Reflections on the African Revolution:  
The Point of the Biafran Case

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It must be stated at once that Black Africa remains in bondage. The hopes concerning the possibilities for revolutionary and progressive change have not materialized. There are a number of reasons for this. But first it is instructive to examine why so many Western intellectuals focused on Africa as the very model of an “emerging” continent. In my view, these hopes originated in a ‘beneficent’ form of ethnocentrism and paternalism. Africa, that is, Black Africa, was, after all, the most obvious victim of Western imperialism. The slave trade which engaged all major European powers, the condition of the Negro population in the New World, the arbitrary division of the continent into European fiefdoms, the conflicts for wealth and power in Africa, and the racial question in general, incarnated in black-white relationships, in Caliban and Prospero, developed in us the illusion that should Africa become “free”, the West would somehow be exonerated. Moreover, Africa was the “primitive” continent par excellence; the contrast with ‘higher’ European civilization was not only fascinating, but gave Western intellectuals the opportunity to exercise their enlightened judgement about exotic peoples. One is also obliged to note that Africa has served as a center for the most intense concentration of intellectual specialists in underdeveloped areas in recent years. The anthropologists, for example, not to mention tardier fellow-disciplinarians, supported by foundations and governments, have turned Africa into a vast conceptual playground; frequently they put themselves at the disposal of metropolitan intentions. Finally, with few exceptions, the emerging African leadership has been trained in the West, that is to say in the forms of Western society, cultivated by us to certain expectations, and their demands have been phrased in political and social contexts that, for the most part, we understand and of which we approve. It had, for instance, become a cliché that if Nkrumah was a devil, he was, at least, our devil. All of this adds up to an ethnocentric clearing of the conscience and a paternalistic expectation of others.
But the fact is that black Africa has not achieved a revolution and, as yet, has not generated a revolutionary nucleus, with, as we shall see, the potential exception of beleaguered Biafra. "African Freedom" where it has been achieved, is merely formal. MacMillan, who was one of the cannier Prime Ministers of the generation in England, understood this well enough when in his so-called "winds of change" speech in South Africa, he also assured his audience that the political independence of India had worked no great hardship on Great Britain and the Commonwealth but had, on the contrary, led to even stronger commercial and sentimental associations. If he was wrong, he was unaware of it; at the very least, he betrayed his intentions. And history has not quite caught up with his assumption.

It is necessary to re-emphasize that Black Africa remains hopelessly dependent upon Europe. The forms of political freedom are not only derived from Europe, but the very outline of the emergent states is the outcome, not of any internal thrust of self-unifying peoples themselves, but of European gerrymandering "legitimated" by chatter about constitutions, federalism, 'maturing', unity across 'tribal' chasms. While we celebrated the demise of frank colonialism and imperialism in Africa, thus deceptively and subtly assuring ourselves of the flexibility and good intentions of Western civilization, we made no significant effort to assist Black Africa whose indigenous cultures we had been instrumental in destroying, to achieve the conditions of a more authentic freedom. Africa, then, is the least revolutionary of the emerging world areas for the following linked external and internal reasons:

**External (International)**

1. The blocking of Pan-African tendencies by both metropolitan and ex-metropolitan powers. Correlatively, there has been a self-serving refusal to take seriously those notions of African socialism and communalism which projected the possibility of the native quality of traditional societies assuming modern forms through the instrumentality of the most advanced technology.

2. The paucity and opportunism of economic aid, with particular reference to the implicit and explicit promises of the ex-metropolitan powers. Africa remains locked in primary product production, and passively subject to the fluctuations of the international market.

3. Africa has become an arena for accommodation and conflict in the cold war; local conditions for growth have been disregarded, the international lines of conflict have been rationalized in terms of the self-interest of the major powers. That is to say, the contrary philosophies of African growth generated in the East and West evade African realities, or transform them into mere social weaponry.

4. The trading empires remain pretty much intact, mining enterprises function basically as they had prior to "independence." The withdrawal of the immediate metropolitan presence worked no hardship on Europe, and had the effect of consolidating and reducing the political dimension of investment risk. The celebrations of independence seem, in contrast, sentimental.