The Africana World : From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance.

Pretoria, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012, 363 p., bibl.

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MUCHIE, Mammo, OSHA, Sanya & MATLOU, Matlotleng P. (eds.). — *The Africana World : From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance*. Pretoria, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012, 363 p., bibl.

- 1 The conundrum of Africa to (western-type of) democracy has so perplexed Africanist authors that the slightest hint of progress in socio-political local development is deftly popularised as a model, or more superficially, a “miracle”. Beneath the surface of that imaginative miracle are characteristics of the spread of HIV/AIDS, uncontrolled curable chronic diseases, extreme poverty, economic breakdown and endemic corruption, particularly the latter has become a norm to the culture of rapaciousness: “what is in it for me”. What is known in Tanzania as kitu kidoko and maslaha in Gambia is regarded in Somalia as howl-fududeyn, madax-salaax, shifo shifo and sharuur. In Cameroon, it is a sort of win-win (or a deal or no deal) as the proverb has is that, “you eat, I eat”. Celebratory literature— the miracle school—tends to sprint such features of African lives.
- 2 The economic underdevelopment and continual challenge to democracy in Africa springs from medieval cultural problem, a culture (or cultures) waiting for Renaissance) that admires personalities more than institutions. Who is ruling, rather than what is the rule, in a given country is a question curiously posed by African communities. This could probably be due to the long historical process of rule by traditional clan/tribal chiefs, in contrast with European medieval city-states, which

laid the basis for strong democratic institutions for contemporary through Renaissance. Personalisation of institutions is a dilemma for African state development. In Somalia, the most archetypal failed state in the world, the case is more nascent than any other part of Africa. Part of the reason in Somalia and elsewhere in Africa is many, but the most pressing lies in the clan-inspired “civil” wars and authoritarian regimes, who rebuffed to make the military apolitical and professional. One vivid example is the uneasy truce between civil-military relations.

- 3 Consisting of five parts, this collection by pan-Africanist authors attempt to offer cure-all answers by lobbying African unity from international front. The introduction sets out the framework of African unity, obliquely inquiring “if not now, when?”. The editors point out that “building a shared understanding, values, purpose, policy and strategy with a decolonised imagination, knowledge, intelligence, innovation, competence, learning and identity is critical to creating a free and non-humiliating African future” (p. 5). After 50 years of independence, African states are still unable to surmount “the colonial albatross”. Indeed, colonialism served a scapegoat for many Africans distressed by perpetual poverty and underdevelopment in many fronts. Yet Haiti is a slap in the face of Africans. It became the first black independent state in 1791 and, after two centuries of independence, it remains one of the ten poorest countries in the world. This shows that political independence did not usher in a human development.
- 4 Part I traces the postcolonial nation-building processes. Part II deals with African governance, democracy and development. Alive with a new form of Afro-centrism, it is claimed in those chapters that African corruption is the same as the American, European and Chinese counterparts. Part III examines the new phenomenon that came to be called the “new scramble for Africa”. It specifically concerns with Brazil, Russia, India and China. Some contributors are favourable to China, others to India.
- 5 China and India are at loggerheads with each other. Where China is concerned with the public sector, India pursued on obtaining economic opportunities from the private sector. The contributors to this part are divided on these issues. India has a strong economic base in the Indian Ocean states; they have even presence on the Somali coast. In fact, Somalia and other East African communities such as Zanzibar had asymmetrical trade relationship with India more than eight centuries or probably more. When Ibn Batutta visited Maldives, on his way to India from Somalia, he saw commodities exported from Mogadishu.
- 6 Gone are the days when Africa was dismissed as a peripheral continent devoid of significance. Africa has become a potential playground for emerging global powers striving to boast economic sustainability and political prestige in a new world order. To rephrase Frantz Fanon who held that whoever controlled the Congo Basin controlled Africa, it appears that whoever controlled Africa controls the world, given the China challenge to the West in the tussle over Africa.
- 7 China is the most exemplary case in point. The comments of one Chinese analyst is apt here that, “studying China in Africa is much like pursuing a dragon in the bush. The dragon is imposing but the bush is dense” (p. 207). China’s interest in Africa is viewed by many people as “mercantilist mission” mimicking a new face of economic colonialism. Its foreign policy seeks to forge closer relationship with the rulers than the ruled, who are those directly affected by any deal signed on the behalf of the state. Indeed, China concentrated for its relations on personalities and parties, rather than

societies and states, though some African states, such as Lesotho, have had relations with China since colonial period. There is an influx of Chinese expatriates into Lesotho, leading one narrator to envisage that the next government might include some Chinese who acquired Lesotho citizenship.

- 8 If Europe conquered Africa through brute military might, China is using through unrestricted, exploitative trade with cheap commodities. There are no political conditions on Chinese aid to Africa, yet it is here where the Chinese seem dreadful for democracy—especially promoting human rights, but not for social development. Its strong engagement of Africa’s politics is hindered by the internal problem, one example being Taiwan. However, apart from trade, there is no investment for sharing knowledge and skills between the Africans and the Chinese. It is unlikely for Africa benefit from such an engagement if it is expected to usher in sustainable development and good governance in the long run. China’s engagement to Africa is, indeed, contrary to its traditional idiom: teach how to catch the fish, instead of giving.
- 9 Part IV is an excellent innovation of indigenous knowledge systems. With the shadow of neo-pan-Africanism, the slogan of this part is re-narration of slavery to capture ordinary Africa’s attention. The trick is perhaps to create an African solidarity out of colonial scapegoat, because Eurocentric view is replaced by Afro-centric. Part V is a return to the core thesis of the collection: twenty-century pan-Africanism. It is through this spirit that the editors of this collection envisage the twenty-first century as the African century, very much akin to “unite or perish time”. Let us say Amen to the editors’ pray to achieve one African “nation-state”.