

Rekindling the Afrocentric Essence

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IF the triumph of a global capitalist culture has signaled and made large portions of the world to be mobilized or created around the image of the West (and more so the U.S.A) at the close of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, it is an image vastly disproportionate in the dimensions it offers.

And, if the culture issuing from Western capitalism, consolidated with its modernity, the calibrative indices of such reveal in the notions of *laissez faire* or unlimited self-realization for the individual in society, the guarantee of a space for civil law in the polity, the participation of the individual in the formation of political will, and related conditions serving the ends of freedom.

The translation of this paradigm, evolving from earlier incursion of European interests into Africa resolved along a contrary logic of unfreedom, siege and scarcity: the narrow and often self-seeking implementations of the idea of modernity, the insularism of one party autarkies, separations along primordial/ethnic cleavages, nepotism, economic plunder, disintegration of social utilities, want and other corresponding pointers signifying the collapse of the state.

If, in translation, this paradigm of

development and social cohesiveness / intelligibility has turned retroactive in Africa, then the collection of essays Olusegun Oladipo puts together and titles *Remaking Africa: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century* has as its incisive *raison d'être*, a project aimed at the enthronement of a newer paradigm taking an hard analytical contemplation of the factors resolving into the failure of an African modernity. Even saliently, it proposes ways out of the mush, toward a more fulfilling turn in the new millennium.

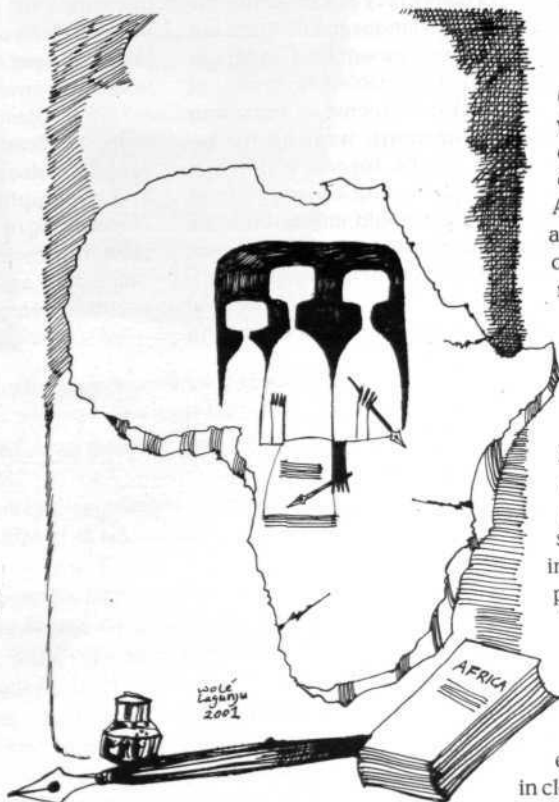
A piece of conventional wisdom seeming to mark its round in this book of essays traces the crests and trough of the defaulting paradigm to the doors of a narrowly-seeking and insidious state, that is, when ethnicity is not reified to the position of antagonist extraordinaire. One could then essay or venture a terse query (even if tentatively): was there really a state consequent upon independence in Africa? This becomes interesting when we consider that some definitions of the state reads as "the whole body of citizens as a corporation represented by the administration for a time being."

When we don't conflate or confound this simple act of definition with issues of institutional or political (il)legitimacy, we tend to wonder whether there was ever a sustained, continuous or theoretically viable construct referable to as the state in Africa? Implied in this terse elucidation are questions involving the promotion of welfare, and essential goodness resulting in the moral legitimacy of any contrived order.

Whereas, received thought equally appeals to the existence of sovereignty, a constitution and jurisdiction as indicators of statehood, to which the presence or absence of welfare or essential goodness hardly detracts from, the script that has been regularly rehashed in Africa testifies to: the ascendance to power (since independence) of a 'postcolonial' elite who took on the reins of power, and ran some of the more vicious forms of kleptocracies that dispossessed a continent while playing up the worst politics of ethnicity/insularism in their interest in cleaving to power. This seems to be 'the

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Olusegun Oladipo (ed.)
REMAKING AFRICA:
CHALLENGES OF THE
21ST CENTURY, Hope
Publications, Ibadan,
1998, 296 pp.



state' regularly referred to. While the state is yet the construct that received opinion has given to us, its basis is however, problematized to suggest its re-view as a moral construct.

Compounding the complex view on the failure of a translated paradigm, as *Remaking Africa* boldly spawns out, are the intricate machinations of Western capitalism and its institutions which though coerces the world around its own image (multi-party democracy/free enterprise), destabilizes its effective participation in a commonwealth. Such subtle manipulations operate through delimited terms of trade, trade barriers, foisted perspectives on development (deregulation, SAP etc.), a global "poverty trap" where exchange values between the north and south, the west and the rest are discrepant and unequal; and an asphyxiating external debt burden. These have been prominently facilitated through the West's institutional interactions with the African 'state'.

Finding a leeway out of this malaise is integral to the Oladipo-inspired re-thinking of Africa, and this necessarily demands the reconceptualization of the notion of sustainable development, regarded as a crucial interlinkage between the irreducible 'givens' of tradition and modernity striving toward a newer sense of being.

Surviving into this project is an affirmation of democracy as a system for the ordering of social relations and the state, but not of the pervasive variant held on for too long. While this often enabled the tyranny of the majority, at the expense of numerous ethnic configurations, its need for re-formulation can be forged within the purview of pre-modern African principles of 'consensus' which would ensure both the participation of the marginal in the formation of political will and their increased self-identity and role in processes of decision making. This will moreover serve the impetus

for community building.

Linked to this is the essential requirement of joining up the universal quest for science and technology as lever for the promotion of sustained welfare, even if with a non-negotiable bend for a communalistic ethos or humane values.

This further impels the desire to revise traditional ideas on development, which have erstwhile been construed as hinging solely on science and technology. In as much as the latter are significant aspect of these, they ought not to be the essence of development in Africa, in the absence of a more crucial element.

Therefore, the requisite foundation for the evolution of sustainable technology/science is in the development of a human resource base or capacity crucial to the empowerment of an African future.

More than the issues observed above, *Remaking Africa's* attempt to initiate a new paradigm for twentieth century Africa is anchored onto the formation of a new moral framework of co-operation centered on identity, self-help and dignity; the privileging of repressed modes of thought within the traditional archive marking a looking back into the heritage for alternative forms of rationality in experience. Also, the re-formulation of concepts of security to include poverty alleviation, the re-appraisal of conditions for continental economic integration; the re-alignment of education to the total ideals of democracy and the general breaking away from dangerous stereotypes in order to envision a newer Africa.

While Oladipo's project cuts its ground in the implication of knowledge formation or epistemology with peculiarities of history and geography, its thesis advocates the empowering of a 'new paradigm' seeking to retract to memory the gory spectacle of unfreedom and scarcity defining much of twentieth century Africa. **GBS**