

Towards A New Social Order in African States

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Abstract

This paper examines, expatiates and discusses the continuous woes, problems, troubles and crises militating against the development and growth of African society. It is a truism to the whole world that African continent is a continent of societal degradation in all facets of human existence be it moral, education, politics, religious, cultural and among others. To say otherwise is to result into blatant and arrant lies of highest order! This is a continent with innumerable resources both human and natural but the problems of this society are human beings whether young or old, man or woman; no one is exempted from the odds facing our society. For many troubles and calamities befalling Africa, therefore, our aim would be to examine issues and problems that culminate in the 'stranded' and 'stagnated' state we find ourselves; hence, looking for ways forward on how there will be a new social order where individuals, groups and corporate institutions and bodies could be of help.

Background to African predicaments

Africa had been in relative peace and harmony before the advent of the western 'missionaries' and explorers in the late fourteenth century; meaning that the incursions and forays of the western world into African society, instead of being a blessing started and began to unfold different problems for the society. Not that one is completely blaming the westerners' incursions and their works but the larger blame is on them as Walter Rodney examined that Europe is to be blamed for the woes being faced today in our society in his work, *How Europe Underdeveloped*

Africa. The era of slavery would forever be remembered due to the offsprings that put Africa in complete and total darkness. Here, history will continue to repeat itself as colonialism and neo-colonialism began to surface in African soil, thus making African continent a deserted one through various means. Edward Carr in his work writes:

Society and the individual are inseparable; they are necessary and complementary to each other, not opposites . . . As soon as we are born, the world gets to work on us and transforms us from merely biological into social units. Every human being . . . is born into a society and from his earliest years is moulded by that society (1961:31).

The words of Carr come to fore that it is impossible to distinguish between individuals and the society but these statements could not be acceptable and accepted as a òniversal maxim in the case of African society because the people have been made to believe that Africa before the coming of the whites according to Harry Johnson is barbaric and that it had never advanced beyond the first era of civilisation. Also, Africans had been made visitors in their own motherland by the imperialists.

There are various effects of the presence of the whites on African soil, namely among many: it led to the loss of African identity, which is so important to any race; it also led to depopulation of the continent when all its 'able-bodies' were carted away as slaves to work on white man's vegetation; economic wastes of African capital on colonies' infrastructure; thorough-bred hardships on the society among others. And this is why Ivan Sertima writes of the state of commotion in African continent thus:

No human disaster . . . can equal in dimension of destructiveness the cataclysm that shook Africa. We are all familiar with the slave trade and the traumatic effect of this on the transplanted black, but few of us realise what horrors were wrought on Africa itself. Vast populations were uprooted and displaced, whole generations disappeared, European diseases descended like the plague, decimating both cattle and people, cities and towns were abandoned, family networks disintegrated, kingdoms crumbled, the thread of

cultural and historical continuity were so savagely torn asunder that henceforward one would have to think of two Africans: the one before and the one after the Holocaust (cited by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 1986:86).

Anthony Echekwube in *Traditional Social Institutions and Human Rights Promotion in Nigeria* shares the opinion of Ivan Sertima about the effect of slavery and colonialism on the African continent thus:

. . . it is clear that colonialism created a very ugly atmosphere in the African countries where it held sway. It dehumanised the indigenes by turning them into commodity for sale. It encouraged disunity and enmity among the peoples and destabilised beyond all expectations the otherwise stable traditional communities, which were living at peace. The ideals of the societies had been seriously eroded by forceful governance. . . . The ideals of solidarity, communalism, respect for elders and observance of the rules and regulations of the land became lost. The effects of the negative developments are clearly evident in the woes, which beset us in modern times (2002 2003:34).

No one could deny the terrible effects this had on Africans and Africa mentally, psychologically, culturally, historically among others. These effects listed above led to the continuous problems and issues, which would be examined below on the African society.

Issues in Africa

Not long after 'political independence' and not 'mental and psychological independence' was granted to many African states by the so-called "Africans allies" that so many issues began to raise their ugly heads and the consequences are enormous for the continent to bear. The continent has never known peace, happiness and tranquility since the time of their departure and this is why Ehusani writes that:

. . . Africans see colonialism as synonymous with material exploitation, cultural expropriation and anthropological impoverishment . . . the African survivors of colonialism suffer gross ego distortion. Their continent has become the most bastardised and misused continent, and they themselves have been milked dry of their self-confidence. In one word, they have been dehumanised (1991:18-19).

