History of Ethnicity and Race in African History: The Schools of Thought

Ganiyat Alli[1]

Abstract

This paper investigates the complex interplay between race, ethnicity, and history in the African context, challenging the prevailing narratives that attribute the formation of racial and ethnic identities solely to colonial interventions. By examining both indigenous and exogenous schools of thought, the paper argues that while European colonialism played a significant role in shaping racial and ethnic distinctions, these identities were not entirely imposed by external forces. The study draws on historical examples from Morocco, Zanzibar, and Rwanda to illustrate how indigenous cultures and social structures contributed to the construction of race and ethnicity long before colonial influence. Furthermore, the paper critiques the reductionist view that race and ethnicity in Africa are mere products of colonialism, emphasizing the importance of understanding the pre-colonial and indigenous dynamics that also shaped these identities. Through this analysis, the paper aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of the historical and cultural factors that have influenced the formation of race and ethnicity in Africa, providing insights that are crucial for contemporary discussions on identity and social justice.

Keywords: Race, Ethnicity, Colonialism in Africa, Indigenous vs. Exogenous

Introduction

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[1]PhD Student in History, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, USA.

Jonathon Glassman asserts that the sources of racial thought must be sought in Africa's intellectual histories since to him the continent's recurrent political difficulties are the products of the choices made by African political actors (Glassman, 2011). He set out to refute the claim of those authors who blamed African postcolonial political violence on the colonial state's social structures created, as they claim by colonial rulers, "European policymakers who defined and divided their subjects by race and ethnicity". Glassman studied the 1964 immediate post-independence violence in Zanzibar with the objective to prove that the Zanzibar pogrom was largely the work of indigenous intellectuals and nationalists.

Africa has been battered variously by peoples from other parts of the world who have inflicted much of what can be called "The menace of history" on its people. The most recent and perhaps the one with the most consequential of such historical encounters with outsiders was European colonialism at its height in the nineteenth century, which was confronted with African nationalism starting at the end of WWII and yielding independence of hitherto colonial states in the 1960s. African post-colonial states have faced enormous challenges that scholars, historians, anthropologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists have produced a myriad of literature to explain them. These Africanists understandably approach their studies from different perspectives.

Race and ethnicity rank high among the themes that preoccupy analysts of the African predilection to political as well as economic problems. Race, in the form of ranking humanity vertically on civilizational scale, attracts much attention from scales of weighing how African History has been treated on its origin whether it is through an exogenous or indigenous process. The same thing is the case with ethnicity, with the

concern of its possibility to exacerbate particular relationships among the people of a state. Both terms have preoccupied scholars' studies which have yielded different explanations not just about the history of 'race' and 'ethnicity' themselves but also about how their formation and application have affected Africans as a people and as citizens of particular post-colonial states.

Race and ethnicity are very important in African History because, whether they were formed by internal or external factors, the two terms and concepts have come to be social markers or political identities even though there are other overlapping identities that the terms depict: economic and cultural for example.

This essay will interrogate race and ethnicity as they have been shaped by African History and how they in turn have shaped African History to explain African historical dynamics and help us understand the historical trajectories that lead to the present African situation. The essay will review the writings of a few authors in analysing the processes that led to the formation of race and ethnicity in Africa.

The discourse surrounding the concept of race in Africa is complex and multifaceted, characterized by divergent perspectives that stem from historical, cultural, and scholarly influences. Within this framework, two prominent schools of thought have emerged: the indigenous and exogenous perspectives. The indigenous perspective posits that race and ethnic identities in Africa are deeply rooted in indigenous cultural and historical contexts, evolving over centuries through internal dynamics and interactions among local communities. On the other hand, the exogenous perspective emphasizes external influences, particularly the impact of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, in shaping racial identities and hierarchies in Africa.

In this essay, I will delve into the contrasting narratives offered by these two schools of thought, examining their respective interpretations of the history of ethnicity and race in African societies. Furthermore, I will explore the extent to which the formation of 'tribe' or 'race' can be

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attributed to either indigenous or exogenous processes, seeking to elucidate the complexities underlying these phenomena. Moreover, I will investigate the pre-colonial existence of racial and ethnic identities in Africa, analysing the dynamics of inter-group relations and identity formation before European contact. Additionally, I will critically assess the transformative impact of colonialism on the configuration of racial and ethnic identities in Africa. By drawing on concrete examples from historical and anthropological monographs, I aim to elucidate how colonial policies and practices, such as racial classification systems, forced labour regimes, and territorial demarcations, reshaped existing identities and engendered new forms of social stratification and exclusion.

Ultimately, this essay seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex historical processes underlying the formation of race and ethnicity in Africa, shedding light on the interplay between indigenous agency and external influences in shaping identity dynamics. Through this examination, I hope to contribute to a nuanced understanding of race in Africa and its implications for contemporary discourses on identity, belonging, and social justice.

