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Section d'Anglais   Licence 1 – Semestre 1

<u>Civilisation Africaine</u>

COURSE OUTLINE

I. AFRICA IN THE WORLD: A SURVEY

I.1. What is Africa?

According to **Ali Al'Amin Mazrui** *(The Africans: A Triple* **Heritage. Toronton-Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986),** Europeans chose the names of the continents in accordance with their own perception of the world. In the same framework, the name "Africa" can be traced back either to Berber origins, or to Greek and Roman origins. The former colonies of ancient Rome, corresponding to present-day Tunisia and eastern Algeria, were referred to as "Africa" by the Romans.

In the view of some scholars, the term "Africa" derives from the local languages Berber or Phoenician. Others consider it as having a Greek or Roman source. They consider that either the Romans used the Latin word *Aprica* (meaning "sunny"), or the Romans and the Greeks used the Greek word *Aphrike* (meaning "without cold") to refer to the continent. Whatever the origins, both interpretations could function considering the geographical features of the continent.

The first Europeans traveled to Sub-Saharan Africa only in the fifteenth century. That exploration of Africa south of the Sahara led the Europeans to refer to the continent as the **"Dark continent"** inhabited by Black people. That focus on the race is the first visible signs of the racist views of Europeans in relation to Africa; contributing thereby to the complexity of the definition of Africa.

In fact, that attitude of the Europeans puts forward two definitions of Africa. On the one hand, we have a **racial definition** which restricts the identity of Africa to the Black people (for example, that is why some countries of North Africa, such as Tunisia, consider themselves as closer to Europe than to Africa). The main consequence of that racial definition is that scholars who defended the theory that of ancient Egypt was an African civilization have decided to find out evidences that ancient Egypt is part of Africa.

On the other hand, there is a **geographical definition** which specifies that Africa is a continent as a whole. That definition, which rejects the racial one, perceives Africa not as a race, but as a continent. At the same time, the geographical definition moves the

northern boundary of Africa from the Sahara to the Mediterranean; including thus the Arab areas of North Africa.

I.2. Africa and the Rest of the World

  The African continent suffered from diverse patterns of colonial rule which have created many divisions on almost all levels. The issue of that diversity is still topical and complex because it does not necessarily imply division. Even if, for example, we have an apparent division between North Africa and Black Africa, there are still linkages at the historical level. That latent union between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa was more visible during the decolonization period when Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Ahmed Ben Bella (Algeria), Ahmet Sekou Toure (Guinea), and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) cooperated to fight against colonial domination. Moreover, the African Unity includes the majority of the Arab countries of the continent.

   With the European rule, a new type of interaction emerged between Africa and Europe. For the Africans, colonialism meant land alienation, exploitation of raw materials, racism, and European education. However, historical linkages still prevail between many African countries and their former colonial rulers, and appear mainly through international organizations and institutions (for example the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Commonwealth of Nations…). This new form of relationships is often referred to as **neocolonialism** and interferes in all areas in the African countries: economics, politics, health-care, education… (Neocolonialism can be defined as a policy that seeks to implement, in new forms, the domination of former colonial powers over the former colonies which have become free states).

I.3. "Traditional Africa" Versus "Modern Africa"

   The terms "traditional" and "modern" are more often misused. From a European or Eurocentric point of view, traditional Africa refers to an isolated continent regarded as wild,

static, and dependent. In contrast, a more positive view presents Africa as a modern continent, dynamic, and progressive. For those positivists, Africa has been able to cope with the western technologies and ideas; leading thus to its development in various domains. Consequently, it appears that the terms "traditional" and "modern" are used implicitly in accordance with the idea of progression over the centuries. The decline of traditional Africa is not fortuitous because the traditional is regarded as old fashion, inadequate, and incapable of abiding by the external forces.

However, these terms cannot reflect the reality because they are not absolute categories referring to specific individuals, institutions, and societies. Instead, they are misleading and they give a limited understanding of the world. They are dependent terms that can be used only in the framework of values and lifestyles.

Tradition implies time-depth, the continuity of ideals, values, and institutions transmitted over generations. But the process involves also **borrowing** (language), **invention** (evolution of mankind), **rejection** (alienation), and **adaptation** on all levels. For all societies, the emphasis is always on continuity and change. For example, in trying to show the difference between modern Africa and traditional Africa, it should be noted that the changes that occurred in traditional societies are not as rapid as those in the twentieth century (for example, because we have the TV, we can travel to very long distances, we can have access to all forms of information, everything that happens in the US can be known in Senegal in a very short period of time). This acceleration of the rate of change can be regarded as a logical outcome of the technological growth, particularly in the western world.

In Africa, the impact of new forces and values was most significant with the advent of colonialism. In that period, the changes were conveyed first by the missionaries, traders, and bureaucrats who penetrated African societies; then by settlers and businessmen. From that interaction resulted a new system of values which led to the development of universal norms. This development is emphasized particularly on the levels of economy (trade, financial support, transportation…) and education.

