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Strategy for Good Governance: A Historical Philosophical Perspective and the African Predicament

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INTRODUCTION

That good governance is a desideratum the world over cannot be questioned; and that strategies for its implementation have been enunciated repeatedly by political theorists from age to age cannot be denied either. With particular reference to Africa, however, as Moyo (writing in the AAPS News Letter, January-April 1997:3-6, especially p.3) remind us:

while governance has become the clarion call of opposition parties, NGOs, human rights activities and donor organizations demanding free and fair multiparty elections, transparent and accountable government, the utility of the concept of governance tool for describing the actual conduct of politics in Africa still leaves a great deal to be desired. While governance has become the slogan of choice, there is still a lot of confusion in the donor community and among human rights activities and opposition politicians as to its meaning ...

Moyo goes on to analyse the meanings of governance as propounded by these groups. He ends up rejecting them all because, according to him, they define governance in formalistic and legalistic terms (p.4). His preferred view is that of governance as an expression of civil society which balances political and economic needs. In this sense, governance is first and foremost about the nature and structure of power relations in society and about legal formalism only in a secondary sense (p.5).

Based on the foregoing this author proffers as working definition "that which sees governance as the exercise of power by a person or group of persons for the benefit of the populace - populace in this context referring to all the inhabitants of a state country, the common people and the ruling elite combined.

Good Governance

According to the first Africa Governance Forum held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 11-12 July, 1997:1 Good governance is a process by which governments and people together identify shared values, needs and challenges, set priorities and develop programmes to address those needs and challenges and jointly manage the implementation of those programmes and the available resources, through a transparent and

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accountable process with shared responsibility for outcomes that are responsive, gender-sensitive and broad-based. This requires a climate of respect for the rule of law, the existence of institutional checks and balances and full respect for human rights, with the expressed objectives of maximizing benefits to men and women for the common good.

See report in Africa Recovery, July 1997:24. This definition will serve as fulcrum for the analysis which follows.

Classical Strategies for Good Governance

Any discussion of strategies for good governance is perforce a discussion of the ethical basis of politics, and this has agitated the minds of philosophers and political theorists since recorded time, and probably beyond. It has also been the concern of practising politicians, so much so that demands for it and/or negations have led to wars, insurrections, riots, and political assassinations the world over through recorded history.

As early as Homer's times, Greeks were concerned with ideas relating to the ethical basis of politics. The ideas may not have been consciously democratic, as Harmon (1964:13) points out, but men were already debating such subjects as government by consent and the rule of law. And long before Plato, Hesiod was pleading the cause of the agricultural worker and demonstrating the role of the economy in the establishment of social justice.

Berki (1977:3f) states that in 594 BC, that is in the sixth century before Christ, Solon provided a new written code of laws to reduce the tensions and growing discontent at the economic gap between the land-owners and small peasants - with the latter falling into debt and even enslavement. He abolished imprisonment for debt and restored the land to those who had been forced to sell it to the great land-owners. This process was carried forward later by Pisistratus and Cleisthenes, the latter who, by 500 BC, had completed his work of reconstructing Athenian political institutions.

The Athenian State under the leadership of Pericles, employed public works, defence projects, relief for the indigent, pensions for disabled veterans, business and price regulation, sharing of tribute and the spoils of war, religious festivals, and other devices to ensure a minimum standard of living for its people. AS Judd Harmon (1964:4) points out, such programmes were considered representative of the best in democratic practice just as were the political guarantees of participation and free speech.

The State also undertook a minimum of economic welfare programmes for its citizens. This was neither the "dole" nor a policy of "bread and circuses" designed to placate an unruly proletariat. It was a general acknowledgment that while economic amelioration for the poorer citizens was required in the interests of political democracy. (Harmon, p. 21).

Plato's *The Republic* reflects the author's profound disillusionment with Athenian politics and politicians, and his contempt for the egoistic philosophy of the Sophists - the latter whose major tenet is that each man should follow his own self-interest.

St. Augustine, John Calvin, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the numerous devisers of ideal Utopian communities, in their various ways all represent the platonic principle that the perfect political solution exists, and can be imposed upon imperfect political societies. More pertinent to our discourse, Plato recommended the following to the ruling elite as a strategy for good governance: a communal life of

great austerity. They are not to possess property of any kind. Their wages were to come in the form of food and clothes supplied by the class of producers. Thus, they would have no inducement to neglect the common good.