Some of the so many issues that have been confronting African states and still calling for adequate attention would be examined here below.

Ignorance/Poverty of ideas and ideals

The highest of all problems facing our continent today is that of ignorance or poverty of ideas. And it is on this basis that the Caucasoid are of the opinion, call it erroneous, that if you want to hide any important information from the Negroid, insert it in a book. This is absurd, degrading and dehumanising! This opinion is tenable in our society today as we study or even read less in a way to searching for controls over our problems. For a society to develop; such society must be able to be abreast with happenings around it but alas, what we see and experience is below expectation. Izibili and Enegho in their paper, *Development in Africa: The Challenge of the African Philosopher* opine, quoting from Iroegbu's book, *The Kpim of Politics, Communalism: Towards Justice in Africa* (1996: 148) that:

Development is balanced if it fulfils two conditions; the flourishing of natural resources aimed at flourishing of human resources and not vice versa; two, the development of human resources does not neglect or reject one or some of the aspects of the human person as indicated above. Development, therefore, calls for total development, realised by the utilisation of natural resources at man's disposal, perfecting and co-ordinating them toward the ends of both the individual and the community (2002 – 2003: 85).

If this above quotation is a truism, then, there is a problem as what could be development in this part of the world where people are short of good ideas and ideals. What interest our so-called "leaders" are those things that will promote their own ego and selfish needs. A society of this nature and one that neglects historical past cannot attain any meaningful development as Edward Carr writes that it is possible that our society may be destroyed or may perish of slow decay (1961:124) and that history is not only a record of progress but a 'progressive science', or, if you like, that history in both senses of the word – as the course of events and as the record of those events – is progressive (1961:115). The knowledge about our existence is the one that refuses to learn from yesterday with the anticipation of

projecting to the future and for this reason; it has been difficult for our society to develop as it might be termed as a human society.

Ethnic and regional wars

The aftermath of the direct and indirect rule all over Africa led to tribal and regional crises years after independence was granted to major African states. Given example was the crisis that rocked the boat of governance in Nigeria in the 60's. there was a bit of honeymoon for Nigerians and Nigeria at the earliest stage of their historical era before ethnic competitiveness and or insurrections, inequality in education and economic imbalances came to rear their ugly heads, which led to the boycott of federal elections of 1964 in the western region with its immediate cause in the controversial census results of 1962. The coups and counter-coups that followed could be traced to ethnicity with both political and religious undertones. What about the crisis that rocked Rwanda in the 90's between the Hutus and Tutsi ethnic clans, which resulted in genocide of all sort. Eritrea, Burundi, Congo Brazzaville are also good examples where ethnic crises had made landmark and unforgettable tale of woes.

Elections' manipulations and crises

The rate at which Africans have refused to learn from past mistakes is at geometric ratio! The issue of elections has been and still a 'do-or-die affair' of which the end-result has not been palatable to all and sundry. The case of Kenya has been a tale to tell where so many innocent lives have been wasted on the altar of stupidity and foolishness of the supposed "leaders" of the people. What about those that were killed, maimed, ostracised from their homes and families in Zimbabwe during the events that called the attention of everyone in the world! So many have been misplaced; so many families scattered; some family's bread-winners had gone to the great beyond just because of the notoriety, selfishness and deceit of some 'miscreants' and their 'god-fathers' in government as the late afro-beat maestro, Fela

Anikulapo Ransome-Kuti called them, *vagabonds in power* (VIP). The number of persons that have died in the last ten years because of elections in Africa is alarming. The case of Nigeria is another issue in electoral malpractices; it seems we have accepted this new culture of deceit as a normal ethos for human survival. We see how humans were being inhuman to their fellow brothers in African continent just because of positions; we see and experience sit-tight leaders of less importance and significance to the citizenry. Examples abound all over the states of Africa.

Religious crises

The so many cases of religious crises between the Christians and the Mohammedans in Africa and particularly in Nigeria are enormous. Ehusani in *An Afro-Christian Vision "Ozovehe" Toward A More Humanised World* has this to say:

The religious climate is no less cataclysmic. Africa has not only been the dumping ground of all religious systems, sects and movements from the East and West, but has also been their battle ground. As if the crisis of ethnicism among many African peoples were not enough, new religious affiliations have pitched brother against brother in bitter rivalry; and in countries where religious clashes have not taken the dimension of a full-scale war, there have been at least hundreds of lives lost to sporadic religious skirmishes. The result of all these is that human life is becoming increasingly cheaper by the day. Human blood is beginning to lose its traditional sacredness, because it is so frequently spilled for the flimsiest of reasons, while the awe traditionally associated with corpses is disappearing because they now litter African roadways and highways unattended (1991:21).