DEFINITION OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

The concept of race has evolved, with the term first appearing in European languages in the thirteenth century. It was not commonly used in English until the sixteenth century. Throughout history, the notion of race has served as a moral compass, a way to differentiate people, and at times, to imagine a utopian future. However, race is less effective in organizing the intricate details of individual relationships because of its abstract nature. This abstraction allows the concept of race to remain

resistant to empirical challenges and to exist alongside social relations that contradict racial assumptions (Hall, 2011).

Race has been utilized to perform various functions in society, influencing social, economic, and political spheres. Scholars like Nirenberg (2014) and Hall (2011) have critiqued the understanding of race, particularly the idea that it stems from eighteenth and nineteenth-century biological classifications based on skin colour. They argue that this definition does not capture the essence of racial ideologies, even in modern times. Western European racial theories often linked race with differences in lineage, ethnicity, caste, or nation. Despite the tendency to group dissimilar individuals based on a few similar characteristics, racial categorization can reflect observable truths, such as phenotypic differences like skin colour, which have been used to construct broader cultural meanings.

Transitioning from the abstraction of race to the tangible nature of ethnicity, it can be said that ethnicity has significant political implications. It can divide people along lines that resist national or class unification. Ethnicity's importance and the need to understand it arise from its ability to shape social and political landscapes persistently. Explanations for its origins and impacts are as varied as its dimensions which underscore its deep-rooted and multifaceted character in forming social identities (Vail, 1989).

Ethnicity organically assigns people to groups based on birth right and inherent cultural traits. One's tribal membership and the accompanying cultural practices are a matter of destiny, not choice, leading individuals to adhere to established customs. This concept of ethnicity is strengthened by the influence of missionaries, educated locals, and the indigenous bourgeoisie in Africa. They have used strategic alliances and indirect rule to shape ethnic identity, which Hall emphasizes in his argument (Hall, 2011).

The construction of ethnicity is also deeply intertwined with land, which serves as the central pillar of ethnic ideologies. It symbolizes

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stability and continuity for those facing displacement due to migration. Thus, ethnic identity provides a crucial mechanism for individuals to manage daily uncertainties through the control it offers over land and kinship. The role of ethnicity in African societies, therefore, must be considered in terms of control and the security that land and familial connections provide (Hall, 2011).

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS ON ETHNICITY AND RACE

According to Jean-Loup Amselle, "A culture must be considered as a reservoir, …a collection of practices internal or external to a given social arena that the actors mobilize as a function of one or another political conjuncture" (Amselle, 1988, p. 4). Amselle cites Lewis Morgan's argument that all societies advance through a linear progression of stages, which he identified as savagery, barbarism, and civilization (p. 9). At the core of Morgan's theory is the transition from simple to complex societal structures. Initially, societies are formed around kinship ties, embodying a social organization Morgan referred to as 'societas'. This stage, closely related to the Greek notion of 'ethnos', is defined by its reliance on familial and tribal connections rather than territorial bonds. As societies evolve, they enter the stage of 'barbarism', marked by more sophisticated social hierarchies yet still fundamentally based on kinship. The culmination of this evolutionary process is the 'civilization' stage, where societies organize themselves into 'civitas' a political entity characterized by territorial sovereignty, state governance, and property rights, mirroring the Greek 'polis'. This progression, according to Morgan, outlines a universal journey of human social development, indicating that societies, irrespective of their specific cultural or geographical contexts, share a common pathway from rudimentary to advanced forms of organization.

The historical actions of the Berber groups Sanhaja and Masmuda in Morocco can be seen as a mobilization of their cultural practices in the face of political upheaval. As they encountered invasions and were driven from their homelands, these Berber communities leaned into their familial and kinship ties, asserting principles of equality among themselves to solidify their communal identity. This conscious cultural reinforcement not only fostered a unified Berber identity amidst the instability but also gave rise to a racial awareness that set them apart from the Black populations they met. Thus, their culture served as a strategic reservoir from which they could draw to navigate and respond to the changing political landscapes (El-Hamel, 2013).

But El-Hamel primarily set out to challenge the conventional readings of slavery in Islam and Moroccan society; the culture of silence or the refusal to discuss about slavery of the Blacks in Morocco. Meanwhile, the Blacks in Morocco through centuries of subjugation and stigmatization stand at the bottom rung of social ladder with the Barbers and the Arabs at the top respectively (El-Hamel). Malay Isma'il's forceful enslavement of Blacks (1672), free and newly free, through conscription into the Army marked the height of racism.

El-Hamel citing Michael Banton offers a definition of racism, suggesting it is the belief that an individual's actions are influenced by inherent traits passed down from distinct racial groups, each thought to possess unique qualities and often ranked in a hierarchy of better or worse. It is important to note that in this definition, evaluations are made based on observable traits like skin colour and facial structure, without considering the underlying personal prejudices that may skew the perspective from which these judgments are made (El-Hamel, p. 102).

