The rise of towns and trade had been an endogenous development but after 800 A.D. the movement gained a new impulse from the growth of the gold trade to North Africa and beyond. With this international trade came Islam and writing. The main long distance traders in the whole region soon became Muslim. But they were not quickly followed by others. Indeed in the eighteenth century some states were still violently opposed to Islam and by the middle of the nineteenth century major holy wars were still being waged and large new Muslim empires still being created in the so-called Sahel lands south of the desert's edge. Muslim Maliki law was even less widely adopted and writing was restricted to magic, diplomacy and some historiography.

Despite this common network of communication then one can hardly speak of a single West African tradition though. Religions, languages, social formations remained too different. But at least this thousand-year-old network created a single integrated economic system with its inherent division of labor, many shared technologies, a unification of economic and urban institutions and common views on the complementary ethical, medical and religious components. All traders and many warriors used Muslim charms for protection and Muslim "wise men" (*marabouts*) were healers as well as makers of charms. There was thus a common tradition. But it included only a portion of the people in different societies. This was possible because mechanisms had been invented to insulate the half dozen or so dominant local traditions from this cultural complex and render it compatible with them. Much further research is needed in this matter, and the need is all the greater in that we shall see that this situation is very relevant to present day Africa.

The major streams of tradition mentioned so far do not account for all of Subsaharan Africa. Several less widespread traditions also have millennia-long histories, for instance, the pastoralist way of life with its original forms of government by age grades or the Malagasy tradition based on a mixed Austronesian and East African heritage with Arabian and perhaps some Indian inputs. Among these one must draw

attention to a tradition based on pastoralism, hunting and gathering in the dry lands of Southwest Africa. Its tragic importance lies in its inability to withstand invasion. The creation of a trading post by Dutch settlers on the Cape peninsula in 1652 was not a unique event. Elsewhere along the coasts such posts remained under local African control or were contained by African powers. Here, even though the number of settlers was puny in the seventeenth century and small still in the eighteenth, the local social formations were unable to cope with them. Europeans overran the local inhabitants and created an outpost of their own tradition, the cradle of their South Africa that looms so large in African affairs today.

No other foreigners succeeded in breaching the self-determination of any of the major traditions in precolonial days. Foreign traders traded on terms set by the populations which they visited even during the height of the massive Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Africans were masters in their own lands and were only marginally influenced by Europe, despite significant demographic, economic and social developments linked to the Atlantic slave trade especially. But such consequences were still channeled along the lines of the dynamics of innovation proper to each of the major traditions. In this sense European histories of Africa have over-stressed the impact of the slave trade on the continent. Only when the full force of the effects of the industrial revolution was beginning to be felt during the nineteenth century did the strain of coping successively with the massive influx of foreign goods, the multiplication of foreign trading posts, the growing number of "explorers," merchants and missionaries, and the increasingly unequal military and other technologies become excessive to the point that Subsaharan Africa could be conquered.

There were then several major precolonial traditions in Africa south of the Sahara. As the whole area forms but a single block in recent statistics of development however none of these traditions could by themselves be responsible for the situation today. One cannot argue that "traditional customs" are the stumbling block that presented this part of the world to prosper. But some feature shared by to all of them conceivably could be. Their oral character is most often cited in this regard. These traditions rejected literacy although some West Africans, some Swahili on the East African coast, some Malagasy and some Kongo from Central Africa in the seventeenth century were literate. As a consequence their traditions remained uncoded and much of the experience accumulated over time was lost. They were

forced to repeat themselves and never to progress according to some. Too much has been made of this point. It underestimates a tradition's capacity for remembrance and it omits to mention the disadvantages of literacy. By rejecting literacy the African traditions retained more flexibility of thought and action than otherwise and avoided the stresses of dogmatism. In any case lack of literacy by itself cannot be the whole explanation. Despite its ancient literacy Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. So it seems wise to continue with an historical survey of the colonial period and afterwards before returning to our main theme.

The Colonial Period

The relevant dynamics during the colonial period are the attempts to suppress the older African traditions and to replace them by variants of the European cultural tradition. In this context it is very important to stress that subsaharan Africa was conquered by violence and that this conquest lasted for forty years in most countries, that is then for half of the whole colonial period.

