Ideational Imperatives of Political Development in Africa: Lessons for India and Other Post-Colonial Societies

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Abstract

Ideas and processes remain inextricably linked in Africa's tryst with its political development. The cumulative complexity of the politico-security milieu is paralleled by self-corrective trends such as inclination for institutionalized domestic power transition, panel of the wise practice and, above all, effective regional mediation in Africa. The popular aspiration of a 'substantively free and self-sustained' Africa can be discerned in the profound ideas of many thinkers who carry meaningful locational connectivity with the continent and also have intense functional interface with the world external to it. Interface between ideas and practices in African political space offers lessons for India and other post-colonial societies for assessing the agenda of the extra-regional actors while being open to ideas coming from new quarters, looking for regional and indigenous solutions to problems concerning state- and nation-building exercises, and prioritizing their foreign policy approaches towards interest of the Global South.

Keywords: *Pan-Africanism, African Liberalism, Sovereignty as Responsibility, Political Development*

1. Introduction

Ideas and processes remain inextricably linked in Africa's tryst with its political development. Nurturing strong quest for 'democratic entitlements,' African people pursue their course of political development amid the historical encounter with a series of disruptive realities. These include imposition of colonial statehood through arbitrary territorial demarcation, Cold War encampments of the super powers containing functional interface between the governing elites and the citizenry thereby restricting societal cohesion, externally imposed multi-party system, competition between traditional (Western) and emerging extra-regional powers for economic space, use of political dissent as strategic opportunity by the Western actors, selective unilateral interventions or threat of such interventions by these actors in the guise of 'humanitarian' mandate, partisan dereliction of the domestic political dispensation and ethno-electoral violent contestation. The cumulative complexity of the politico-security milieu is, however, paralleled by self-corrective trends such as inclination for institutionalized domestic power transition, panel of the wise practice and, above all, effective regional mediation in Africa.

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The popular aspiration of a 'substantively free and self-sustained' Africa can, indeed, be discerned in the profound ideas of many thinkers who carry meaningful locational connectivity with the continent and also have intense functional interface with the world external to it. The path-breaking propositions of *Pan-Africanism or Communism* by George Padmore, *African Liberalism* by Ali Mazrui and *Sovereignty as Responsibility* by Francis Deng are salient representative of such genre of thought reflecting constant developmental endeavours of African people in the decisive stages of their political struggle. Keeping this in perspective, this paper has tried to explicate Africa's indigenous democratic spirits in these *Pan-Africanist, African Liberal* and *Sovereign Responsibility* arguments. It has further explored lessons for India and other post-colonial societies from the interrelationship between such insightfully empowering ideas and unique political development trajectories in Africa.

2. George Padmore's Idea of Pan-Africanism

George Padmore's celebrated work titled *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, with foreword by Richard Wright, was published by D. Dobson in London in I956. The substance of Padmore's argument is that Western Communist Parties made their attitude to the struggles of the African people subordinate to the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union; and that the Soviet Union made cynical use of the African people's struggles for its own ends. He was concerned to mark out a path for Africa's future—and that path, in Padmore's view, should above all avoid any alliance with the Soviet Union or with individual Communist Parties. He combines his anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism with the argument that the European working class has become corrupt and its 'revolutionary ardor' has been blunted. Padmore tries to bring Lenin to his aid in support of this argument, citing his comments about a 'bourgeoisified' working class (Padmore, 1956). Prof. Nwafor rightly commented that Padmore's ideas of "Pan-Africanism were admirably suited to the era of the cold war during which most African countries emerged into independence" (Woddis, 1974).

Padmore's work remains a remarkable tract for the times, with revealing resentment of the way Stalinists had violated the right of Africans to 'mental freedom (Hargreaves, 1972).' He wrote, "The only force capable of containing Communism in Asia and Africa is dynamic nationalism based upon a socialist programme of industrialization and co-operative methods of agricultural production (Padmore, 1956)." Communists, according to Padmore, are 'more interested in promoting the foreign policies of the Soviet Union than in advancing the national liberation of dependent countries (Padmore, 1956). The 'greatest psychological mistake' made by the West, however, is in failing to realize that African leaders are determined 'to be mentally free from the dictation of Europeans, regardless of their ideology', (Padmore, 1956), an attitude dramatically underlined at Bandung and subsequently (Robinson, 1957).

3. Ali Mazrui's Idea of African Liberalism

Mazrui (1974) conceived *African Liberalism* in his paper titled *Africa, My Conscience and I*. Writing it in *Transition* journal, he conceived *African Liberalism* as "a toleration of diversity and pluralism in the society, a reduction of governmental arbitrariness, a respect for intellectual non-conformity, some degree of responsiveness to public opinion, some degree of accountability to the electorate, and a relatively fair chance for those who are out of government to campaign to discredit the government and hopefully prepare the way for their own triumph."