In contemporary Africa, the terms "traditional" and "modern" are used to differentiate between rural and urban areas; this apparent difference is, in fact, erroneous because the

connections between those two geographical areas are pervasive. Every town is a mixture of indigenous and foreign influences; what creates new values and ideas. This is valid particularly for cities which receive migrant laborers who work temporarily in cities and return to their villages. Those villagers who go back home carry with them elements of the culture they experienced in the cities (radio and TV sets, pop music, cellular phones, new ideas...).

II. GREAT BRITAIN IN SOUTH AFRICA

II.1. Historical Background

The first Dutch powers settled in what is now known as the Cape Town in **1652**. They called themselves "Boers", meaning "farmer"; and they were motivated by the expansion of the Calvinist doctrine on the one hand. On the other hand, their passage to Cape Town was at first a stage of their trip to the East Indies. But they finally spread out all over the colony. By the **1850s**, they became more numerous and were involved into agricultural activities. As a matter of fact, they clashed with the indigenous people who considered that their control of the land was being threatened by the Dutch settlers.

The Khoikhoi people, as well as the Sam, were almost entirely exterminated and replaced by slaves brought from other areas of Africa, but more particularly from the East Indies. This melting pot of population inevitably led to an intercourse which finally gave birth to a "mixed race" called the "coloured people". Another consequence of that situation was the fact that the white settlers owned some slaves caused a feeling of domination among the coloured. There were three levels determined by what they called the "racial order": **(1)** implementation of slavery, **(2)** domination of the whites over the coloured people, **(3)** the obedience or acceptation of the surviving people such as some of the Khoikhoi.

On their way to expansion, the Dutch settlers clashed severely with the Xhosa who appeared as a better organised people moving towards the south and the southwest. The first frontier war burst out in **1781** and led to the decline of the Xhosa and Zulu armies. The Boers snatched the lands from them and dispersed the survivors.

After the abolition of slavery in **1833** by **Victor Schoelcher**, a French Member of Parliament from Martinique (the decree for the abolition of slavery was issued on **24 April 1848**), the Boers who considered that there was an interference with their way of life decided to migrate to the north and the northeast: this was known as the "Great Trek"[1] and it achieved its climax between **1835 and 1838**.

In their exodus, the Boers moved into the Nataal inhabited by the Zulu. But the Zulu army led successively by **Dingisway, Chaka,** and **Dingaan** failed to contain the power of the Boers who defeated them. In the Transvaal, the Boers formed the **South African Republic** and the **Orange Free State**. The former (the SAR) was recognised by the British Crown as independent in **1852**, while the latter (the OFS) became independent in **1855**. The fact that both states were made up of white people only made them believe in the white supremacy over all other peoples. But the British Crown declared the Cape Town a colony with non-racial franchise.

The Boers encountered the British expansionist army and some conflicts soon erupted for the control of the newly discovered riches under the soil (gold, uranium, plutonium, iron…) and the Afrikaner administration in the Transvaal refused political rights to the foreigners.

II.2. The British Settlement

The Prime Minister of the Cape Town, **Cecil Rhodes**, supported by the British government, tried to organise a coup to take control of the Transvaal. But they failed, and then followed the Anglo-Boer war (**1899-1902**). In order to put an end to the war, the African elite were given the right to vote on the same basis as the coloured people and the whites.

In **1884**, **John Tengo Jabavu** who founded the newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native opinion) helped organise what was called the "Native Electoral Association" (NEA). Their scores at the elections worried the whites at the Parliament of the Cape. Consequently, the Parliament began to dismantle the African electoral body in **1887**. This

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[1] A trek: a long and hard journey

process reached its climax with the **South African Act of Union** issued in **1910,** and which gave to the whites only the right to become members of the national Parliament. That segregation was denounced in **1919** by the **National Native Convention** first, then by the **South African Native National Congress** (SANNC) which became later the **African National Congress** (ANC). But this does not prevent the Boers from fighting on the pretext of nationalism.

(<u>Sources</u>: *Africa*. Second edition, edited by P. M. Martin and P. O'Meara, p.346.)

II.3. The Boer Nationalism

The discovery of diamond in **1867** changed the British policy in the Cape Town. The diamond fields were annexed; mining centres sprung up, and new urban areas followed. Then appeared the first official and overt manifestation of racism: segregation in "the State and the Church". This was followed by the **Reserve Policy** whereby eight reservations for black workers were created in **1854**, and out of which no African could go without a special permit called a pass. Besides, Cecil Rhodes issued the **Glen Grey Act** in **1892** denying the right to vote to anyone who was not a landowner. The Afrikaner movement asserted itself through organisations like the **Afrikaner Bond** and the **South African League**. The British tried to preserve their superiority over the newly discovered gold in the Transvaal. This, in return, sharpened the contradictions between the British and the Boers. The Boer Republic waged war against the British by invading the colonies in **October 1899**.