As Donald Wright pointed out, Europeans who studied pre-colonial Africa carried with them a lot of "cultural baggage, a bundle of preconceptions" that got in the way of understanding African history (Wright, 1999). He demonstrated this by the examples of how European colonizers forced on Africans their notion of land use and

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land ownership on Africans with their own idea of boundaries, which delineated people into 'tribes' and ethnic groupings which later made African tribal and conferred on them ethnic identities. He quoted John Reader as saying "ethnicity was not a cultural characteristic that was deeply rooted in the African past; it was a concisely crafted ideological tradition that was introduced during the colonial period" (Wright, p. 14). From the foregoing, it can be said that there are two broad schools of thought about the history of ethnicity and race in African History. Those who claim that race and ethnicity were a creation of the colonial project in Africa, which deliberately designated people into distinct ethnic groups for the purpose of administration and with the notion of they being inferior to the white colonial rulers; they are a race apart from their colonial rulers. Mahmood Mamdani and Donald Wright are examples of this *Exogenous School of Thought*. The second school of thought are those scholars who are of the opinion that race and ethnicity exist and have always existed in Africa even before the coming of the Europeans - *Indigenous School of Thought*. Such scholars are Chouki El-Hamel and Jonathon Glassman who demonstrate in Morocco and Zanzibar centuries of Arab subjugation might not be out rightly in either of the schools but his approach and sensibility places him within the indigenous spectrum. His study is on nation and race relations in a postcolonial city.

Amselle (1988) argues that under the guise of respecting indigenous customs, some assert the rights of African cultures to engage in practices like excision (female genital mutilation) or of Islamic countries to execute those accused of blasphemy. However, these assertions fundamentally oppose the concept, though not necessarily the practice, of democracy. By rejecting a Western model of democracy, which they detest, fundamentalists and others utilize

alternative political theories. This stance serves both to resist the spread of Western democratic ideals and to carve out a distinct identity for themselves. Essentially, these claims are a strategic use of cultural relativism to justify practices that are controversial or condemned from a Western democratic perspective, while also establishing a clear demarcation from Western values to maintain a unique cultural or national identity.

Amselle draws parallels between the strategies employed by Stalin in the Soviet Union and those of missionaries and district officers in Africa, emphasizing how both approaches resulted in the amalgamation of diverse populations into units now seeking independence as nation-states, such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. He observes a similar pattern in the emergence and fading of regional and ethnic identities in Europe, citing the examples of the Basques and Bretons in France, the Irish in Great Britain, and the Walloons and Flemish in Belgium, which coincided with the decline of their respective colonial empires. He also notes the significance of the disintegration of the Russian and Soviet empires in the eventual independence of Ukraine and Belarus. This comparison underscores the role of political restructuring in shaping national identities and the quest for sovereignty, drawing attention to a global phenomenon where the end of imperial dominance leads to the reassertion of regional and ethnic identities.

Jonathon Glassman (2011) posits that the historical narrative of race, ethnicity, and nationhood entails the emergence of specific methods of categorizing humanity, which have become pivotal in shaping social and political dynamics within distinct historical contexts. He delineates two distinct approaches to analyzing racism: the concept of "new racism," which underscores that racial ideologies need not be couched in scientific terminology, and Etienne Balibar's notion of "racism without races," which emphasizes a racism focused not on biological inheritance but on the perceived insurmountability of cultural

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disparities. However, Glassman argues that the distinction between ethnicity and other forms of identity, such as race, can be misleading because they share common underlying elements which include the belief that humanity is comprised of distinct cultural groups, each internally cohesive and owned by a specific "people," as well as the metaphor of descent, which suggests that these cultural groups are somehow linked by biological or ancestral ties. While the term "race" explicitly emphasizes descent, ethnicity tends to be more ambiguous in this regard (Glassman, p. 11). Overall, the distinction between race and ethnicity is portrayed as a matter of degree rather than a fundamental difference, with both concepts existing along a continuum of thought shaped by the idea of descent.

Donald Wright (1999) argues that throughout west-central Africa, identities remained localized for an extensive period, with individuals perceiving themselves as distinct from neighbouring communities. Within these localities, privileged or elite groups often exploited less privileged segments of society, perpetuating hierarchical disparities. He further asserts that the people of Niumi in Senegambia maintained multiple levels of identity, comprising extended family units, upper-class distinctions dominated by ruling families, and village affiliations shared among families residing in the same locale. These identities were integral to the societal order and hierarchy, which were primarily structured by various ethnic groups. Ethnic affiliations served as markers of pride and recognition, differing from their postcolonial redefinitions.

Hall (2011) argues that race in Africa is often misunderstood due to academic scholarship that exclusively associates it with European-American ideology. Instead, he contends that there are African histories of race that defy colonial logics. For instance, along the Sahel in West

Africa, racial language was evident in the writings of Muslim intellectuals long before European colonization. Sahelian writers distinguished between "whites" and "blacks," with the latter being marked as inferior, leading to significant legal disabilities. Hall supports his argument by illustrating how France, upon colonizing the Sahel in the late nineteenth century, utilized these existing local concepts of racial difference in its administrative practices. The colonial government's familiarity with these concepts, coupled with their alignment with European denigration of black people, made them convenient tools for colonial rule. Moreover, Hall suggests that race operates as a moral ordering device and a means of conjuring utopian visions, rather than organizing individual relationships. Its abstract nature makes it difficult to disprove empirically, allowing it to coexist with social relations that contradict racial arguments.