Mazrui gave the reason for the probable discredit of 'Liberalism in Africa' by saying, "it came with capitalism, and capitalism for Africans was discredited mainly because it came with imperialism." He argued that "it is possible to have capitalism without liberalism, as examples in places like Brazil, Spain and Portugal before the coup would indicate. But is it possible to have liberalism without capitalism?" "Scandinavian countries are amongst the most liberal in the world in the freedoms they give to individuals ranging from free speech to free love," according to him, "and yet the Scandinavian countries have also achieved some substantial controls over their capitalism." He added, "Capitalism to some extent has been tamed, socialized, and more deeply liberalized in those conditions" (Mazrui, 1974).

Mazrui identified four types of capitalism—ascriptive, liberal, fascist and state capitalism. Ascriptive capitalism tends to give special concessions to heredity and birth, extending entrepreneurial opportunities to younger sons of the aristocracy, be that aristocracy based on ethnicity, caste or other forms of descent. England in much of the 18th century illustrated the phenomenon of ascriptive capitalism, reserving major opportunities of investment and economic success to those who were well born. By the second half of the 19th century, England was getting liberalised, and opening up the doors of economic success to strata of society which had previously been relegated to less triumphant levels. While retaining some ascriptive elements in the British economic and political system, the liberalism has widened the power of trade unions, reduced the control of the House of Lords and aristocracy, diluted the power of the monarchy, expanded the powers of the middle classes, and facilitated the processes of social mobility, both upwards and downwards. Japanese capitalism remained substantially ascriptive well into the 20th century. Ascriptive capitalism fuses itself with some elements of feudalism. Capitalism based on a caste system is also ascriptive (Mazrui, 1974).

Kenya's capitalism is partly liberal and partly ascriptive, according to Mazrui. Its western orientation gave it a liberal bias. Its leadership by the Kikuyu gave it an ascriptive tendency. The United States was born on a doctrine of liberal capitalism, with a profound distrust of a landed aristocracy and a commitment to the principle of social mobility. Again the United States' performance for the first a 150 years of its life far from fulfilled the ultimate goals of its own political culture. But there is no doubt that while British capitalism started with a massive bias on the side of ascription, American capitalism was born with a bias towards liberalism (Mazrui, 1974).

Capitalism as a fascist phenomenon belongs to the twentieth century, with the notion of an authoritarian or totalitarian polity based on corporate economic interests in a special alliance of production. It is clear that Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Salazar's Portugal, while basically capitalistic, were normatively different from Churchill's England or Roosevelt's America. The latter two included a greater distrust of governmental arbitrariness, some respect for individual and civil liberties, parliamentary or electoral accountability, and a highly articulate arena of public dissent. The Watergate scandal could never have been exposed in a fascist country without a revolution. The Watergate scandal has disgraced the United States; yet the very fact that it has been revealed so openly and mercilessly has been a credit to the American system of government. It is these considerations which make liberal capitalism under Richard Nixon qualitatively different from fascist capitalism under Adolf Hitler. Nixon himself as a personality may have a good deal in common with Hitler, but the American system of government has less in common with Nazi Germany (Mazrui, 1974).

Finally, there is state capitalism, usually associated with countries claiming to be socialistic, and even Marxist. The state entered the scene to exploit the working man, partly in pursuit of the profit motive, and partly for the greater glory of the state. State capitalism produces a powerful bureaucratic class, often at least as ruthless and exploitative as any bourgeois class under the other forms of capitalism (Mazrui, 1974).

Mazrui maintained that 'Liberalism in Africa' need not follow the western book of rules. There is a distinction, according to him, between liberal institutions and liberal rules. The institutions of western liberalism include in some cases a sovereign parliament, as in the United Kingdom, and in others, separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and judiciary, as in the United States. Sovereignty of parliament and separation of powers are mutually exclusive as institutional principles (Mazrui, 1974).

The liberal rules of the game, on the other hand, are substantially similar in both the United Kingdom and the United States. They include precisely those principles of public accountability, toleration of dissent, respect for diversity and pluralism, and a profound abhorrence of unrestrained governmental arbitrariness. He believed that the liberal institutions as they have evolved in the western world are probably unsuitable for African conditions, and would have to be modified through a process of trial and error. African people might have to evolve different types of party systems, different rules of legislative behavior, different boundaries of executive initiative, and different processes for the judiciary. But some residual control of authority, some residual public accountability—these are all indispensible liberal values, whether the arena is 'Africa, India, Western Europe, or North America' (Mazrui, 1974).