In the peace treaty issued in **Vereeniging** and signed in **Pretoria on 31 May 1902**, the British agreed that the question of non-European vote would not be raised. The treaty put an end to the Boer war by the annexation of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal to the British Empire. **Lord Milner** was sent to rebuild South Africa and one of the primary occupations was to impose the English language as a medium of instruction. But he encountered a strong revolt of the Boer people.

II.4. The Apartheid System

It has been implemented since **1948** and consolidated in the **1950s**. It means **"*separateness"*** and is a mixture of ideals such as racial superiority of the white race, Calvinistic theology, and some philanthropy (act of doing well). According to the doctrine, every race has a contribution to make to the world. Therefore, they should be kept separated as much as possible so as to preserve the purity of the racial culture. Then Africans should be kept separated from whites. Finally, to a lesser extent, different African ethnic groups should also be kept separated, hence the **"Bantustan policy".** Each race should have its own homeland in which to develop its own culture. The great majority of the total population (the Africans) is given only **13%** of the lands. Those lands have no significant resources. Thus, the segregationist principles of Apartheid are a more dogmatic and extreme formulation of the policy followed by all governments since the end of the 19th century.

The **1948** elections were fought by the nationalists on the race issue. In **1960**, they made South-Africa a free republic. The power of the nationalists stems from the situation in the chaotic country. In its earlier forms, Apartheid worked both to the advantages and disadvantages of the capitalists in spite of the restrictions imposed on the exploitation of labour. In other words, despite those rules established to regulate that exploitation of labour, the capitalists gained much profit from the Apartheid system.

Apartheid has been sustained by a series of important laws aiming at a less flexible social and residential segregation of the races. Among those laws we can mention the following acts:

➢ **The Mixed Marriage Act**: with this act, no white person was allowed to marry a black and vice-versa;

➢ **The Immorality Act**: it was an extension of the Mixed Marriage Act;

➢ **The Population Registration Act**: this act organised the population in South-Africa;

➢ **The Group Area Act**: it organised the distribution of the lands according to the ethnic or tribal groups;

➢ **The Bantu Education Act**: it stipulated that education should be given to the Native Affairs Department of the government;

➢ **The Extension of the University Act**: with this act, all the Blacks and coloured people should be expelled from the white universities;

➢ **The Bantu Authorities Act**: it gave more power to the Bantu people;

➢ **The Suppression of Communism Act**: it was used to repress anybody who was involved into any kind of civil disturbance or demonstration.

II.5. The Reaction to Apartheid

A section of the white population opposed to Apartheid formed the **Liberal Party** which became later the **Progressive Party** and contributed to the fight against Apartheid. Most of its members were English speaking democrats who lived in exile. Even though the coloureds and Indians played an important role in the fight against Apartheid, the contribution of the black people was also very significant. Members of the Black Western Educated Elite founded **"The Ethiopian Movement"** in the late **1880s**. This begun in The Cape with the **Native Cape Voters' Association (NCVA)**. The **African People's Organisation (APO)** was also born in **1902**; whereas the **African National Congress (ANC)** came out in **1912**. The movement was initially restricted to educated professionals and chiefs. It was led by middle-class Christians such as **Reverend John Langalibalele Dube** or **Albert Luthili**. However, the movement suffered from a lack of organisation worsened by the imprisonment of its younger leaders like **Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisilu, Govan Mbeki...**

The ANC and the **South African Indian Congress (SAIC)** launched a campaign against the racist policies of the National Party in **1952**, but it was severely repressed by the authorities. Consequently, the ANC, the SAIC, the **Coloured People's Organisation (CPO)**, and the **White Congress of Democrats (WCD)** organised a **"Freedom Congress"** in **1954** and worked out the **Freedom Charter**. In **December 1956**, some 156 members of the "Freedom Congress" were arrested and charged with plotting the overthrow of the Head of State. This was known as the **"Treason Trial"** which lasted until **1961**. Some members of the ANC considered that working with other racial groups was weakening the movement. Thus, they left the ANC and created the **Pan-Africanist Congress** led by **Robert Sobukwe**.

African resistance to apartheid took different forms: boycott of municipal buses in **1957**, the **1960 riot of Cato Manor**, the rebellion in Pondoland against the Bantu authorities system... In **1960**, the ANC called for a renewed anti-pass campaign. The call was sustained later by the PAC and demonstrations were organised throughout South-Africa. The police fired at the demonstrators in **Sharpeville** in **March 1960**, killing 67 persons and 186 were reported injured. Both the ANC and the PAC were banned, but they kept on working as clandestine movements.