The persistent image that when bearded men in Berlin divided the continent in 1884-1885 full fledged colonies were suddenly hatched could not be more wrong. Each colony was conquered region by region, village by village against determined resistance. By 1920, the conquest had cost the lives of perhaps half the population of East and Central Africa and had ruptured the continuity of the old traditions in the whole region by breaking their capacity for self-determination. The old social order was totally destroyed by 1920 and replaced by a new social order based on European views. Colonial ideology denied this and attempted to legitimize the new order by the fiction of continuity. The old customs were supposedly preserved, streamlined, reduced to writing and cleansed of features abhorrent to civilization or detrimental to the maintenance of public order. In the Belgian Congo they even invented "customary urban law" for their brand new cities. Yet the same colonial ideology justified the presence of the colonizers by their "civilizing mission." Customs contrary to civilization were stamped out. In clear language, the core of the older traditions had to go, but some of the trappings could stay.

Using force, colonial decision-makers imposed an overall European configuration of state, economy, and society, especially visible in urban society. The European liberty of initiative in these matters was only checked by the fears of further insurrection, or of depopulation

and the loss of their labor supply. Africans could only survive by compromise. On the one hand they invented ingenious ways to subvert European initiatives and to mentally deny European superiority; on the other, some among them or the same people in other circumstances took advantage of career opportunities in the service of Europeans.

Meanwhile, by 1920, after the shattering of the old social institutions, there remained of the older traditions only the heritage of language with its embedded concepts, images and experience as well as a smattering of practices and of legal and moral principles. Moreover in the name of efficiency, morality, and civilization colonial agents and missions interfered with the transmission of the former traditions by banning initiation schools, witch finding rituals, major healing practices, most public rituals and even sometimes dance and music in general. Much of the older scientific lore and technical know-how disappeared through the suppression of industries such as metallurgy and direct interference in the management and practice of basic activities such as trade and agriculture. Innovations were forced on the populations without any regard to the sense they made or did not make in terms of the traditional worldviews. African traditions lost their integrity and much of their content, despite the continuity of language. And they were continually contested.

For at the same time, missions and schools were propagating a new worldview, the very core of the European traditions. The message of Christianity, like that of Islam, was plausible to Africans because it rested on revelation and revelation had been a mechanism to learn about the world in all older traditions as well. Moreover the first catechists or evangelists acted as cultural brakes. They africanized the message by translating its crucial ideas and concepts into the local languages and by borrowing key terms from the older traditions to give meaning to the Christian message. They made conversion possible. Gradually the Christian message reached everyone, converted or not, wherever the colonial governments allowed missions to be established. It was but a matter of time before many African communities made the new religion their own, either within the churches which missionized them, or within their own independent churches, or by creating new dogma and practices, as a new synthesis of the old worldview and the new. On its side Islam in West and coastal East Africa also expanded rapidly as an alternative worldview independent of that of the colonial power and of foreigners generally.

While the regions of the book influenced all the inhabitants of the area, schools beyond the lower grades affected only a few, but those few

were to be the leaders of the future. Colonial high schools succeeded in recruiting students into the European tradition. The European languages both as the subject and as the medium of instruction, literacy and the practice of boarding schools were crucial. Most children were so thoroughly indoctrinated that they became not just AfroEuropeans but Afrosaxons and Afrolatins as Ali Mazrui once aptly put it. The painful price the students paid for this was cultural alienation from their own past and even more painfully from their communities of origin. Thus a social and cultural chasm arose between elite Africans and others.

In most cases the colonial system continued only for some forty years after conquest and remained unchallenged only for twenty five. It lacked the time to carry out its ambitious program to indoctrinate all Africans and implant its tradition, its "civilization" into their minds and hearts. In most cases the whole colonial period lasted less than a single life time and in the 1960s it was not uncommon to meet people who were born before the conquest and were still alive after independence. No wonder that Jacob Ajayi, the respected Nigerian historian has called the colonial period but an interlude in history. An interlude perhaps but one that left the population of each territory in great cultural disarray between a popular tradition that was still being formed and a European tradition instilled into a small élite. From today's point of view it could be argued that either there should not have been a colonial period at all or that it did not last long enough.

After Independence

The small Europeanized élite, backed at first by masses who wanted to recover self-determination, inherited the whole colonial apparatus of institutions: the state, its economy, and its society. The nation-state and its appurtenances like the market economy were a requirement for international recognition, complete with national anthem, flag and paper currency signed by the head of the national bank. Independence meant more varied contact with the outer world and western influences were intensified at that level. Given the indoctrination of the new leaders in the western tradition which had moulded even the expression of their nationalist aspirations it was only natural that their main ideologies, policy goals, choices and strategies were inspired by western notions.