The communism in property and family which Plato proposes for the upper classes is also designed to maintain the desired harmony. Plato implies that private property and family relationships are evidences of man's lower nature that must be shunned by rulers if they are to devote their energies to the welfare of the community. Very important for our subject matter is the fact that Plato maintained that a good political system will provide justice for all; and his Republic is, in part, a definition of justice and a statement of the manner in which it can be secured.

The ethical quality of governance constituted a fulcrum of Aristotle's classification of government: whether it is in the personal, or in the general interest. Those regimes that served the interests of the ruling group only, were perversions of the true constitutional forms. According to Aristotle, the rule of law and not of force should govern man. Governments must in some way be responsible to those they govern. True freedom in society can be achieved only if men participate in making the laws which they are compelled to obey. In a good society men must be entitled to equal standing under the law.

Harmon (p.85ff) stresses that other classical theorists, particularly Cicero and Polybius thought that stability depended on the existence of a "mixed state" made up of all the social classes participating or being represented to some degree. And for Seneca, the exercise of order and control constituted the strategy for good governance.

According to Bigongiari (1981:x) and Rendell (1978:164) St. Thomas Aquinas, like Aristotle, held that the good life was achievable only in the state. The ruler of the community has therefore a duty to promote the common good by providing what is necessary for its welfare. He must provide peace and unity, moral direction and material well-being. Therefore, the notion that the powers of government should be restricted to what is for the common good can be traced back to St. Thomas Aquinas.

Marsilius of Padua maintained that the basis of government is popular sovereignty. Ultimate political authority must be lodged in the people (Harmon, 139f). For Machiavelli the strategy for good governance is the achievement and maintenance of national unity (*The Prince, and The Discourses*, Passim); while in his essay, of Seditious, Francis Bacon argued that poverty and discontent are the great causes of sedition. The state must therefore involve itself in economic life by regulating industry and prices and ensuring that extremes of wealth and poverty are eliminated (in Wolfe (ed) 1967).

John Harrington advised that the governmental structure and methods employed to select officials and hold them responsible should also be designed to maintain the common-wealth. The legislature, should be salaried, and there should be a minimal property qualification for holding legislative office. This would ensure a legislative body that would not consist only of men of great wealth. He went on further to stress short terms of office and rotation in office, separation of powers in government, as well as free elections and the use of the secret ballot by citizens (in (Harmon, p.241).

Baruch Spinoza's strategy was an impassioned defence of free speech, and also of religious toleration. He went on to argue that the real disturbers of the peace within any commonwealth (read country) are not those who express their sincere opinions, but rather those who seek to control the liberty of judgement

over which they cannot tyrannize. Such people, according to Spinoza, force a contradiction into the structure of law, and so bring it into disrepute: remove its limiting functions, and destroy the sovereignty which the law proclaims. (Scruton 1982:s.v. Spinoza).

For Thomas Hobbes, safeguarding the lives of citizens is the strategy for good governance. The ruler should be temperate and the laws he enforces should be just and wise. (In Harmon, Passium).

John Locke brought powerful arguments against doctrines of legitimacy that try to bypass the need for consent on the part of the governed. Locke advocated limited government and some kind of (preferably democratic) representation. Locke and other members of the "natural rights" school held that men were naturally endowed with the rights of life, liberty, and property, and that governments which inadequately protected those rights should forfeit their authority. But Locke, in particular, went on to state that governments may also act to prevent property being used against the public interest. (Scruton 1982:s.v. Locke, John).

Since the French enlightenment, the remedy that Voltaire (1694 - 1778), Montesquieu (1689 - 1755), Diderot (1713 - 84), etc., proposed for the ills of society was liberty. For if men had freedom to act and to speak as they wished, the rule of reason would usher in a regenerated society, free from privilege, religious superstition and secular persecution. (Berki p. 39).

John Stuart Mill outlines and defends an ideal system in which minorities will find spokesmen in the institutions of government, and in which the right of all citizens will be effectively guaranteed, while allowing to them maximum occasion for self-development. (Scruton: s.v. Mill, John Stuart).