Furthermore, Glassman, like Hall, posits an indigenous perspective, suggesting that the struggle of the Omani state was primarily engineered and fostered by the indigenous people, with minimal European intrusion. He argues that in pre-colonial Swahili society, divisions within the populace over gratitude and entitlement to patronage resulted in a colorful diversity of wit, even during rebellious moments. Glassman contends that colonial conquest prompted an internal crisis, leading to extensive European documentation that, when understood alongside cultural idioms, provides insights into power dynamics and motivations. He further suggests that events like the 1888 uprising can only be fully understood within the broader context of ordinary East Africans experiences prior to European intrusion. According to Glassman, the immediate threat to the Omani state did not come from the German company but from lower-class celebrants. In addition, he argues that highly politicized masses sought racial justice after internalizing rhetoric claiming they were at risk of being denied their rights. Glassman rejects explanations of ethnic and racial violence in Africa that solely attribute blame to colonial projects. In his work,

Glassman discusses divisions within Zanzibari society, highlighting the ANP (blacks and Africans seeking to rule and acquire land) and the ZNP (Arabs viewing other races as inferior) (Glassman, 2011, p. 31). He argues that the emergence of racial ideologies in colonial Zanzibar was predominantly shaped by indigenous intellectuals, especially those involved in nationalist movements, who actively contributed to the formation of racial hierarchies and divisions within their society. Glassman asserts that to comprehend the origin and significance of racial thought, one must delve into Africa's intellectual history, particularly when external concepts were influential. Asserting that these encounters were distinct rather than entangled, and various factors, including economic production and political actor's strategic considerations, played a crucial role in shaping racial perceptions and their societal and political importance. In essence, the African postcolonial political community gave rise to racial violence and the propagation of dehumanizing racial ideologies (p. 18).

El-Hamel's (2013) assertion that ethnic and racial diversity in Morocco, including the presence of Black Moroccans, predates colonial times reinforces the exogenous arguments. The challenges of slavery, as well as cultural and racial discrimination, are longstanding issues, with Black Moroccans historically marginalized as *abid* (slaves) and referred to as *Sudan* (Black Africans), reflecting a history of social stratification and exclusion. Before the arrival of Europeans, identities within Morocco were already distinct and could often be recognized by occupation, apart from religious practices. Black Moroccans typically existed outside of tribal structures, organizing themselves into family units or small collectives. Their primary roles within society included being tenant farmers, household staff, custodians, watchmen,

labourers and artisans; occupations that served as a social indicator of their ethnic identity within the broader Moroccan context (p. 95).

It will be convenient to say that the formation of a 'tribe' or 'race' is both through exogenous and endogenous processes. Even though each writer will be so emphatic on their understanding of this issue, they most often unwittingly accept the opposite view. Glassman criticizes instrumentalists of their failure to break fully with the nationalist paradigm that has shaped African historical studies, admonishing that "to understand the etiology of racial thought, we must abandon the cliché of colonial encounter", he admits that Pan-Africanism has built on racial solidarities as an "outgrowth of the distinctions enforced by colonial dictatorships" (Glassman, p. 15).

Mamdani (2001) did a great job of demonstrating how Belgian colonialism separated the Hutu and Tutsi as a people with distinguished centuries of cohabiting and intermarriage that had made them members of *Kinyarwanda,* and made the Tutsi an alien minority superior group – a race with limited privileges - apart from the Hutu majority. Yet, Mamdani admits that "Belgian power did not arbitrarily cook up the Hutu/Tutsi distinction; it took an existing socio-political distinction and racialized it" (p. 99). As he put it, "…the state of Rwanda appeared as a Tutsi power under *mwami* Rwabugiri" (p. 66).

ETHNICITY AND RACE: HYBRID PRODUCTS OF AFRICAN HISTORY

The idea that racism can be distinctly identified through differences in skin colour appears to be a relatively recent development. Michael Banton offers a definition of racism, suggesting it is the belief that an individual's actions are influenced by inherent traits passed down from distinct racial groups, each thought to possess unique qualities and often ranked in a hierarchy of better or worse. It is important to note that in this definition, evaluations are made based on observable traits like skin colour and facial structure, without considering the underlying personal

prejudices that may skew the perspective from which these judgments are made (El Hamel, p. 102).

In the 19th century, the concept of "nation" was broadly applied to people globally, though an implicit hierarchy based on skin colour and other factors was recognized (Amselle, p. 7). However, as the century progressed, this perspective shifted significantly. During the era of nationalism, the ascendancy of racial principles altered the dialogue, transforming "nation" to "race" and refining the term "ethnic group" to signify segments within racially homogeneous populations (p. 5). These segments, identified by their unique experiences and transformations, were now viewed through a lens that emphasized racial differences and a newfound hierarchy, moving away from national or ethnic distinctions to a more racially stratified social order.