In the years after independence many African intellectuals developed a new interest not only in socialism but also in Marxian vocabulary and symbolism as they sought to assert their intellectual and economic independence. It is true that the Marxian rhetoric and strategy could succeed in creating a mood of militant economic independence. But the use of Marxian ideas as a method of asserting African intellectual independence is basically a contradiction (Mazrui, 1974).

On the other hand, many Africans resent the great cultural dominance that European civilization has exerted over their lives. The range of this dominance is wide: European languages, educational systems, Gregorian calendar, time division, science and technology, dressing style. The alien influence in Africa is omnipresent. The massive presence of alien civilizations in the lives of Africans, especially the omnipresence of European civilization, evokes their rebellion against this dependency and assertion for a militant autonomy. Since the different ideologies were quite capable of being abused by their adherents and perpetrators, Africa should seek to discover at least some truths on its own initiative instead of simply borrowing the rhetoric of European dissenters. It is necessary, according to Mazrui, for the African continent to have both a socialist Tanzania and a capitalist Kenya, and for its people to derive their own lessons from the two experiments in the full maturity of historical time (Mazrui, 1974).

African liberal identity is partly subscribed to the African nationalist character. To the extent that liberalism at its most tolerant allows for diversity and experimentation, it is to liberalism that needs to be embraced, creating scope to experience the full impact of 'indigenous intellectual innovation'. By refusing to be a monopolistic system or a closed system, a liberal Africa would permit itself to be stimulated even by the enemies of liberalism. It could respond to a variety of intellectual traditions, from Islam to Marxism, from Judeo-Christian concepts to the domestic heritage of the African continent itself (Mazrui, 1974).

In liberal societies which sincerely uphold their values, Marxist books and ideas compete in the open market. Marxist newspapers are freely published, communist parties are formed, and individual communists can attain national pre-eminence. By contrast, communist systems rarely allow similar latitude to those of their nationals who might prefer the values of liberalism or capitalism, or indeed of some alternative Marxist tradition divergent from the official one in their own country. Feeling the heavy burden of external intellectual dominance, African continent has to permit itself the possibility of indigenous experimentation in diversity, rather than enslave itself to yet another 'foreign closed intellectual system (Mazrui, 1974).'

But the liberalism which could serve Africa well must be only that part of the tradition which is concerned with the rules of the game, with permitting diversity and freedom of thought. The actual institutions of the liberal West need not be re-enacted in the African continent. Africa could hope for alternative institutions, but might nevertheless permit its scientists, philosophers, artists and traditional sages to contribute to a new cultural melting pot of their own. Liberalism in Africa has to be tamed and conditioned by African nationalism and third world solidarity (Mazrui, 1974).

Mazrui's vision of an interface among African liberalism, African nationalism and third world solidarity is more widely elaborated in his paper. He stated that at least since the beginning of 20thcentury Africa has been an intellectual melting pot. In this essay, he mentioned that penetration of external intellectual influences, started earlier, gathered momentum more recently, and assumed most diverse forms in the last 70 to 80 years. Both Islam and Christianity as systems of ideas came to Africa from their earliest days. Ethiopia has been Christian longer than many parts of Europe, including England. And North Africa was substantially Islamized in the first century of Muhammad's religion, which later spread to other parts of the continent. Each had ideas and values which have direct political implications (Mazrui, 1975).

After examining the role of culture in imperialism, the entry of liberal and capitalist values in Africa, the rise of modern nationalism, the fascination of Marxism among black intellectuals, and the obstinate resilience of many traditional African values, Mazruicame to the conclusion that creative eclecticism (implying a genius for selectivity, for synthesizing disparate elements, and for ultimate independent growth in the intellectual field) is the only ideological alternative compatible with African autonomy in modern conditions (Mazrui, 1975).Envisioning his *African Liberal* worldview, Mazrui stated:

> I do have a vision of an African tomorrow that I have tried to transmit in both my teaching and my writings. It is a tomorrow which would permit Africa the full potential of intellectual diversity-which would tame our governments into accepting dissent, train outsiders into respecting our perspectives, educate our intellectuals into the habits of mental self-reliance, persuade our people to explore new horizons, and prepare ourselves for a new phase of indigenous creativity. That is my creed in all its painful naivet (Mazrui, 1974).

