Prevalence of Prejudice in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Progressive, Africans argue that tribalism is one of the most disruptive influences confronting newly independent sub-Saharan African states. Tribalism, they argue, is the basis for hatred between peoples within a country as well as between countries. If African states are to take their rightful place in the world, progressive Africans believe, tribalism must be destroyed. There is little evidence, however, that tribal identity is on the wane, even among the most progressive elements within the newly created states. Furthermore, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that post-independence efforts to eliminate tribal identities may have contributed significantly to Africa's catastrophic problems.
Keywords: Prevalence, Prejudice, Progressive, and Africans.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of significant developmental changes for all youth. Specifically, improvements in reasoning and information processing are evidenced [1], pubertal changes are occurring [2] and identity development is prominent. Explorations and commitments with regard to racial or ethnic group membership require further efforts to crystallize an ethnic identity among many youth of color [3]. Thus, in addition to a heightened awareness of stress associated with the biological, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence, minority youth also contend with racial discrimination, which may negatively influence developmental paths. Theoretical work suggests that it is important to consider discrimination as a prominent environmental characteristic for minority youth [4] which may place them at risk for negative outcomes [5].

Prejudice is an affective feeling towards a person based on their perceived group membership [6]. The word is often used to refer to a preconceived, usually unfavourable, evaluation of another person based on that person's political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, beauty, occupation, education, criminality, sport team affiliation or other personal characteristics [7]. Prejudice can also refer to unfounded or pigeonholed beliefs and it may include "any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence.[8]. Gordon Allport defined prejudice as a "feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience [9]. [10] defines prejudice as characterized by 'symbolic transfer', transfer of a value-laden meaning content onto a socially formed category and then on to individuals who are taken to belong to that category, resistance to change, and overgeneralization [11].

Racism in Africa is multi-faceted and dates back several centuries. It was originally strengthened by European colonialism, under which boundaries were drawn that did not take into consideration the different peoples dwelling within the newly formed provinces [12]. The boundaries were little changed when former European colonies gained independence. As a consequence, some African nations have been plagued by inner conflicts, prejudiced attitudes and tribal warfare [13].

State versus Nation

In Africa, "state" is the least politically charged, and therefore, perhaps the best term to describe countries, the largest political unit that people recognize. Even "state," however, is not a term that all peoples of Africa would use to describe accurately the political system of which they find themselves apart [14]. Members of numerous, culturally distinct groups in Ethiopia, for example, insist that they were conquered and never allowed to choose to join the country (many of these groups do not even officially recognize Ethiopia as a legitimate political entity). Therefore, they insist, until they have equal representation in the central government and the freedom to choose their political affiliation [15]. Ethiopia is more accurately referred to as an "empire" [16]. Conquered groups in Ethiopia prefer to be called "nations" following the original meaning of the term which meant persons closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history [17]. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, such groups "form a race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory." The Ethiopian government, which is overwhelmingly dominated by Amhara, a minority group accounting for less than 15% of the country's population, refers to other groups in the country as nationalities, a term which they use derogatorally to imply that such groups have narrow, cultural interest which must, one day, give way to allegiance to the central state. The Amhara, like many other distinct cultural groups that dominate African countries, have attempted to create a "nation" in their own image. Ethiopia is a "nation," Amhara is the "national" language, and Amharic values are the basis of the legal, political and educational systems; other "national" values and languages must be eliminated [17]. The Oromo, 60% of Ethiopia's population, with a different language, culture, religion and history, do not accept their lot within the empire. They, as well as other groups within Ethiopia, see the Amhara-dominated government as an illegitimate, colonial government similar to the government of South Africa. Africans, too, can be colonizers, they insist, and it is racism that prevents Westerners from seeing this. The official position of the Oromo Liberation Front is that the Oromo must become independent of Ethiopia in order to determine the possibility of them joining a confederation of equal nations in the Horn of Africa. Their main concerns are land rights and political and cultural autonomy [17]. The same is likening to Nigeria as a nation with numerous ethnic groups with three outstanding recognized one which is the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo. This three drags for supremacy thus leaving only Igbos to feel inferior of being marginalized. Nigeria with the average population of about 200 million citizens still lacks basic amenities promised by the federal government. This only brings lots of discrimination and hatred about some ethnicities [18].

Tribe versus Ethnic Group

During the colonial period, "tribe" was used to identify specific cultural and political groups in much the same way as "nation" is defined above. Tribes had relatively little power outside their own group during the colonial period [18]. Furthermore, for generations, Africans were taught the Western notion of the tribe as a primitive social and political system to be abandoned with civilization. Today, with few exceptions - notably South Africa, "tribe" is now avoided except when describing small, isolated societies that have little involvement with the central government. In practical terms, tribe has come to imply groups that are affected by the policies and programs of central states but have little or no involvement in their design [19]. Thus, "tribe," unless being used to condemn a people's self-interest, is used to describe groups that have local autonomy because they are small, isolated or have few resources of value which interest the central state. In essence, tribe now refers to the powerless. The various groups which are today collectively known as the "Bushmen" are perhaps the best example.