An important question comes to mind and which will affect the rational minds in our society that if our faith could not bring us out of our crooked ways and carnivouristic tendencies; then, what is the necessity and significance of calling and nick-naming ourselves as followers of and adherents of the two 'foreign religions'? That is the state we find ourselves today in African continent; our habits and characters are not different from those of the animals.

Corruption

The issue of corruption has been watered down in our society as many writers and authors have cried fouls all days whether political or religious sector. Well, this has been the immediate cause of our many problems in African society where the effects and offsprings are the banes of our development. So many of our leaders are culprits of corruption whether the executives in all cadres of governance, “the law-breakers” called law makers, the judiciary and even the religious leaders and adherents in all sectors of our economy. Maxwell James in his article, *Corruption Inc.* examines the depth of corruption in the Police Service of the Nigerian state that, “today, policemen have been reduced to nothing in our society, as grotesque incompetence rules the day. Our police chiefs are soaked with inert conscience – they give the rank and file terrible assignment of bringing ‘returns’ after mounting illegal check points on our dilapidated roads (2008:14). This is a minute sector of the society! Ehusani in his book, *A Prophetic Church* writes about corruption in our society that:

What is wrong today is not the manifestation of gross social inequities, but the fact that dubious values now form the predominant aspiration of people in the society. Nigerians (Africans) now seek pride and status in the accumulation of material goods, by whatever means. A person’s character no longer means much to many in our society. It is not who you are, but what you have that matters these days. And it does not seem to matter how you acquired what you have. There are people in society whose wealth is acquired by brazen robbery. There are others that are known drug barons. Some are known to have become rich by sycophancy and political prostitution. Yet they are left to enjoy their loot. So wealth, and the power it brings have become the object of public adulation (1996:12-13).

So many are thinking today that corruption is part of our culture, and even with the existence of different commissions fighting against corruption in all facets, what do we see and experience today? Corruption at its zenith continues to thrive! We have allowed individualism and corruption to uproot and supplant the communitarianism

that is African in us; this surfaces in the disintegration of human relations. If the sense of community disappears, the individual has to battle for his true identity. Ours is a community and according to Senghor in his paper, *A Prerequisite: Cultural Independence of 1962*, it does not mean that Negroid society ignores the individual, or that collective society ignores solidarity, but the collectivist society bases this solidarity on the activities of the individuals, whereas the community bases it on the general activity of the group (1975:599). Consumerism, selfishness and extreme capitalism are now gagging up our economic temperature. We have shifted from communalism only to endorse the Hobbes' state of nature where man is ruled by passion, of which leads him into conflict with other men.

Poverty and economic imbalances

There is poverty of food in Africa; the situation today calls for attention from all and sundry if our society hopes to grow, develop and contribute to the emancipation of the citizens. There is malnutrition in children all over the continent; particular reference could be made to poverty situations in the eastern part of the continent. One does not need a prophet or a soothsayer to explain this because people are embodiment of poverty in our society. There is at all levels, economic imbalances among the citizens. Donal Door writes in his work, *The Social Justice Agenda*, that the most obvious item on the social justice agenda is the very wide gap between the rich and the poor. This gap exists at various levels . . . (1991:7). He is not saying that it is a crime for one to be rich and other poor, and not canvassing for a some-what classless society but that justice demands equal rights, conditions and remuneration to everyone not minding the race, tongue and ethnic among others. To make a bridge over the lacuna of what might be interpreted of the above, he corroborates his idea saying, "the mere fact that some people are more wealthy than others is not, in itself, a social injustice. But the existence of gross poverty alongside conspicuous wealth is morally unacceptable" (Door 1991:8).