4. Francis Deng's Idea of Sovereignty as Responsibility

In the 1990s, Francis Deng introduced the concept of 'sovereignty as responsibility' when working as special representative of the United Nations Secretary General on internally displaced persons. For Deng, sovereignty as responsibility meant that national governments were accountable to their own people and also to the international community for the provision of minimum standards of security and welfare for their citizens. In 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty adopted Deng's concept and reframed it as 'the responsibility to protect'. Sovereign states were said to be responsible to the international community for the protection of their populations from grave violations of human rights, and the international community, in turn, was bound to ensure that populations were protected (Glanville, 2009).

Deng assert that sovereignty can no longer be seen as a protection against interference, but as a charge of responsibility where the state is accountable to both domestic and external constituencies. In internal conflicts in Africa, sovereign states have often failed to take responsibility for their own citizens' welfare and for the humanitarian consequences of conflict, leaving the victims with no assistance. It is shown how that responsibility can be exercised by states over their own population, and by other states in assistance to their fellow sovereigns. Sovereignty as responsibility presents a framework that should guide both national governments and the international community in discharging their respective responsibilities. Broad principles are developed by examining identity as a potential source of conflict, governance as a matter of managing conflict, and economics as a policy field for deterring conflict (Deng, 1996).

Considering conflict management, political stability, economic development, and social welfare as functions of governance, Francis Deng and his co-authors develop strategies, guidelines, and roles for its responsible exercise. Some African governments, such as South Africa in the 1990s and Ghana since 1980, have demonstrated impressive gains against these standards. Opportunities for making sovereignty more responsible and improving the management

of conflicts are examined at the regional and international levels. The lessons from the mixed successes of regional conflict management actions, such as the West African intervention in Liberia, the East African mediation in Sudan, and international efforts to urge talks to end the conflict in Angola, indicate friends and neighbors outside the state in conflict have important roles to play in increasing sovereign responsibility (Deng, 1996).

Approaching conflict management from the perspective of the 'responsibilities of sovereignty' provides a framework for evaluating government accountability. Standards are proposed for guiding performance and sharpening tools of conflict prevention rather than simply making post-hoc judgments on success or failure. Sovereign responsibility is demonstrated both as a national obligation and a global imperative (Deng, 1996). Deng has mentioned criticality of a 'regional approach', by arguing that countries in the same region quite often share the problem. Crisis in one country overspills into the neighbouring countries in the form of refugees, carrying their baggage of political crisis, according to him, which can destabilise the whole region (Deng, 2010).

Deng has tried to bridge the gap between ideal aspirations and engagement with ground realities. To this end, he said that it is one thing to say to governments that in the name of human rights we will override their sovereignty; to threaten that if they violate human rights the world will move in and will stop them from doing it by whatever means necessary. It is another thing to say: 'Sovereignty itself means responsibility, and the dignity you enjoy in the international community, the respect you have, your legitimacy at home and abroad, has a lot to do with the degree to which you discharge the positive responsibilities of sovereignty (Deng, 2010).'

The notion of sovereignty as responsibility has evolved into the responsibility to protect, with the three pillars: (a) the responsibility of the state to protect its own populations; (b) the responsibility of the international community to assist the state to enhance its capacity to discharge its national responsibility; and (c) the responsibility of the international community to take collective action under the UN Charter when a state is manifestly failing to protect its own populations. Measures under the third pillar range from diplomatic intercession to the imposition of sanctions, and, in extreme cases, to military intervention. The responsibility to protect is, however, being more and more seen, according to Deng, interms of the third pillar, which is an absolute last resort of using coercive means to control the situation, even having under its ambit non-coercive measures to apply (Deng, 2010).

Deng perceives gist of the African crisis being grounded in the mismanagement of diversity and not making use of the indigenous values and institutions as building blocks in the process of nation-building. The indigenous system of autonomy or political structures and processes was replaced by a centralized authority of the colonial state that raised the stakes in that the central authority became the key to acquiring power, services and opportunities for development. At independence, the central authority was captured by certain ethnic groups which then monopolized power and marginalized others. This struggle for central power became the key to the ongoing tensions and conflicts resulting in coups and counter coups and causing instability (Deng, 2004).

There is a need for recognizing the realities of ethnic compositions, which have sustained the Africans for centuries, according to Deng, if not thousands of years. While ethnicity has been abused and manipulated by both the colonial authorities and independent governments, it is a potential resource for a genuinely de-centralized system of governance and development as a process of self-enhancement from within. In other words, ethnicity can be used as a means for divisiveness but it can also be used constructively as a means for grounding the system of governance and development in the African reality (Deng, 2004).

