

EXPLODING THE MYTH OF TRIBAL AFRICA

By Seth Awuku

It is often maintained that Africans are evading nationalism for tribalism.

The idea that tribalism is the cause of Africa's socio-economic and political problems first began circulating a few years after independence. Europe has brainwashed its societies into this belief.

Now the same idea is also being used by a number of African scholars and students (some of whom should know better) as an argument for the major cause of African refugees.

Shockingly, efforts to demonstrate that tribalism is the cause of Africa's woes have not only received acceptance among Africans but have been influential among Black people in the diaspora, thereby generating ignorance about Africa.

This reassuring fantasy of tribalism is based on three propositions. The first is that the ruling classes of African states are composed of one tribal group that oppresses other tribes.

The second is that African states are new, with no national history, no commonly accepted political institutions and no domestic unity.

The third is that Africans are more inclined to tribalism than to nationalism.

There is just enough truth in each of these propositions to mislead. It is too easy and also unfair to blame Africa's ills on tribalism.

On the first point: whether or not African rulers believe in tribalism is irrelevant. Many forms of tribalism exist in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Canada, for example.

The fact is, Africa is in an economic coma. What it needs is a transfer of modern technology and fair international trade practices in order to bolster its economy. Unfortunately, Europe has consistently refused to do so.

It is not tribalism that plagues Africa. It is European and North American egoism that plagues Africa.

This leads to the second point: If tribalism works against political institutions and national unity, why it that nation-states like the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Botswana, and Tanzania — which are made up of many tribal groups — are not faced with any significant dilemmas?

The third point — that Africans are tribalists first and nationalists second — is therefore self-defeating, because it is not all African nation-states that are engaged in the so-called tribal conflicts.

There has been a transition from tribalism to inter-tribalism that has been going on for centuries, since before the arrival of White foreigners.

Anyone knowledgeable in African history will appreciate that trade has long been an essential part of African relations. As Africans traded between and amongst themselves they also strengthened their relations through inter-tribal marriages in order to improve relations.

African scholar Kibreab writes that "gradually the exchange or the circulation of goods indicated a continuous movement of goods and services and people bringing an end to tribal isolation." The altered character of tribalism led to inter-tribalism.

Why do so few acknowledge the number of African inter-tribal marriages, or that most Africans not only speak their native language but also other tribal languages?

For one thing, to say that tribalism exists in Africa is to deny tribalism any clarity or specificity. To think that the Kikuyu or the Ibo tribe of the 10th century is the same as the Kikuyu or the Ibo tribe of 20th century is to ignore the transformations they have undergone.

The proposition about Africa as a tribalist continent is erroneous and as such dangerous to the very concept of Pan-Africanism. This talk of nonsense has been going for too long. It is time it came to an end.

Seth Awuku is preparing to enter either law school or a Masters program in International Relations. He is a visiting student from Ghana.

"It is not tribalism that plagues Africa, it is European and North American egoism that plagues Africa"

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REPORTING THE TRUTH ON YUGOSLAVIA

by Nikola Gamulin
and Martin Gamulin

Among the tragic mistakes made at Versailles after the first world war was the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes — now known as Yugoslavia.

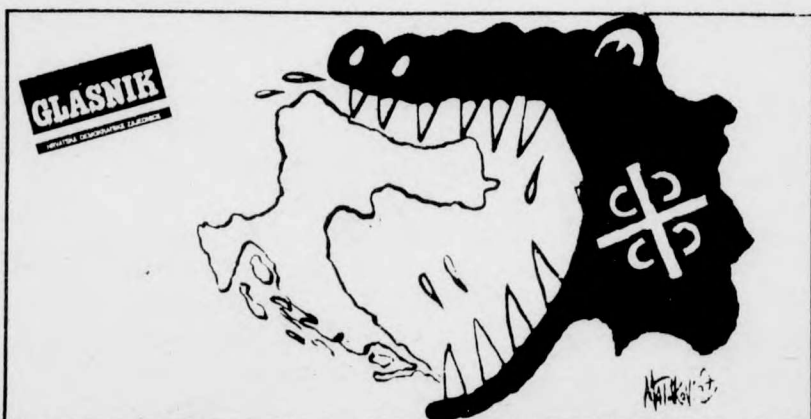
The country has existed for seventy-three years (save for four years during World War II) and for

not one of these years have the people inside been happy.

Over the past few months, the strings that held Yugoslavia together finally broke. The Western press is so full of reports that one can't pick up a newspaper and not read about the situation.

However, much of this reporting has been biased, incorrect or incomplete.

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This cartoon, which appeared in the Zagreb Evening Paper on July 8, 1991, has Serbia swallowing up Croatia. The symbol in the alligator is a Serbian slogan which stands for "Samo sloga Srbina spasava" and translates into "Only Serbian unity will save."