The utilitarian ethics developed in the later 1700s by Jeremy Bentham in his Principles of Morals and Legislation, 1789 approaches moral issues from the standpoint of society. Bentham asserts that it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong. Government should therefore act to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, (see Harmon, p.9 and Berki, p. 332). This approach, now popularly referred to as the felicific calculus, underpins all discussions of democratic THEORY today. I say theory with a decided emphasis because democracy has since become a cheer word. Everybody claims to be a democrat: from Hitler to Mussolini; from Stalin to Francesco Franco of Spain; from the juntas in Latin America to megalomaniacs in Africa such as Marcias Nguema (Equatorial Guinea), Bedel Bokassa (C.A.I.L), Idi Amin Dada (Uganda) Samael Doe (Liberia). Kamuzu Banda (Malawi) Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire). Felix Houphouet Boigny (Cote d'Ivoire), Siad Barre (Somalia), Gnassingbe Eyadama (Togo) and Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha (Nigeria). Since, however, from differs from substance, it should not be too difficult to determine pretenders to the democratic toga.

It must be noted also that, as Sergeant (1993:166f) points out, not everyone is enamoured of liberal democracy. Marxists refer to it as bourgeois democracy, and hold that such a system must be destroyed via a revolution which would be followed by the setting up of the proletarian dictatorship. This form is not distinguished from previous forms by its dictatorial nature. All governments, Marx in particular contended, are dictatorial. The proletarian dictatorship differs from previous dictatorships in that it provides, for the first time in history, majority control. It is, Marx said, far more democratic than other governments have been, including the bourgeois democracy of capitalism. And while the proletariat operates for a time as an exploiting class, its purpose is not to perpetuate its own power, but to eliminate oppression forever.

While Marx and Marxists would work their way from a class struggle in a capitalist society through revolution and a brief transitional "dictatorship of the proletariat" to the Communist State in which government and the State would wither away, Anarchists, Lyman Tower Sergeant (1993:180) succinctly point out, envision a peaceful free life without rules and regulations. Not surprisingly "the anarchist vision also attacks such institutions as the government, church, and family". The basic assumption of anarchism is that power exercised by one person or group over another is the cause of most of our contemporary problems. As Walter (1969:6) stated:

Many people say that government is necessary because some men cannot be trusted to look after themselves, but anarchists say that government is harmful because no man can be trusted to look after anyone else.

This is a point of view which most anarchists would feel comfortable with. And indeed, all anarchists focus on the corrupting nature of power, and the belief that human beings are capable of organizing their affairs without any one exercising authority over others. This does not mean there will be order in society; it means people can cooperatively produce a better system than can be produced by any authority. (Sergeant p.18f).

The reader must have noted that a common thread running through all standpoints or propositions outlined above is the essence of governance, particularly, good governance. Irrespective of ideological leanings or inclinations is the advocacy of service to the people - people here (pace Scruton: s.v. PEOPLE) understood in the sense of the Greek term - Demos: People as a whole - in contradistinction to the Roman: Populus. The latter refers to those subject to government, as opposed to the Senate, or those who govern. Demos serves better to convey a sense of collective identity which is at least partly independent of political structure. A people has a history and a continuity, which are not those of a State and, according to some nationalists doctrines, it has a "right" to that state which will express and conserve its existing identity.

THE AFRICAN PREDICAMENT

The governance forms imposed upon, and accepted by all the post-colonial states in Africa have European philosophical underpinnings. Over forty years after the independence decade of the 1960s they have not been seriously questioned. This being so the expectation was that the governing elite would be acquainted with, and indeed, put into practice the strategies for good governance as enunciated by European political theorists. But if the African governing elite is so acquainted, it has not shown it; and certainly has not put them into practice. The result has been that Africans have, in the words of the U.N. Secretary General, Kofi Annan (quoted by Harsch in Africa Recovery. March 1998:14) "over past decades...paid a high price for the absence of good governance in many parts of the continent".

