

THE HUMANITIES AND AFRICA'S CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES: THE COLLUSION FACTOR

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Many still believe that Africa rightly deserves to be called the 'Dark Continent' and the darkness is beyond the dark pigment of the skin of majority of the population. The cognomen is due to the crass inability of the past and contemporary leaders of the various countries of the continent to resolve the myriad and protean crises that continue to confront it. The humanities are known to relate with the human condition. The faculty concerned with humanistic issues has in its purview, the discourses on the what, why, when and how of the ordeal faced by humanity in all ramifications. The major concern would be the ways of life of the people within the faculty's vicinity, or better still, the culture of the area. A look at our culture in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular proves that all is not well. However, it is crucial for the humanistic pursuit to recount and transmit the African condition especially the challenges that dog it in recent times and continue to defy mitigation. An African humanist who does not know the start of his problems may not know how to end them. This paper shall attempt a review of some seminal texts of African origin and how they analyze the African condition and proffer solutions (if any) to the challenges. By this focus on the challenges and how the humanities can ameliorate them, there shall be a look at how exogamous and endogamous diagnoses have furthered the role of the humanities in this regard. This treatise asserts in its concluding part that the major problem of Africa is one of collusion between Africans and those that continue to rape and pillory the continent. Apropos, this ripples onto a major cultural and leadership deficit that makes the African of contemporary times, a split persona, whose identity is torn between Africa and Europe, Africa and America or between Africa and Asia and is neither here nor there as regards cultural integrity (a look at contemporary women's fashion further proves this).

It is heartwarming to come to my home state for an academic exercise that promises to shape our academic experience. I consider it a pointer in the right direction, if Delta State-born academics are involved in the processes and events that continually attract them home to make contributions towards building a stronger educational structure. I have connections already with this great institution as a conferee at the Tanure Ojaide International Conference in 2005 and as an external examiner for Masters and Ph D Theses of the DELSU Postgraduate School. I therefore thank you for this opportunity to interact with colleagues and invited guests at this forum.

The links between the humanities and African concerns have been the engagement of different universities. To provide some examples, University of Abuja, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria have organized

conferences on the humanities and the Millennium, nationalism and democracy, national security, integration and sustainable development. These academic outings contributed a lot to knowledge, yet the challenges that merited the attention of scholars at the events remain across Africa. Nevertheless, Comaroff and Comaroff have argued about the limits of epistemology in our bid to understand society. Any look at the challenges of Africa shows that what bedevils the continent also confronts its component states. The jungle metaphor remains real on the continent as long as Africans and their rulers lose sight of the need for the succeeding generation to subsist in an equitable and peaceful society. The different tendencies in power make the ruled to be constant prey at the mercy of the different rulers across Africa. It is common to read negative labels used to describe Africa. Some of them are 'vulnerable' (Huxtable, 8) 'hopeless' (Zeilig, xvii) 'dark' 'backward' (Shaw, 1, 44). From its renaissance foundation, the humanities would dispatch the cultures of people and the ways these are transmitted verbally or by action. It is different from the sciences or technology. Nevertheless, it has linkages with the scientific endeavour and its affiliations in technological innovations and output. Central to all these is the human, or man and his creative enterprise. For the humanities to dwell on the contemporary challenges of Africa is therefore worth the while of academics as they concern the human condition, ergo, the human condition in Africa, or of Africans. It should be pointed out that Africa is made up of many nation states and is not one state as many scholars claim. It is also problematic to discuss Africa as a monolith, without its diversity in culture, politics, economy and other areas of life.

Inside Africa: Troubled States, Manmade Challenges

That most of the problems of Africa are manmade is a fact. But the collusion factor is corroborated by Segun Osoba who blames the African elite and the African nation states as responsible for the crises in Africa. In his words, "These two creations of European imperialism in Africa have survived virtually intact into the present and have become, separately and in combination, the main sources of Africa's persistent and recurrent crises" (104). However, before Segun Osoba, Edmund Leach had lamented "The real danger is not the sophistication of the technology, it is the outmoded mentality of the power-holders and the policy makers' and "it is nationalism, not technology, which is our contemporary disaster, the lamentable delusion that only the separate can be free. (cited by Thurstan Shaw, 1975). Olukoshi and Laakso (1996) also dwelt on the myriad problems of the continent from the ones that threaten the existence of states in Africa. Africa and most of the third world countries are problem-ridden. The third world of which Africa is inclusive came into existence in 1955 at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Osoba declares that "Africa and its peoples have suffered most as a result of their contact with Europe" (103). This is the major pointer to the collusion factor. Martin Meredith is of the same disposition as Segun Osoba. Meredith regards the colonial encounter as the challenge borne by Africa. He asserts:

During the Scramble for Africa at the end of the 19th Century, European powers staked claims to virtually the entire continent. At meetings in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals European statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of

interest they intended to establish there... the maps used to carve up the continent were mostly inaccurate (1).