Similar to many concepts shaped by a Western or Eurocentric viewpoint, I advocate for the development of a new framework specifically focused on the study of ethnicity and race within the African context. This is in line with Amselle'sviewpoint, which suggests that ethnology's initial application and development were deeply intertwined with colonial systems. He highlights that ethnology not only seeks to understand "exotic" societies but also plays a crucial role in defining Western societies themselves. Furthermore, Amselle (p. 6)points out the intrinsic connection between ethnology and colonialism, noting how the discipline has historically been used, and continues to be used, in shaping the identities of both societies that were colonized and those that did the colonizing. Cultures and societies should be approached in terms of their historicity, their history. In the context of colonialism, the goal of studying different ethnic groups should be understood as a way through which colonial powers assert and shape their dominance. This approach to ethnology, or the

systematic study of cultures and peoples, becomes a tool for the colonial authorities to understand, manage, and sometimes manipulate the populations they control.

Hutu and Tutsi as *Kinyarwanda* is a single people, a common cultural community. They became polarized into two distinct and antagonistic political identities inside the state of Rwanda, as Mandani (2001, p. 60) demonstrated. Ethnicity, as reflected in the self-designated names of groups, serves to differentiate them from their neighbours and assert a form of superiority, especially through the shared use of a language, turning the concept of "society" into a political marker within a wider network of human groups. Amselle (pp. 8, 10) cites Ernest Renan arguing that a nation's foundation lies not in tangible traits like race, language, or geography, but in the collective willingness to unite and the shared history of significant achievements. This unity is further fuelled by the ambition to attain greater accomplishments in the future.

Meanwhile, in Morocco, the cultural identity has commonly been seen as quite uniform in terms of race and ethnicity. This sense of unity believed to be further shaped by the widespread adherence to Islamic beliefs, as well as a strong sense of Arab nationalism that influences the country's language and politics is however questionable; as El-Hamel (2013, p. 62)pointed out, "slavery was clearly associated with blackness in Morocco" while emphasis on benign attitudes distorts the social realities of slavery and undermines its cruel effects on the enslaved person. The worst moment and phase of Black enslavement in Morocco was marked by Mawlay Isma'il "racializing" slavery in the seventeenth Century.

 It is important to note that the distinct physical characteristics, such as skin colour, between the darker-skinned inhabitants of the Sudan region and the lighter-skinned Arab and Berber populations, were significant in the historical process of identifying and differentiating between various ethnic groups (El-Hamel, p. 93). In Africa, these features serve

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as indicators of ethnic origins, without inherently negative connotations. However, this association has often been misinterpreted or negatively framed outside the continent, where skin colour and physical appearance have been wrongly used to imply racial hierarchies and the unjust notion of one group being more predisposed to servitude than another. The essence of this perspective is to understand that while physical traits may denote ethnic variety within Africa, they have been inappropriately construed as racial in a way that carries negative implications elsewhere. Besides, El-Hamel opined that Morocco's historical approach to defining races was inherently concerned with racial differences, yet it represented a notable contrast to the racial classifications prevalent in Western societies. Unlike the clear-cut and often unyielding racial divisions seen in Europe and America, the Moroccan system was less rigid, allowing for more fluidity within its racial hierarchy. This flexibility sometimes permitted individuals of Black heritage to ascend to significant roles of influence, a circumstance less common within the more inflexible racial structures of Western countries.

In his analysis, Edwin Wilmsen presents a critical view of the lasting impacts colonialism has had on Southern Africa's socio-economic landscape. He argues that prior to the arrival of colonial powers, the indigenous populations of the region, including the Khoi, San, Tswana, and Herero communities, were involved in a diverse range of economic activities (Amselle, p. xiii). They also shared extensive social networks among themselves. On the other hand, El-Hamel (2013, p. 60) traces the origins of racial identities, highlighting how the Hamitic myth significantly influenced the stigmatization of Black Moroccans. He underscores that the association of Black individuals with disbelief, whether the myth was embraced or not, played a key role in their further

alienation. He emphasizes that these factors collectively underscore the deep-seated impact of racial perceptions on the social hierarchy and positioning of Black Moroccans.

Wilmsen (1996) suggests that these pre-colonial societies were characterized by fluid and interconnected social structures, which were dismantled and reshaped into constrained, clearly defined groups by colonial rule. In the same vein, Amselle argued that the concept of stateless societies in pre-colonial Africa might be a misconception. According to him, the often-perceived stateless societies were actually dissident state societies that, throughout their history, had been forcibly detached from their core political structures (Amselle, p. 15). He suggested that the disappearance of their centralized governing systems was a direct result of European colonization, rather than evidence of their inherent statelessness.