The glaring political and economic failures and frustrations of post-colonial Africa and the daunting problems facing the continent have, to borrow the words of Kukah (who writes in Africa Today June 2000:24) taxed the intellectual imaginations of many scholars on a continent that is so rich, but grievously bounded by poverty and failure. The State in Africa, continues Kukah:

Mutates from one appellation to another: failed state, rogue state, prebendal, state, confiscatory state. The essence remains the same: a futile attempt to define the

gargantuan appetite for theft and graft by the elite along with the sheer wickedness and assault on the lives of its citizens. Along with this has been the state's inability to meet the most basic needs of its citizens through the provision of such social services as roads, water, health care and education.

The situation is so bad that another commentator has written an "Epitaph to a Dying Continent". Inter alia, Abbas wrote in the Sunday Vanguard (Lagos) of June 15, 1997:21.

If Africa was bad in the 1960s and 1970s, it was worse in the 1980s and terrible in the 1990s. The older this continent grows in age and freedom the further it degenerates in value and reason.

And indeed, in nearly all African countries the promise that independence originally spawned had quickly deteriorated into political tyranny and economic chaos. Narrow political considerations have taken precedence over the public good, and government has since, in most cases, been privatised, and is run in secret. The advice of the likes of Dumas has fallen on deaf ears. Dumas (1978:13) had advised that:

Politics ought, as far as possible to be carried out in public. Politics is corrupted by secrecy in the same way as private relationship is corrupted by exhibitionism. As soon as politics is manipulated, in a clandestine fashion, secretly and undemocratically. as soon as it is at the mercy of personal influence and personal relationships, it is corrupted and becomes crypt-authoritarian.

Not surprisingly, the above taken into account, all over Africa it has been one autocracy after another with a change of the colonial personnel to that of local leaders who behave, by and large, like colonial governors and officials. To quote First (1972:65):

As members of the imported oligarchy left, Africans stepped in to fill their jobs, play their roles, inherit their rates of pay and privileges, and assume their attitudes, in particular the conviction that the educated in power have a divine right to rule and prosper.

So it was that as the euphoria that marked the "independence celebrations" subsided, as soon as the nationalist leaders and their cohorts had occupied the Government Reservation Areas (G.R.A.) and the corridors and halls of power, the main pre-occupation became, not how to run government and the state for the benefit of all, but how to entrench oneself in power. The people whose support had been, so meticulously wooed in the struggle against colonialism, were now like broken glasses, swept aside.

First was the fact that in the years that followed independence, many of the new states in Africa moved quickly towards single party systems of government. Leadership in the one party states, in theory, was supposed to be collective, consultative, and rotatory. But in actually turned out to be a tendency towards personalized and self-perpetuating rule with leaders hell-bent on clinging to power until death did them part!

The one party states developed into tyrannies, with government by decrees, imprisonment without trial, strong-arm political police, and other defiances of the rule of law. From Kwame Krumah in Ghana, Sekou

Toure in Guinea (Conakry), Bourguiba in Tunisia to Marcias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea, Kamuzu, Banda in Malawi, Felix Houphuet-Boigny in cote d'Ivoire, Bedel Bokassa in Central African Republic (CAR), to mention but a few, the story was, by and large, the same.

It is also well known that as leaders entrenched themselves in positions of power, as leaders declared themselves "life presidents", the masses woke to the realisation that colonial rule had been replaced by "politicians" rule, with popular oppression remaining the constant. As a result of these, an unbearable wind of the politics of anomie prevailed as the fruits of politics became the exclusive right of the ruling elite. It is by and large in this context that the military began to intrude in the political arena with varying degrees of popular acceptance.

But contrary to post-coup declarations of military governments being corrective and interim, it was soon discovered that civilians did not have a monopoly of misgovernance and/or perpetuating themselves in power. A few examples may serve to illustrate the point. Under Senyi Kountche power in Niger was Kountche himself; Idi Amin in Uganda brutalised civil servants, judges, church officials, university teachers, and his fellow army officers alike with reckless abandon. The Central Africa's former army sergeant, Bedel Bokassa, an overt admirer of Idi Amin, not only tried to emulate the latter in many ways, he used demonstrating secondary school students for murderous target practice, and ended up emptying the country's till to crown himself empower on the lines of Napoleon Bonaparte, a former French army corporal turned emperor, who Bokassa also greatly admired. Another army sergeant turned general converted Liberia - which name suggests freedom, into a murderous little republic in West Africa. The track record of Siad Barre of Somalia, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), and probably on a leader scale the military regimes in Nigeria - particularly that of Ibrahim Babangida and Sard Abacha in recent times - are all indications that no lessons have been learnt.