The major challenge as regards the identity of the African is the need for cultural rebirth. Yoweri Museveni, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Thandika Mkandiwire have spent much energy to bewail the lack of cultural especially integrity among Africans. Museveni discusses development issues in Uganda and on the language problem bemoans the need to speak to his people in English:

I am sorry that I have to speak to you in English. This is because our leaders in the past did not encourage or foster national language. I sound silly when I talk to my people in English when there are African languages that can easily be learned by all of us. Owing to the bankruptcy of the leadership ... no effort has been made to develop a national language. (10).

In his position, Mkandiwire's rhetorical questions deserve attention: How many Social Scientists have ever written even a single document in an African language? How many researchers have even retained the original field notes in words spoken by the primary informant? Our knowledge of Africa is largely filtered through European languages and their vocabulary. (160). Ngugi wa Thiong'o also provides examples of African nationalists who can be considered bastions of African culture. These are Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwesi Kwan Prah, Paulin Houtundji, Neville Alexander, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Kwesi Wiredu. One may add names like Aime Cesaire, Aldous Huxley, W.E.B Du Bois, Malcolm X among several others. This rebirth is expected to span the sundry spheres of culture, performance, dance, drama, music, chants, folklore and even magic or mimesis through which African identities were and still can be shaped.

Dilettante leadership can be considered another major challenge of Africa. Most of those who can be considered leaders of nation states have compounded its problems. African contemporary history is replete with tyrants and despots. Unfortunately, many of them fail the accountability processes test as propounded by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye Jr. These are:

- ☒ Electoral accountability, which entail fairness, equity,
- ☒ Hierarchical accountability and the insistence of leadership for direct political control
- ☒ Legal accountability by judicial processes
- ☒ Reputational accountability which is often created by the media through the fear of embarrassment and damage to reputation they can generate
- ☒ Market accountability

Many African leaders are undemocratic, irrespective of the wave of democratic movements in Africa. As a powerful bloc that constitutes members in whose favour

democratic discourses and practice take place, (Joseph Weiler, 337) the electorate is yet to realize its power of the vote and this is due to ignorance. Isawa Elaigwu asserts that “any authority that does not emerge from the consent of the people is not democratic ... a democratic polity must be based on the rule of law ... (and) be legitimate(253).

In summation, many African leaders are not accountable. Aligned to the above would be the economic challenge faced across Africa. The term 'Permanent Crisis' used to describe the continent by Nicholas van de Walle would seem Africa's challenges cannot be resolved. He discusses structural adjustment and the different approaches to this 'permanent crisis'. Using the urban bias and interest group as well as the reform mongering models he proposes the need for the resolution of the crisis in Africa. He argues that in Africa, when reforms are started, they are not sustained or adequately implemented. To him also, the major problem of decision making or leadership in post-colonial Africa is based on neopatrimonialism, capacity of the African state, autonomy from colonial powers or the political influence outside Africa that are known to be responsible for some of its sundry problems. The twin panacea of autonomy and capacity can assist Africa in the reform agenda because he avers “autonomy from societal interests opposed to reform ... capacity ...to carry them out and sustain them” are crucial (45). What de Walle finds to be of additional predicament is the state response to the permanent crisis, which he sees as only partial attempts at reform, as well as the recourse to foreign aid. In terms of reforms, he offers examples like exchange rate policy reform, fiscal adjustment, structural adjustment, and to him (286) “the African evidence suggests that much less reform is often accomplished than is claimed”. He declares again (271):

The optimism that greeted African independence in 1960 seems incongruous today. Then, few Western observers doubted that Africa would develop rapidlyAt the end of what is a fairly pessimistic account of Africa's contemporary political economy, it may be useful to remember how wrong these earlier outside observers have proved to be.

The reasons for the acerbic declaration by de Walle above can be justified by the evidence he provides, that the process of democratization in Africa is 'imperfect'. His grounds are that “... public institutions have deteriorated and atrophied (272). The leaders who pursue the reforms are often too few as the above declaration is continued and the factor militating against economic development is stated. De Walle states “the key obstacle to growth-oriented economic policies is much likely to have been the small number of senior state decision makers who have found it difficult to reconcile reform with their understanding of their own material interests” (274).

Corruption is endemic in the continent and Nicolas de Walle and Segun Osoba above consider the elite as culpable for the ill that has blighted the fortunes of Africa. “state elites in Africa have used access to state resources for individual enrichment ...much of the behavior of state elites actually weakens state institution building” (283). Nigeria,