Bushmen do not refer to themselves as either a tribe or Bushmen. This is a term used by outsiders to describe them. Indeed, people who study different groups of Bushmen insist that they represent a wide variation of cultural and linguistic groups, perhaps even more than one could find in all of Europe. Often such groups do not have a name for themselves, only for neighboring groups; and the names given them by neighboring groups are pejorative [20]. Yet, they are the ones that have been used by colonists throughout the world for centuries (for more on this issue, see "Letters to the Editor," this issue). Hence, because these people lived in the bush, they were called Bushmen. The use of "tribe" for small isolated groups is a way to reinforce the notion that larger groups are "progressive," becoming "civilized" [21].

"Ethnic group," in contrast to "tribe," refers to larger, culturally distinct groups that recognize the legitimacy of the central state and compete with other culturally distinct groups for control of a share of the benefits that accrue from manipulating or dominating central governments [22]. Most African peoples, at the time of independence, were thought to be in the process of becoming ethnic groups and living in plural societies where cultural differences would be accepted. This has not happened. After independence, sub-Saharan African countries were expected to develop political systems styled after Western democracies. It was assumed that ideology and class alliances would counter the potentially harmful effects of tribalism. In fact, however, it quickly became apparent that the political parties which were formed in most new states rarely represented more than one or two cultural groups [23]. As different parties came to power, they ruled with their own group's interests coming first. Plural societies did not develop. In an attempt to create the appearance of political unity, dominant groups began to ban, or make unconstitutional, other political parties. As a result, secessionist movements, one-party states and military governments became the norm. Today, of the more than forty sub-Saharan governments, only five allow opposition parties, the rest are divided equally between one party states and military dictatorships.

The State and Identity

The importance of the domination of most African states by one or two groups only becomes obvious as one examines the impact of government programs. Most African countries have state or district divisions that reflect cultural distinctions [24]. All government monies are distributed to these entities and all revenues are collected from them. By examining the per capita expenditures and receipts by district one can develop a clear understanding of the relative power held by each group. Looking more closely at which districts receive development projects, credit, roads, communications networks, public health facilities, and schools completes the picture. In Africa, administrative units often are as cultural specific as political parties. Discrepancies between regions are often thought to result from "differential development" rates [25]. It's simpler than that; they result from institutionalized discrimination. Some African states have invested considerable sums on public education in the belief that it would eventually eliminate racial prejudice most commonly referred to as tribalism. But, education imparts values and ideas - usually those of the dominant group - thereby reinforcing feelings of superiority or inferiority depending on the relationship of one's group to the central government. Education alienated many people from their own cultures, and at the same time, created unrealistic expectations of the state. Kenya, for example, is teeming with educated people who cannot find jobs but who no longer know how or are willing to farm. New African states made people dissatisfied with their own cultures while at the same time growing bureaucracies filled capital cities and attracted large amounts of consumer goods. Rural people began to flock to the cities. It is no wonder that the urbanization rate for the continent has increased so dramatically in the last 25 years. Perhaps the most important reason

that African states attack cultural identity is that the existence of separate or distinct societies poses threats to the centralization of power and control of resources. In some cases groups have been allowed to continue to practice certain cultural or religious beliefs if they agree to renounce their political and economic autonomy. However, as the power of states grows or is threatened, the rights of distinct cultural groups are curtailed even further [25]. The groups that dominate the state and its resources also control the benefits accrued from recognition by other states - foreign assistance, investments, weapons, alliances. During periods of economic prosperity they rarely share assets equally with the dominated groups. During periods of economic austerity, such discrimination frequently accelerates into persecution, as dominant groups attempt to maintain their own economic, political and social positions. As a result of persecution and discrimination, Africa has produced half of the world's refugee population [26]. As a result of policies aimed at generating foreign exchange, African states have reorganized agriculture in order to generate cash crops for export [26] [27] [28]. Africans in many drought-affected countries, now starving in unprecedented numbers, are not allowed to grow food crops. The foreign exchange generated from cash crops is most often used for funding development projects which benefit the politically dominant groups in the country, importing luxury consumer goods or purchasing weapons with which dominant groups maintain power [29].

Strong Identity - A Hope for the Future
Africans believed that the development of strong states after independence would improve their lives as well as the status of their countries in the world [30]. It has probably done neither. While the new states demanded allegiance, which often meant the abandonment of long-standing social and political systems, little was returned from the central government to local areas [31]. While governments promised a number of services, they have rarely delivered them. As a result of global recession and declining revenues, African governments can no longer fulfill such promises even if inclined to do so. At this point in history, many Africans are beginning to ask if a decentralization of power within African states and a renewed local emphasis on self-sufficiency might not be a better way to feed the people on the continent, strengthen the cultural identities of diverse peoples, reduce urbanization, reduce social conflict, reduce the foreign deficit, and diffuse the interest of superpowers in the region [32] [33] [34].

CONCLUSION

The Integrative Model proposes that racial discrimination reduces the capacity for minority youth to mature optimally because it increases the likelihood of negative developmental outcomes. Previous research has indicated that perceived racial discrimination was negatively related to African adolescents' achievement motivation, grade point average and self-esteem and positively associated with anger, depressive symptoms, and problem behaviors. Consistent with cross-sectional studies, longitudinal research supports the association between perceptions of racial discrimination, psychological well-being and risky behaviors among African youth. For example, a study of African pre-adolescents indicated that perceived racial discrimination predicted subsequent psychological distress and substance use while the reverse relations were non-significant. The burgeoning research suggests that perceptions of racial discrimination were associated with diminished psychological well-being among African youth.

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