According to Wilmsen, the introduction of colonial administrative systems imposed artificial boundaries and identities on these once fluid communities, leading to the creation of static and separated societies. He goes further to criticize the colonial perspective for fabricating distinct societies, cultures, and ethnic groups which were not only artificial but also contributed to fostering ethnic tensions and tribal conflicts seen in modern African societies. Wilmsen attributes these divisions to the colonial imposition of rigid classification systems on groups that previously enjoyed a degree of flexibility and interchange. Thus, he sheds light on the destructive legacy of colonialism, which not only disrupted established economic and social networks but also sowed the seeds of division and conflict that continue to affect the region.

Amselle presents the view that the ethnic identities in Africa and the nation-states within the former Soviet Union were not organically formed, but rather, were the result of external influences. This leads to his conclusion that Africa can be seen as a collaborative creation between Africans and Europeans, providing a foundation upon which

Africans can build their individual identities. This concept aligns with Mudimbe's (1988) postmodern perspective on identity, which, despite acknowledging the arbitrary nature of ethnic, cultural, and national affiliations, affirms their validity. Through this lens, both Amselle and Mudimbe suggest that the constructed aspects of identity do not diminish their authenticity or the rights of individuals to embrace these identities.

To Wright (1999, pp. 415, 418), in pre-colonial Africapeople were the critical element and control of people was far more important than control of land. In his study of Miumi(Senegambia), he found out that the distant ancestors of today's Gambia did not identify themselves as members of ethnic groups. They had several levels of identities: class, extended family, village and then lineage. Europeans came to label the people as tribesmen and ethnic groups. It can be said that Europe came to "create" Africa in its own image.

El-Hamel (p. 62), in religious narrative, argues that the marginalization of Black individuals in Morocco can be traced back to an interpretation of biblical stories, specifically the story involving Ham, Noah's son, and the supposed "curse of Ham."This interpretation has historically been used to rationalize the inferior treatment and discrimination against Black people, falsely linking them to Ham's lineage and suggesting they were destined to be subservient. Mamdani (2001, 81) also elaborates on the Hamitic hypothesis, manufactured from Judeo-Christian myths to justify the subjugation of parts of humanity, as seen in his study to back the placement of Tutsi hierarchically above the Hutu. He elaborately exposed the continuous failure of the hypothesis to explain the complex political organisation that Caucasians met in Africa. El-Hamel argues that historical evidence from the late 1600s indicates Morocco indeed engaged in the oppression of Black individuals, establishing a societal

structure based on skin colour. Consequently, religious values were replaced by racial notions and discriminatory beliefs, creating and upholding social divisions that defined the roles and advantages of Arabs and Berbers.

It is important to note that before the era of colonial expansion, societies situated along the route linking Europe and Africa experienced a fluctuating array of organizational forms and cultural rituals. For instance, when French military forces clashed with the Toucouleur, it significantly heightened the cultural identity and solidarity within each group. So also are the Berber attitudes towards Black individuals which developed before the Arabs took over North Africa. The Sanhaja and Masmuda, two Berber communities, had to abandon their territories because of foreign invasions. This forced migration made the Berbers more conscious of the cultural and racial distinctions between themselves and the Black communities they came across. Consequently, these interactions led to the formation of a pronounced racial divide during that era (El Hamel, p. 87).

Moreover, while European colonization across much of the world was often justified as a mission to eliminate savage customs, the reality was that colonial policies frequently showed regard for native traditions, leading to a broad-based cultural relativism (Amselle, p. 2). Besides, as presented by Amselle(1988, p. 11), the formation of ethnic identities in colonial territories, particularly those under French control, was a deliberate construct by colonial rulers, blending efforts from both colonial officials and ethnologists. This collaborative endeavour aimed to solidify direct colonial governance through the establishment of administrative and territorial divisions, such as *cercles* overseen by French administrators and *cantons*managed by locally appointed African chiefs. This structuring was underpinned by racial politics, where preferential treatment and the marginalization of certain groups facilitated a form of economic development rooted in Spencerian ideals of survival of the fittest. Additionally, the creation of

detailed ethnographic documentation, including maps and atlases delineating ethnic and administrative boundaries, served dual purposes. It not only contributed to the academic field of ethnography but also reinforced the colonial authority by systematically categorizing and controlling the colonized populations. Through these measures, colonial powers meticulously crafted ethnic classifications to enforce their rule, significantly impacting the social and political landscapes of these regions.

On the other hand, in the British colonies of tropical Africa, Lugard introduced a system to categorize the local populations based on their societal structures into three main categories: primitive tribes, evolved communities, and Europeanized Africans. Although this categorization inherently reflected racial biases, evolved communities were typically associated with Hamitic peoples, known for being empire-builders, and Muslims. On the other hand, primitive tribes were described as indigenous black populations that had been marginalized to mountainous or forested areas, maintaining a basic familial social structure. This approach helped the implementation of indirect rule in Nigeria's northern region, where Lugard advocated for the governance of Fulani societies through their traditional institutions and leaders, thereby reinforcing racial distinctions and hierarchies under colonial administration.

