

A REFLECTION ON AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTAL PREDICAMENT

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Abstract

Among several issues surrounding scholarly and political discussions about Africa is that of the continent's development. Despite the claims that it is the cradle of civilization, Africa, at the moment, remains a developing nation in the global developmental ranking. Efforts to lift Africa from the shackles have included, among others, addressing issues relating to factors responsible for the situation. Although replete with submissions as regards possible ways forward, the dialectical reality takes its course and refines possibilities for African integral and sustainable development. Deploying the tools of phenomenological and critical analyses, the present work reflects on the problems and prospects of African development. It submits that insofar as development is an on-going process, Africa is emerging. Institutions have crucial roles to play towards African developmental goals.

I

The annual diaries of events of most African nations reflect dates for celebration of national independence. Ranging from recall of memoirs of colonial capture to periods of colonial emancipation, series of national ceremonies garnish celebrations of nations' independence days. Independence days are usually days when leaders of nations recount their national ordeals as well as provide progress report from proceeding governments to the achievements of their own administrations. Such days provide forum for the rehearsal and appraisal of concepts underpinning national definition usually reflecting opinions upholding or dismissing a particular form of government based on developmental achievements of national leaders operating such systems.

As viable political concepts take hold on Africa, ushering in the regain of political freedom from invasion and grip of colonialism, the question remains as to whether the celebrations of independence relate more to mere regain of political freedom or to the developmental advancements of African nations within the post colonial era. In other words, there is need for the question of essence. What should African nations celebrate on independence days?

After several years of colonial independence, Africa is generally underdeveloped. In the global developmental scale, Africa is adjusted developmentally backward. Although scholars and theories of development vary in the definitions of the term, and while such indexes could be grand narratives, it must be observed that, political and economic development remain the present point of consideration. The reflection hinges mainly on the extent to which Africa can boast of economic and political independence.

Independence here does not negate the realities of inter-dependence for no nation is intrinsically developmentally sufficient. The developmental cause and effect of colonialism is not lopsided as might commonly be perceived. The phenomenon has developmental effects both on the colonizer and the colonized. Hence, independence of the present reflection related more to self-dependence. The question should then be: to what extent could Africa boast of economic and political self-dependence in the post colonial period? Can the continent justify claims to organic generation and adequate management of economic resources for enhanced and sustainable development? The answer comes too readily upon a view of the vast economic resources of which Africa is blessed. Nigeria is currently among the leading oil producing nations on the global scale. This excludes the other rich mineral resources of which the nation is blessed. Ghana is a huge deposit of gold. Rich agricultural and other solid minerals are scattered throughout the continent. In fact, it is already known that the colonial relations in Africa were more economy oriented than socio-political. This simply suggests that in their utter scarcity, the colonialists sought economic refuge in Africa with subtle coercive apparatus. Thus what supposed to have been simple economic trade was a show of super power with its attendant culture imposition.

But where lays the problem? The harness and management of a nation's economic resources depend heavily on the nation's human resources. Politics and its theories are by their nature abstract, but require the activities of men for practical implementations. The essence of an organized political society (state) is to ensure its self preservation mainly for the human common good (humanism). Discussing the relationship between political institutions and political theories, Sabine and Thorson submit that, "Political institutions and political theories merge into one another in the sense and to the degree that both aim to relate people, objects and happenings under some notion of common good or common interest" (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:2) Although having legitimate political authority, political institutions are coercive since they are institutions that at least sometimes employ force or threat of force to control the behavior of their members (Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 1999: 718)

Nevertheless, a political society reserves the right to determine which political theory best suits its existence and circumstances, subject to review and change over time. Consequently, every society requires an ideology of which purpose remains the provision of the theoretical framework for socio-political action. Wiredu identifies two distinct senses of the term ideology. The good sense refers to "...a set of ideas about what form of the good society must take" (Ibid, 718). The undesirable sense refers to "...a ready made set of ideas meant to be adopted by government as the exclusive basis for the political organization of society" (Oladipo, 1996:58).

The African colonialist and immediate post colonial experience reflect the latter sense of Wiredu's ideology. The colonialists came with very inhuman concept of Africa as savages requiring ontological transformation. With very powerful arsenals, they invaded the continent and attempted the cultural imposition that virulently diluted the organic African culture and leaves her in staggering identity crisis. Part of it was to retain the continent in socio political slavery through the imposition of their political ideologies on a maimed society. Thus, colonial independence of African nations simply opened a phase for neo-colonialist, imperialist political settings, that is in no manner congruent to Africa.