Philippe Van Parijs reiterates the idea above as that the equal distribution of these possibilities is not a strictly equal distribution not even as equally durable as possible. It is a distribution based on the principle of sustainable *maximin* . . . It is the maximisation of the minimum (2002–2003:16-17). Aristotle’s analysis of justice is the key to its meaning at the level of the particular act or decision. Justice, he says, consists in treating equals equally and unequals unequally but in proportion to their relevant differences (Benn 1967:298-9). The demands of justice are pressing in two areas, distributive and retributive. Distributive requires equality among other things and retributive requires backward looking retaliation or forward-looking use of punishment for the sake of its consequences. The ‘Golden Rule’ of Immanuel Kant presupposes a kind of justice in its application to those in the society. His imperative deals with the notion that justice ought to be given and granted justly; his moral reciprocity of doing to others as one would have them to do oneself is closely related to the idea of not doing evil to others and doing things at the expense of others in the community (Olatunji 2005:55).

Apart from the above-examined issues of issues and predicaments in our society, there are many others, which so many scholars have outlined in their various articles and books. Looking at what we could do in this part of the world to ameliorate the perennial problems being faced everyday in Africa, the way forward for Africans and Africa in order to have a stable society would be examined and discussed below.

Ways forward

For a stable society and state in this continent, the under-listed areas of our life must be taken into consideration, namely: regard for the functional rule of law; structured thinking, humanisation of African values; entrenchment of social justice and many others.

Regard for the rule of law

The process of attaining good governance in any society is the determination of all to have regard for a functional rule of law. The rule of law – its definition and attributes, the possibility and conditions for its existence, and the significance as a political value – has long been a subject of scholarly investigations and debates. In recent years, it has emerged from the confines of academic and philosophical discourses onto the wider stage of contemporary political events, transcending national borders, political regimes, and legal systems. Sina Babasola opines in his article, *Nigeria Needs Structured Thinkers* that:

One of the greatest challenges of our day and age in Nigeria is how to promote a national culture of integrity and obedience to law. Without innate integrity, we cannot practise one of the cardinal values that must be promoted and preserved in our nation – i.e. fidelity to the letters and spirit of the Constitution. The legal profession, as the guardian of the Constitution, must ensure that it saves the Constitution from corrupt practices manifesting in the abuse of power, disregard for the provisions of the Constitution, among others, which rob it of its dower (The Punch 2008:14).

It is on its hinge that democracy and good governance could be preserved and sustained. At the first glance, the comment that the rule of law is an unqualified good is clearly sub-evident. The benefits of the rule of law are innumerable: it proposes that government should have restraints, not possessing discretionary powers. There should be legal controls over government activities and no one including those at the helm of affairs should be above the law (Olatunji 2005:75). These principles if successfully implemented within the state and the society will result in national stability of which will guarantee good governance and security of individuals. That importance lies partly in the power it denies to people and governments, and the discipline to which it subjects all authority.

Structured thinking

Our world will remain as it is if there is the continuation of the dearth of structured thinkers. A society that lacks thinkers will surely lack ideas and the ability to develop such society would be an effort in futility. Samuel Jaja in his article, *Towards a Realistic Vision 2020*, reiterates that while every nation should have a vision for the future, it is pertinent that realistic and achievable goals are set, so that we do not lose the race even before we start (The Punch 2008:14). And to do this, the paramount aspect that needs to be envisaged is our education sector; as without good education, there would be dearth of ideas. He continues saying:

The education sector must be overhauled. It is in a very sorry and needs urgent reformation. . . . the standard of education has fallen so drastically that if immediate action is not taken to reform the sector, we may have to import skilled manpower from abroad to met our challenges . . . The way forward is for the government to make policies that would encourage more private sector participation in the establishment of schools (The Punch 2008:14).

In this way, Dele Cole is of the opinion that calling the attention of the foreigners to solve our numerous problems for us cannot only yield good results until we do it in our own ways as he states in his article, *Tending the Golden Egg* that

. . . Engaging the international community is a good first step, but it is not a panacea for success. It is one arm of multi-stage approach to resolve this problem and the overwhelming focus of responsibility lies with the government. You cannot kill a hydra by chopping off one head; it will grow bigger and bigger. You have to comprehensively attack it to make sure it stays dead forever (The Punch 2008:14).