Following the era of indirect rule, colonial administrations reverted to racial politics, a foundational aspect of both British and French colonial strategies; oscillating between direct and indirect governance approaches. In this context, ethnic politics within both the French and British empires served as a critical intersection of ethnology and colonial governance. Maurice Delafosse's work on ethnic politics highlights this through his classification and mapping of languages in

French West Africawhich played a crucial role in shaping the identities of various ethnic groups, effects of which are still evident today (Delafosse, 1912).

Culture is the repository of a people's history and heritage. It sets people apart from others as it documents their history and serves as their collective memory. The Gnawa (Black) people of Morocco maintain a distinct cultural identity through their unique musical traditions. El-Hamel (p. 4) pointed out that their music is not just an art form but a living expression of their ancestors' beliefs and rituals. This rich heritage sets the Gnawa apart as a unique community within Morocco.

In his intellectual history of race in Muslim West Africa before European occupation, Hall (2011, p. 39) demonstrates the origin of racial labelling of the people of Sahel by Ibn Battuta and the subsequent practice of racial identities in the region. The Berbers, Islamised, and Arabized were ethnically labelled Touareg and the blacks remained Black. There was gradual differentiation in the Sahel; Arabic and Berber-speaking groups reconfigured their genealogies connecting with important personages of the Middle East. Local Arabo-Berber intellectuals rewrote the history of their pedigree to make them bearers of Islamic orthodoxy. Both ways, they attempted racial distancing to the Sudani.

RACE AND ITS AFTERMATH

Amselle (p. xiii) suggests that it was the arrival of colonial forces that disrupted the inter-connected societies, leading to the emergence of separate ethnic groups and political entities. Missionaries, district officers, and fieldworkers played significant roles in solidifying these identities which were then adopted and reinterpreted by local communities through a phenomenon Amselle describes as "working misunderstanding."

Glassman (p. 8) criticizes Mamdani's tracing the racialization process back to a single source, the actions of the colonial state as having the

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result of a view of Rwandan intellectual history in which Europeans are the only actors, inventing and imposing identities as prompted by administrative needs. Meanwhile, Mamdani (pp. 9-10) argues that the imperative to analyse the Rwandan genocide within the framework of colonialism is central to understanding its complexities. He asserts that colonial rule engendered two distinct genocidal impulses: one perpetrated by settlers against the native population and another driven by the native population's impulse to eliminate the settlers. Moreover, Mamdani contends that the severity of violence inflicted upon the native population correlated with the extent of Western settlement in the colony. Beyond mere land expropriation, colonialism politicized indigeneity; creating a binary world of settlers and natives. This binary preoccupation, he argues, contributed to the construction of the Tutsi as a privileged alien settler presence, initially catalysed by the nativist revolution of 1959 and perpetuated by Hutu power propaganda post-1990(Mandani, p. 114).

Mamdani's analysis of the Rwandan genocide delves into the impact of colonialism on African perceptions of race and ethnicity. He argues that African usage of racial language, as seen in the ideology of Hutu Power, stems from a false consciousness rooted in the colonial experience. Hutu Power's conviction that the Tutsi were a foreign race, rather than an indigenous ethnic group, reflects a return to the colonial-era vision. Propagandists of Hutu Power claimed to be radical nationalists but unwittingly reaffirmed the colonial legacy by defining the Tutsi as outsiders, echoing the colonial construction of identity.

Mamdani sees the appearance of racial language as emblematic of post-colonial Africa's failure to fully liberate itself from the lingering effects of colonialism. He views the Rwandan genocide as tragically ironic, as Rwandans unknowingly employed the same tools as their former

colonizers in their struggles for power. It was a native's genocide "by sonsand daughters of the soil…clearing the soil of a threatening *alien* presence…it was not an 'ethnic' but a 'racial' cleansing" (p. 14). This insight underscores the complex legacy of colonialism and its enduring influence on African societies, highlighting the need for deeper understanding and reconciliation.

It is however this severity of violence that Glassman sees as (an) anathema. As he puts it, "In order to explain the dehumanizing and dehumanized violence of pogroms and attempted genocide, it is necessary to navigate through territory that African scholars…have long preferred to avoid – the heart of darkness – most disparaging of the Hegelian canard" (p. 18).He criticizes as senseless violence beyond seizing power or material advantage, the ritualized, theatrical violence of a pogrom or ethnic riot disembowelments, massive sexual assaults, mutilation of corpses, acts evidently more than simply killing an enemy. A lot can be said concerning Glassman's disgust and sensibilities. He could not understand the possible primordial sensitivity of being subjugated, ostracized, and stigmatized for all time with the fear of never getting redress. Moreover, since it was not government implemented violence as the Nazi holocaust against the Jews, it lacked the clinical execution of the European carnage (Glassman, pp. 18-19).