And so all over Africa since what Crowder (writing in African Affairs 86,342 (January 1988:9) calls the "annus mirabilis of Africa independence, the abuse of power and the desecration of the democratic game has been the rule. In the words of Austen (1978:29), power has moved uncertainly, sometimes very bloody indeed in a frenzy of killing frenzy of killing from one community to another, from party leaders to military commanders or from one section of the civilian elite to another- democratic republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria, Liberia, Congo (Brazaville), Angola, Sierra Leone, Tchad, Swaziland, Lesotho, and South Africa, to mention but a few.

Writing in 1972 of the generation of the elite that led the nationalist movements and succeeded to the power of the colonial governments, Nwabueze (1972:303) had hoped that the repressive and perverse methods which were primarily designed to maintain the "founder" rights of the authors of the nationalist revolution would disappear when their era is over. But as he was well aware, and quite quick to point out:

The danger of course is that practice often stamps its imprint upon the course of historical development; once originated, it serves as an example which might be resorted to in the future by those who find in it an easy way out of a given situation.

He concludes by stating that:

It would be a tragedy if the coming generation of rulers in the emergent nations should succumb to the temptation to resort to the methods of their predecessors.

Unfortunately the fears expressed by Nwabueze have come to pass as any observer with even only a nodding acquaintance with the African political scene well knows.

From all the foregoing a few points come out quite clearly. By way of summary they are as follows: Despite the high hopes occasioned by the euphoria of decolonisation and independence the African political scene is strewn with what the late eminent Senegalese historian, Anta Diop (1987) called the proliferation of little dictator-ridden countries governed by terror with the help of outsized police forces.

Most African States even today are administered by regime with a tendency towards: excessive political coercion of individuals and groups; electoral malpractices: personalised and/or military dictatorship. Most African states are led by regimes which equate force with firmness, violence with authority, and repression with strength. Most African countries are states where government has unlimited rights and privileges, but hardly any duties on which they can be pinned down, while the people have few rights and hardly any means of enforcing them. And African leaders, by and large, have never been particularly committed to the equitable distribution of resources that their election/coup manifesto promised, and their talk of African socialism may have suggested. What is usual is the abuse of inherited constitutions and the acquisition of personal powers through manipulation of the ballot box or the barrel of the gun. This is coupled with the expropriation of the resources of the state by the few, and the patent progressive immiseration of the masses as a result.

WHY IS AFRICA SO UNBLEST?

Extent literature suggests at least five reasons which can be treated under the following headings:

1. Alien legal and Philosophical Underpinnings of the Governance Scheme

There is a school of thought which implies that the African predicament is a result of the fact that the governance scheme adopted by African States embodies ideas originating in Roman law and Greek philosophy which by a process of assimilation have become a common heritage of the whole of Europe but certainly not to Africa (Nwabueze 1973: 24: Read in Verfassung and Recht Ubersee 6(1973:27).

2. Negative Carry-over from the Pre-colonial Past

According to this the problem must be attributed to some aspects of the traditional system which have negative impact on governance today. First here is the fact that rulers of the pre-colonial period, subject to good behaviour, held offices for life. This has provided a model for contemporary African rulers to want to hold offices for life - even without good behaviour. Second, it is argued that the emphasis on wealth for rulership seems to have encouraged corruption and briber) among contemporary African rulers. In the pre-colonial period. an incumbent ruler was expected to be wealthy enough, through tribute and service from the ruled, to sponsor the traditional festivals, dole out gifts and largesse to visiting dignitaries, give alms to the poor and needy, equip the fighting forces, and so on. Thus, "the ruler-must-provide" attitude seems to have cast a negative shadow on African political experience down the years, (see Report of The Political Bureau, Abuja. Nigeria: March 1987:26).

3. The Human Factor in Politics

This would attribute the problem of poor governance in Africa to the human factor in politics. The human factor here referring to the capacity of politicians to distort and vitiate whatever governmental forms may be devised (see Nwabueze 1973:139).