Justice Ayoola of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission in Nigeria (ICPC) as quoted by Sina Babasola offers his own solution to the multi-faceted problems in African society and particularly Nigerian state in his article, *Nigeria Needs Structured Thinkers* thus:

. . . Excellence in all sectors of our society tends to count for nothing. Nigeria is in great need of thinkers. One of the greatest challenges of our day and age in Nigeria is the dearth of thinkers. There are in our nation today, many blinded by power of all sorts, by material greed. . . For our nation to move forward, we need people who think (in whatever segment); but most of all, we need

leaders who think. . . . Nigeria needs structured thinkers as leaders who are capable of harnessing the human and natural resources that abound in this country.(The Punch 2008:14)

Social justice

Social justice is an important aspect in the society, which is so crucial to the running of a particular society and state where there will be equality and freedom on the same basis without putting some persons into high pedestals. Aristotle's analysis of justice is the key to its meaning at the level of the particular act or decision. Looking and examining justice from the viewpoint of Iris Marion Young, she opines and thinks about justice not as a set of debts we owe ourselves but as a set of relations between social groups. She investigates the rhetoric power that underlies old ways of discussing justice in terms of distribution, denying justice is a finite community-oriented justice that revolves not around the interlocking and often villages but around the interlocking and often messy communities that exist side by side (Nov. 2004). In her arguments, she affirms that a distributive paradigm of justice corresponds to the primary formulation of public debates in societies. It is inherent from the views of Young that justice could be discussed and examined extensively where participation in public discussions and decision-making is embedded. She says that democracy (a democratic society) is a condition for public to arrive at decisions whose substantively just outcomes include distributive justice (Young 1990:92). This means that all differences, interests would be transcended to seek a common good.

Entrenchment and humanisation of African values

The study and entrenchment of our values and ideals are imperative because we find ourselves in a setting where vices are extolled at the expense of values. The problem that leads to other vices in our society, which also has affected all aspects of nation-building, is that of crisis of identity. Olatunji in his paper, *Freedom and Culture: The African Experience* writes:

The cultural crisis in Africa – a crisis sometimes referred to as the crisis of self-identification – is, therefore, an aspect of a larger problem. This is the problem of socio-economic emancipation, which can only be resolved when Africans become masters of their collective destiny by winning the struggle for national liberation in their various societies and thereby creating the atmosphere for the evolution of an authentic Pan-African cultural identity (1992:205).

The study of our values like honesty, respect, sensitivity to the need of others and the society, loyalty and others (humanism), does not mean declaring oneself a faithful guardian of the views of our forebears but rather, it is a critical approach to those values; a revival of the values, a renaissance approach to the study of values and an ardent awareness of what values are as Ehusani writes in his book that, “. . . humanity is at the centre of the traditional African world view (1991:24). The effect of our education should be to develop and contribute to the emergence of Africa at the limelight for the emancipation and humanisation of the society. Nnoruka in Oguejiofor (1988:45) writes:

It is now ripe for us to ask the question: What kind of education can contribute to African development? That is, what kind of education can enable us to develop our Africa of today? It is education that gives one sufficient exposure beyond his African horizon while at the same time prepares him to appreciate cherished African values. The recipient of this education becomes authentically African while at the same time open to and appreciates other cultures. The beneficiary appreciates African values such as solidarity, hospitality, communalism, and respect for elders.

For the emancipation of our world, there is the need for us to recognise our African identity; who we are and where we are heading to. Indeed, the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial Yoruba education, for instance, was its relevance to Africans in sharp contrast with what was later introduced. There should be no separation of education and productive activities; our education should match the realities of our Africanness and produce well-rounded personality to fit into the society. In another dimension, there is the need to recognise and admit the necessity to conform with the nature of being an African; its close links with social life both in material and

spiritual senses; its collective nature; its many sidedness and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional, mental and moral development. Therefore, no one should be made to be visitors to his (her) own culture and the habit of not looking down on the culture, practices and emotions of the society. Here, Nnoruka is of the view that, “it is clear . . . that education that can contribute to African development is one that gradually enables the recipient to systematically assimilate cherished African values. Such a system of education must also have a focus.” (Oguejiofor 1988: 247).

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to discuss the state of things in the continent of which the aftermath of the coming of the whites into African world has always been a disaster. Our search in this paper has been to see how we could have a lasting stability and peace in the continent of Africa. Apart from ways forward examined above, there are also many others for the sustenance of the polity. Different cases and issues have been examined and explained so far and the way forward for all in the search for finding lasting solutions to the problems of stability in all our facets of our existence. An analysis of the proper ways to looking for stability on this African continent as individuals efforts are needed, so also, the efforts of corporate bodies and non-governmental organisations, religious sects, schools and the society in general are of paramount importance. The time to begin is now in the general interest of canvassing for a serious social order for African growth and development. Delay might be disastrous!

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