The state was now supposed to have all the trappings of the nation-state: a government responsible to the people through a Parliament

based on elections and a multi-party system, separation of powers and an impersonal bureaucratic administration. Its field of action encompassed many activities from public order to transportation to health, to education and of course to the regulation of the economy from the central bank down to the policing of the local markets. Urban people were supposed to be mostly blue-collar wage-laborers with civil servants, traders and artisans making up the balance. Rural folk were supposed to farm and produce cash crops for export and foodstuffs for domestic consumption. That was the façade. All of this is what is called *en principe* in African French.

But in practice or, *en pratique*, and from the start, the apparatus did not work exactly as foreseen, especially in politics. The new rulers had come to power by mobilizing the populations who, sometimes with millennial fervor, wanted freedom from an oppressive state. The leaders were Europeanized but their very success indicates that they also understood and were attuned to the aspirations of both their urban and rural followers. The leaders had to do more than merely succeed to colonial proconsuls. As nationals they had to build up a power base. They had come to power by managing coalitions of others representing particular interests. They had already been developing personal rule based on building up a clientèle. As to the population it continued to cope in its old ways subverting the exigencies of the state and its agents. From the start there was thus more than a little bit of posturing and make believe all around. Within less than a decade the actual practice of government and the economy had little in common with the official view.

Everywhere the typical contemporary state is now run by one man, the leader without any legitimacy whatsoever in the eyes of the people, although rule by one person itself is accepted. He therefore rules by coercion. His power is based on two networks of clients rewarded by state revenue, in other words by what westerners call corruption. Face to face relations rather than impersonal administration are the norm, the so-called informal economy has now become of major importance and threatens to overwhelm the official one in many states. Despite the increase in the numbers of civil servants the state has lost much of its capacity to act in many areas: e.g. social legislation, public health, education, etc. Indeed in many cases even territorial control has become uncertain.

The rift between façade and practice is *prima facie* proof that one faces a deep crisis of tradition here. The duplication of institutions is a sign of clashing traditions as surely as sheep turned into mutton, calf

into veal, ox into beef and pig into pork at medieval banquets in England. Or to use an up-to-date metaphor: the social organism seems to be rejecting a foreign organ transplantation. Moreover instead of lessening, the crisis seems to be deepening. For instance, it was held and often still is that coalitions of clients and the informal economies can only be transient phenomena. Instead they have grown and been institutionalized.

It would be wrong however to understand the situation as one in which a general conspiracy maintains the European legacy of institutions as but a mask of convenience, merely for the benefit of outsiders. The legacy is crucial. The notion and the institutions of the state itself and its network of institutions still forms the framework for the whole society even if everything is duplicated and despite a wealth of make-believe. The European legacy is also indispensable as the region becomes more and more drawn into a single world system. The Worldbank or IMF statistics are a poor set of indicators because they measure the performance of this sector. But they certainly show that the region is the least integrated of all into the world system. It would be folly to deny that all sorts of links between the countries in this block and the world outside have been growing and so has the influence of a general western legacy. For instance European languages are indispensable as the means of communication between the leading élites internationally and even internally in the largest countries. Their role is such that a real rift exists between groups of countries using French and those that use English as a working language. Indispensable as the European legacy is though, it is still being rejected. Not only was it already divorced from the realities of daily life in 1960, but the rift between *en principe* and *en pratique* has been growing. That is evidence for the vitality of one or more African traditions which seem to be just as essential as the European legacy.

But how is the maintenance of such a strong cultural dichotomy possible even if there is international pressure? Is there a cultural divorce between leaders and followers? Are the leaders perhaps the disseminators of western influences and the people at large the builders of one or more neoaffrican traditions? This would explain the situation. The population understands the worldview and the concerns of their rulers less and less with the passage of time, because their patterns of socialization, education and lifestyles have become so different. It follows that because there is no agreement as to what the world really is like, there can be no agreement on anything else: not on goals or means, or choices or even desired directions of change. There are no

common guidelines for the conduct of life, no common standards of ethics, no common expectations for the future. The rulers can only coerce the majority by force. Therefore the majority tradition cannot determine its own future. Its worldview and its institutions are warped by oppression. Not a favorable climate to develop original solutions to overcome the crisis. The dismal position of tropical Africa in matters of development would derive from such a situation first because the fundamental economic choices made by the rulers are not perceived as priorities, as necessary or even as useful to their populations who work in an informal parallel economy. Secondly, the duplication of institutions is extremely expensive. It robs the state of the revenue to provide for protection, health, employment and education of most of its citizens for whom it becomes a parasite. Finally the duplication weakens both the field of state power and its overall effectiveness.