4. The Colonial Contact Situation

This is a common view held in most Social Science circles in Africa, It implies that the structures and philosophy of governance implanted during the colonial period have shaped the attitudes, behaviour and conduct of the power elite to the present day.

5. A failure of leadership

This would attribute the problem of poor governance in Africa to, in the words of Achebe (1983:1). "the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership".

A careful study of the arguments adopted by the five schools of thought would suggest that the* first two can be conveniently discarded as irrelevant. Attractive as it is, it does not seem to have taken into account the fact that a casual reading of the African systems in pre-colonial times would suggest that many aspects are laudable and have parallels in Western liberal - democratic forms. For example, there was consensus democracy; leaders did not cut themselves off from those who placed them in positions of leadership and authority; there was a system of checks and balances which prevented extreme authoritarianism; and of course, the people had the power, effective power, to remove a despotic or tyrannical ruler (Jordan 1978:48f; also Ayoade and Agbaje (ed) 1989:passim). Re 2: It must be stressed that the scope and challenges that the pre-colonial systems were called upon to meet were usually less complex, and the universe of their operations much smaller than those that confront modern states, particularly in Africa, each polity was confined, more or less, to its respective nationalities. More significant for our purpose, however, was the fact that governing and governance, as indicated already, were guided by clearly defined principles in the pre-colonial times. Among these were: balance between power and authority on the one hand, and accountability and service, on the other; more open and direct participation of the population in governance through consultation, and emphasis on consensus; emphasis on merit, performance and character in the choice and sustenance of rulership; and an unambiguous definition and acceptance by all, the rulers and the ruled, of the purpose of governance as the promotion of the well-being of the people and the entire community (see Report of the Political Bureau, 1987 p.26). That said, it must be emphasised that Africa owes most, if not all its predicament of lack of good governance to a combination of the human factor in politics, the colonial contact situation and the failure of leadership.

The Human Factor in Politics

By way of reminder, this refers to the capacity of politicians to distort or vitiate whatever governmental forms may be devised. While this is not unique to the African political situation, the problem in Africa is uncanny. Africans have tried all possible forms of government: the parliamentary system of liberal democracy; the Presidential system modelled on the United States of America exemplar; the French model of Presidentialism; One-party/single party systems, military dictatorships, etc. None has come out

quite successfully in Africa while even some post-colonial states outside the continent have been more successful. Politicians are responsible.

The Colonial Contact Situation

As I had occasion to point out in another context (Agi in Indian Journal of Politics xxvi, 1-2 (1992:100) the growth of dictatorial, and at times fascist regimes in Africa was not a mere accident. It was nurtured both intentionally and, to some extent, inadvertently, right from the onset of colonial rule. Like deep tumours which sometimes take years before their growth manifests, the fascist institutions engendered by colonial practices proliferated until they began to manifest themselves in contemporary times.

To begin with, while most of the colonial powers adhered to the tenets of liberal democracy in the metropolis, they had no intention of transferring same to their African "possessions". Whether it was in North, South, Central, East or West Africa, as Young (in Daedalus, CXI, 2(1982): 75f) observed, the need for domination over a subject population left no room for the transfer to the new colonial states of the "state-limiting doctrines, constitutionalism, civil liberties, liberalism" that had evolved in Europe. Rather the colonial state sought to equip itself with the mythology of irresistible power and force in order to impose its hegemony 3.-z simultaneously find means to extract from peasant economies the fiscal resources to pay for conquest and its institutionalization.

Furthermore, as Crowder (in African Affairs 86.54: Jan. 1987:47) points out, the colonial rulers hardly set a good example of operating the economy in the best interest of their subjects. Profits were expatriated .lot invested in local industries, providing a parallel with, though here not a model for, the present salting of ill-gotten gains by Africa leaders in the banks of Switzerland and other safe havens of the Western World. This was the political culture to which the independence nationalist leaders who inherited the post-colonial state were socialised. Does it need a genius to point out that a genuinely democratic culture can never be built on an autocratic foundation?

Then of course, the political institutions introduced in Africa by the colonial rulers hardly took into account the existing indigenous values and practices. Not surprisingly, as Ki-Zerbo (writing in AAPS Newsletter, January -April 2000:4) rightly points out:

Independence, instead of being an occasion for Africans to merge the positive input from outside, and the best of the African patrimony of governance, was often the takeoff point of a rush towards brute/ savage power, combining the worst of Africa with the worst of the outside, from where the deviants seriously tarnished the image of the continent.