CONCLUSION

I agree with the school of thought that opines that race has been in existence before the colonial government. Several societies exist with distinct colour differentiation in Morocco, Zanzibar,and even Rwanda prior to colonial intrusion. It must however be noted that in Rwanda for example, Christianity proved to be an integral part of the genocide culture. The Catholic missionaries played diabolical role in racialising the Hutu/Tutsi difference. One continues to wonder how their role constitutes part of theology (Gifford, 1998, p. 54). Glassman

and Hall are of the same opinion; Glassman opines that highly politicized masses sought racial justice after internalizing rhetoric that claimed they were in danger of being denied their rights. He however rejects explanations of ethnic and racial violence in Africa that put blame on colonial projects. He interrogates the dichotomy of the inflammatory rhetoric of the Zanzibari society; ANP - blacks and Africans aiming to snatch power and ZNP - Arabs who see another race as inferior. Hall in the same way demonstrates brilliantly the systematic way the Sahelian non-Arab and non-Black intellectuals manipulated texts to put them in superior positions above the Blacks through dubious genealogies that connected them with "Bib families" of the North African littoral and the Middle East. Contrary to conventional interpretations that understand "racism" as the pathological propensity of one particular political camp - abetted by colonial agents, from whom it was learned - Glassman has argued that it grew from more pervasive discourses of racial thought.

Belonging to the same school of thought as Hall, El-Hamel argues that relying solely on Islamic ideology as a crucial key to explain social relations, particularly the history of black slavery in the Muslim world yields inaccurate historical realities in the Arab world especially on the issue of slavery. The profound power of the social dynamic of Islam and Islamic law has been doused by other cultural and ethnic factors how Islam was engendered in particular historical social settings. Hence to understand slavery and its legacy, we must investigate the nature and practice of slavery in Morocco within and beyond Islam.

El-Hamel's work demonstrates that the traditional understanding of the politics and the practice of slavery in Morocco ignores important historical evidence and derives from gross generalizations deduced from Islamic legal treatises regarding the status and practice of slavery.

Skin color does divide the Moroccan society and the blacks do have the short end of the stick. With the 17th Century mass forced conscription of the Blacks into the Army, the public perception of Blacks was radically altered and it reinforced prejudices and determined the future image of Blacks in Morocco.

Brennan's (2012) assertion about the Taifa resonates with Hall, Goodman and El-Hamel as he relates the word race in Tanzanian typical language. Taifa had existed before colonialism; it has however been instrumental to stabilizing Tanzanian polity. However, there is some confusion knowing where he stands; he asserts that the imposition of European colonial rule on what is today mainland Tanzania (Germans, 1890–1916), (the British, 1916–1961) "shaped in formative ways the social, economic, and intellectual lives of those who inhabited its capital city of Dar es Salaam (Brennan, 2012)." Colonial rulers oversaw urban segregation; they reserved for themselves the best housing and services; they instituted inferior and racially segregated systems of education and government employment for Indians and Africans. Yet the impact of colonial rule did not fully reinvent the language with which people identified one another!

Taifa as an intellectual history of racial and nationalist writers, mostly based in Dar es Salaam, made sense of the wide-ranging urban and territorial changes by articulating the idea of nation and race during the 1940s and 1950s is interesting. The African racial identity paradigm flourished under political leadership of the African Association, which by 1954 had become the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The book somehow and perhaps not deliberately extols an aspect of the working of the *ujamaa* policy and the efforts of Nyerere's *African Socialism*.

Amselle's anthropological work is way complex; he examines the issue of race from different angles as well in different parts of the world. His main argument revolves around the historical definition of small chiefdoms, which is influenced by the anthropologist's perspective and

the political context of their observation. His assertions that the discontinuity caused by colonial conquest gave rise to distinct ethnic groups, specific political systems, and unique religious systems are instructive. As he contends, colonialism played a significant role in shaping African ethnic groups, whereas the emergence of regionalism and ethnicity in France, Belgium, and Great Britain resulted from the decline of their colonial empires. His perspective that Africa is the joint invention of Africans and Europeans, wherein each African enjoys the right to use this shared knowledge as the basis of his or her identity highlights the interplay between indigenous African perspectives and the influence of European colonialism in shaping the continent's identity.

Mandani does not deny the fact that prior to Belgian colonialism and in the process of making the state of Rwanda, the Hutu-Tutsi divide and debacle had been created. His argument however is clear that the colonialists harped on this societal cleavage, which was problematic enough, widened the fissure for the exigencies of the colonial enterprise and with the questionable collaboration of the Church, lighted the fuse that slowly but eventually exploded in what he called "natives' genocide." Donald Wright's admission that European researchers and administrators came to study and govern pre-colonial Africa with "cultural baggage" is so illuminating. These European researchers came with preconceived ideas that led to the disinformation/misinformation of the people's history and culture. They also joined the administrators to impose new but disruptive realities to the communities as ideas that changed the face not just of Africa as a continent but also its cultural, political, and socio-economic realities. The colonial creation of identities, either raw or tinkered has

left a lasting mark on how African realities have since manifested and also how meanings are read to its past.

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