You may remember that precolonial West Africa also knew a dichotomy of traditions. And yet there it was not dysfunctional. There was no duplication of institutions or activities. The common tradition was integrated into the local ones. The main difference, however, between the older West African situation and the contemporary situation is that the decision-makers then represented the majority tradition and now represent the minority tradition. The present disaster would flow from that fatal characteristic.

Attractive as the proposition is, it must be qualified. The masses do not remain uninfluenced by western culture and they do not adhere to a single stable tradition. The cultural history since independence shows several main popular trends which deserve mention. Christianity, especially Catholicism, and Islam have been gaining ground among both rural and urban populations in a spectacular fashion. And the culture of people in the capitals has been a model for those in other cities and has influenced the evolution of culture also in the countryside. Finally the desirability of European goods and comfort is a desired goal of all. As to "the leaders" they no longer form a tight little group consisting of a political academic and economic élite. The political leaders and the technicians who serve them are the most western in their lifestyle, but their politics are African and presuppose at least an understanding of aspirations and values of the masses. An independent economic élite is emerging in the informal economy and they share popular culture. The intellectual élite in and around the universities now impoverished is more and more forced to share the general urban life style. So both leaders and followers are more involved with both western and non western traditions than the propo-

sition of total congruence of either group with one tradition indicates. This is a momentous observation when one considers the future.

Our hypothesis is now complete. Cultural traditions are a root cause for the dismal situation in subsaharan Africa, not because the tenets of any precolonial tradition preclude industrial lifestyles or the emergence of societies on a large spatial scale. Nor is the rejection of literacy, common to other major precolonial traditions, to blame. Nor should one blame the mere existence of a dichotomy of traditions as once existed in West Africa. It is the congruence of a minority tradition with a despotic ruling group which denies the self-determination of the majority tradition that is the root cause, even though the congruence be imperfect.

This situation prevails in Africa south of the Sahara. It does not in any large block of countries elsewhere in the world. In a weak form one can perhaps cite the case of Poland, where the atheism of the ruling majority confronts the Catholicism of the majority and Poland has not been doing well. But at a deeper level Poland like eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R. is homogeneous in tradition. They all belong to an extreme secular version of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Latin America as a whole belongs to the same tradition. East Asia, southeast Asia, India, and the Muslim world have maintained their respective ancient traditions adapted to the industrial revolution. The cultural situation described for Africa south of the Sahara is unique among large regions in the world.

What will the future of this past then be? The most likely scenario, based on the extrapolation of major existing trends and by historical analogy is the following. The majority cultures will continue to consolidate their worldviews around Christianity in southern central and parts of eastern and western Africa and around Islam in most of Western Africa and parts of eastern Africa. They will continue to rally both urban and rural communities behind a common vision. They will continue to use churches, mosques, schools and dispensaries to elaborate institutions parallel to the failing official ones. Perhaps traders in the informal economy without affiliation to official circles will play a special role here. There will emerge two neoaffrican traditions built in part on the common Christian or Muslim cultures and in part on the legacy of precolonial traditions. These neoaffrican traditions will be carried by African languages. They will not be monolithic. Variants of popular culture will reflect urban and rural ways of life as well as of different social strata all within the common neoaffrican tradition. But the creation of a stable common majority tradition, like all such major

cultural phenomena may take a long time, perhaps two generations still, and its emergence will not end the cultural dichotomy by itself. One expects different portions of the élites to be drawn gradually into their majority tradition just as the traders now are. A portion of the intellectual élite will follow soon. In the end the rulers themselves can no longer avoid being drawn into the orbit of the majority. The baneful dichotomy between western influences and the majority tradition can then be expected to end through the absorption of portions of the western tradition, despite its continual reinforcement from outside of the region. And then Africa south of the Sahara could finally flourish, although serious tensions could continue in countries divided by Muslim/Christian loyalties.