5. African Political Development: Idea-Practice Interface

Political development is defined by *Oxford Dictionary of Politics* as "Broadly, the development of the institutions, attitudes and values that form the political power system of a society (McLean and McMillan, 2009)."Africa comprises around 54 countries, differing in their geographical makeup, demographic composition, social historicity, and thereby political development. An attempt, however, can be made to take a macro view of some common trends in the political development of all these countries, which have experienced cold war encampment, subsequent process of globalization and renewed movement towards continental integration. In contemporary Africa, where the democratic experiment against 'standard' structural constrains (Varshney, 2007) has acquired steady acceptability, the intertwined linkage between indigenous political ideas and trajectory of political development has been strikingly evident (Varshney, 2007). Establishing its credibility as a system of choice to foster economic growth and stability in the continent, democracy remains the primary agenda of the African Union (AU) (Olivier, 2013).

The unique trajectory of political development in Africa is underpinned by consolidation of its democratization process under the active support of the regional groupings under the leadership of the AU. A trend towards civilian led

electoral governance systems, with 'limited yet sometimes frequent' military interregnum, has indeed gained traction across the continent through the constant interventions and institutional protections of the regional actors. The evolving African political development under a comprehensive regional security architecture, characterized by its democratic commitment, anti-intrusive undertone and indigenous embeddedness, carries marked semblance of *Pan-Africanist* proposition by George Padmore, *African Liberal* idea of Ali Mazrui and *Sovereign Responsibility* notion of Francis Deng.

George Padmore's resentment against subordination of African people's struggles by the ideologically degenerated Western Communist parties to the Soviet Union's foreign policy interests, his call for protection of the African right to 'mental freedom' against the European dictation (regardless of its ideology), and his vision of dynamic nationalism in Asia and Africa based upon a socialist programme of industrialization and co-operative methods of agricultural production have influenced African leaders for their active participation at Bandung and subsequent Afro-Asian platforms. There was a manifested unity of purpose between decolonization campaign of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the wider Non-Aligned Movement.

Ali Mazrui's vision of *Liberal Africa*—practice of universal liberal principles such control of authority and public accountability by the indigenous institutions, intellectual independence against exogenous ideologies, African liberalism based on African nationalism and third world solidarity, creative eclecticism, intellectual diversity, scholarly capacity to influence governments for accepting dissent, global outreach of native perspectives, mental self-reliance, exploration of new horizons, and indigenous creativity—has got its strong imprint in the contour of Africa's interface with the Cold War geopolitics and the globalization dynamics. The discursive reflection of *African Liberalism* is clearly demonstrated in the OAU's campaign against apartheid and its solidarity for the larger third world cause, reincarnated AU's democratic commitment through panel of the wise and related indigenous practices, its vigilance against extra-regional intervention, African leaders' proactive Asian orientation strategy and championship of the Global South for a reformed world order, and above all, emerging African consensus demanding pattern of external engagement as per their own priorities and preferences.

Deng's conception of sovereign responsibility as a national obligation as well as a global imperative, his emphasis on 'regional approach' of addressing politico-security crisis, his caution against mismanagement of diversity, and his plead for constructive use of ethnicity for decentralized governance and self-driven development have significantly impacted the African attitudes towards their political development. Furthermore, Deng's sovereignty as responsibility notion has decisive bearing on the contour and content of political globalization process elsewhere. Thus, India and other post-colonial societies have to try and learn in terms of assessing the agenda of the extra-regional actors while being open to ideas coming from new quarters, looking for regional and indigenous solutions to problems concerning state- and nation-building exercises, and prioritizing their foreign policy approaches towards interest of the Global South.

6. Conclusion

In essence, Ideas and processes remain inextricably linked in Africa's tryst with its political development. Nurturing strong quest for 'democratic entitlements,' African people pursue their course of political development amid the historical encounter with a series of disruptive realities. The cumulative complexity of the politico-security milieu is paralleled by self-corrective trends such as inclination for institutionalized domestic power transition, panel of the wise practice and, above all, effective regional mediation in Africa. The popular aspiration of a 'substantively free and self-sustained' Africa can be discerned in the profound ideas of many thinkers who carry meaningful locational connectivity with the continent and also have intense functional interface with the world external to it. The path-breaking propositions of *Pan-Africanism or Communism* by George Padmore, *African Liberalism* by Ali Mazrui and *Sovereignty as Responsibility* by Francis Deng are salient representative of such genre of thought reflecting constant developmental endeavours of African people in the decisive stages of their political struggle.

Interface between ideas and practices in African political space offers lessons for India and other post-colonial societies for assessing the agenda of the extra-regional actors while being open to ideas coming from new quarters, looking for regional and indigenous solutions to problems concerning state- and nation-building exercises, and prioritizing their foreign policy approaches towards interest of the Global South.

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