The Leadership Issue

The countries of Africa, with the rather rare exceptions such as the leaders of Botswana, and Tanzania under the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, have never been fortunate in their leadership. Africa has failed to produce even the distant equivalent of Plato's philosopher king. On the country, African leaders have the uncanny propensity to regard their various countries as personal Chiefdoms where their bidding is law. African leaders and their cohorts, by and large, used and are using strong arm police and terror tactics to suppress all expressions of dissent and opposition, even when paying lip-service to democratic

principles. Indeed, quite often, African leaders, tacitly or expressly, take a leaf from the book of Louis the XIV of France: they equate themselves with the state.

African leaders have never been particularly committed to the equitable distribution of resources that their election/coup manifestoes promised, and that their talk of African socialism may have suggested. What is usual is the abuse of inherited constitutions and the acquisition of personal powers through manipulation of the ballot box or the barrel of the gun. These are coupled with the expropriation of the resources of the state by the few and the patent progressive immiseration of the masses as a result.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

A lot needs to be done to enable African states to improve the quality of governance. To begin with, we must remember the saying that actions speak louder than words. This being so, all those involved in the governance project must cut down drastically on the rhetoric and let us have more action. In this regard, a start has already been made in the context of the UN system-wide Special Initiative on Africa which as indicated earlier, has as major theme: Good Governance Key To Progress, and whose aim is to seek to improve the quality of Africa's political and economic governance. Pursued to its logical conclusions, this initiative should take care of the human factor in politics and ensure that governance in Africa stops being only elite dominated, and becomes in a true sense mass oriented. *Pari pasu*, the old-guard leadership must be prevailed on to step aside. This is because as Moyo (in AAPS Newsletter, January - April 1997:6) is at pains to point out:

Through no fault of their own and products of history and dominant social structures in society, the current influential leaders in politics, law, business, industry and scholarship in Africa are at worst authoritarian and at best ambivalent toward democracy and human rights. Their mindset is genuinely steeped in the authoritarian traditions of the past.

To replace this crop of leadership Africa must nurture leaders with personal integrity, committed to the development of their states and the pursuits of the interests and welfare of their people as a whole, and not the interests of the members of their own ethnic groups or of a coterie of like-minded, self-interested power-seekers, leaders who do not see themselves as indispensable (Ndulu et al in CODESRIA BULLETIN, No. 1, 1998:5). As Africans, we must seek to merge the positive input from outside and the best of the African patrimony of governance entailed in compromise, communal harmony and participation; decision-making procedures which allow for individual input and promote mutual tolerance, patience and respect for the views of others; and the notion of the state as a *res publica*, a political organisation whose survival, welfare, and success are matters of everyone's concern (see Ki-Zerbo in AAPS Newsletter January - April, 2000:4 also Ndulu et al in CODESRIA BULLETIN No. 1, 1998:6). Finally, it must be noted that all the foregoing will come to naught if we forget to take into account the colonial contact situation. Therefore, of utmost importance is the need to dismantle the neo-colonial nature of the African States and enthrone a regime of self-reliance, and one may even say, limited autarky on the lines of China and Malaysia. Only so can we prevent continued unwarranted intervention from outside to maintain a situation of permanent crisis in the continent, which in turn enables outside forces to continue the exploitation of Africa in more subtle ways. Only so can we extricate the continent from the predicament of the absence of good governance.

NOTES

1. Co-sponsored by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa the Forum was held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia on 11-12 July 1997 in the context of the UN System-wide Initiative for Africa which has as aim to seek to improve the quality of African political and economic governance. It was hoped that the Forum might become a yearly event; but not much has been heard of it in the last two years.
2. Attempts to fashion indigenous forms (as in Tanzania under the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, and in Nigeria in the period 1986-7) have all come to naught as political leaders grapple with issues of governance.
3. A recent case in point is the decision by the Presidency in Nigeria to hike the cost of petroleum products by about 50% - a move generally regarded as anti-masses, and therefore ill-advised. Criticisms

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