What reasonable development would have been expected of such an entity that could be likened to a housefly stung by a mad bee? For instance, the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates as the current Nigeria is a clear instance of a reckless formation of a nation–state. The attendant civil war of 1966–1970 was an uncontained quest for national re-definition. The corrupt practices that trailed the African military regimes simply bastardized any meaningful thought for African development.

II

Development has become mainly limited to economic and technological advancement. The level of the economic and technological growth of any nation underpins its placement in the global scale of development. But Dukor had argued that the global developmental rankings defile any objectivity other than the result of battles for domination and supremacy among the world super powers. Economic and military power for Dukor, remain the major determinant of power equation likened to a chess game. Thus, “In the chess game of power and supremacy, the permanent members of the pawns community include first and foremost, Africa and most underdeveloped countries” (Dukor, 2006:73). As a continent without advancement, ‘civilization’ and development, possessing neither economics, nuclear military power, Africa remains subservient and an observer. The contemporary Africa live below the line of poverty and shuts his reason, will and intelligence to technology but wide open to all manner of evils “...hatred, looting and pillaging of public treasury, gangsterism, fraud, corruption, military dictatorship, robbery and commercialization of ends and humanity” (Ibid, 74). Colonialism seems to have played a key role in the African predicament. But the vast blame by Africans on the colonialists has been critically disputed by Dukor since Africa’s survival is dependent upon black man’s will power and intelligence to draw from others. Thus:

The necessary components to African survival are the will, ration and the intelligence to develop. Yet he has not been able to adopt and adapt the science and technology that flows from the west. Africa does not have the science that can compete with western science either. At the level of ethics, the post-colonial Africa is Machiavellian and primitive while in science and technology it is seen as an imperfect and perfect consumer (Ibid, 75).

From Dukor’s line of thought, African has no development and any reasonable section on African development would rest on the reversal of the existing trend. In response, some African scholars like Wiredu has posited that the basic step should be meeting the challenge of African self-definition arguing that the African problem lies with western imperialism and modernization. Africa needs to struggle out of conceptual decolonization. It means that although the challenge of modernization cannot be met without scientific and technological development, there remains an urgent need to engage with traditional culture “...with a view to discovering aspects of it that are still of significance for modern living” (Oladipo, 1996:40).

The suggestion is that development is not just about advancement in science and technology. Although Marx holds that the economic structure remains the driving force of development – a theory with so much prominence in the West, tending the subtle

institution of westernization to mean economic development with much neglect on other aspects of development. The situation is simply borne out of overemphasis on homocentric humanism with its attendant glorification of science prevalent in Europe and America.

A western scholar would retort that the Africans are yet to generally transcend the pre-humanistic era of his culture and religion. Surely, “Africans are notoriously religious”, Mbiti would submit, but there remains the need for Africa to review the gains of tenacious inclination to Africa Traditional Religion (ATR) and its practices. Development has to be holistic and humanism has to be integral. Glory in science and technology with grave moral depravity is no development. Augustine condemned the great ancient city of Rome whose huge civility lacked morality, and predicted its eventual fall. It has implications on modern nations. Humanism requires theism at its foundation to be integral as theism remains the foundation of meaningful morality. Africa needs to retain her ontological conceptual religio-cultural cum societal values in the wake of westernization in the guise of globalization.

Conclusion

The African wide embrace of democracy is a welcome development since democracy is not just a western concept as might be misconstrued. The idea of democracy is organic to humans as far as societal living is concerned. As a formal political theory, it has to be generated from somewhere. After all, Africa remains the cradle of civilization despite the debates. The recommendation is that democracy has to be ontologically indigenized. African leaders of democratic governance should draw a thin line between African communalism and democracy. African democracy should shun the western individualistic oriented social setting which they know how best to manage. African leaders should base democratic governance on communalism which is organic to Africa. That mindset seems to be the panacea to the numerous political and economic vices currently bedeviling African economic development. The onus simply lies on African philosophers to project this suggestion on the concrete political terrains and not just on prints.

References

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