

BOOK REVIEW

BIEREENU-NNABUGWU, Makodi (2005) *Africa in the March of Civilization: An Outline of African Heritage*. Enugu: Quintagon / CERPAHD. 189pp. Price: N1000.00

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The book, *Africa in the march of civilization: An outline of African heritage* is a scholarly work by Makodi Biereenu-Nnabugwu which provides scholarship with a new vista seeks to redirect academic discourse away from a Eurocentric dominated narration and analysis of African history and social science to an African (and of course more objective) perspective. The author makes an argument against such Eurocentric assertions that Africa had no history and no trace of civilization before their contact with the white man, first during the legitimate trade and later during colonialism (the so called civilizing mission). The author does not just posit that Africa has a history but goes on to assert that it also has a heritage. All other arguments and analysis made in the book by the author is intended to show case and prove this singular position.

In order to drive home this argument, his work is presented in sub-themes as follows: Understanding Africa's Civilization, Conceptualization and some Clarifications, character of the contemporary Africa; Africa: the home of the human race. Africa and the origin of the State; Africa: The cradle of human civilization, Africa's political and historical heritage, A heritage of challenges 1500AD and, thereafter, Africa and the heritage of colonial order; Africa: A heritage of politics and law; Heritage and factors of legal order in Africa; Africa and the dilemma of change, some icons of Africa heritage and Heritage and the politics of Africa's future. To enhance our understanding, we intend to treat these themes separately. However, the fact that many of the sub-themes are not standing on their own, rather are preceding or succeeding argument of a previous or succeeding sub-themes, we may group some of them together in this review. The entire work is thus presented in fourteen chapters.

Chapter one and two serve as the introductory chapters and are dedicated to show case some foundational issues which the author purposely designed to provide a holistic overview to the challenges of understanding contemporary Africa. In chapter one the

author admitted the fact that in today's complex world, so many issues and perspectives compete for attention. These competing perspectives affects in no small measure what one hears and thinks. Thus many a times it is not what is or what one feels that he hears and thinks but what is presented to him. To this end many Africans tend to see the world from the view point of outsiders; this includes even Africa's own world.

Citing evidences from the works, utterances, and actions of people whose perspectives lends credence to the erroneous and Eurocentric view of Africa as a continent without civilization and whose people are savage and crude he was able to show the extent of this misrepresentation of facts about Africa's history and "personality". Some of these evidence have to do with the works of Adetoro, George Hegel (1770-1831), George Henry Lewis (1817-1879), John Wilson, Leopold Senghor, King Leopold II etc. The author showed the faulty nature of their assertions and claims in addition to those of modernization scholars such as Rostow and others who propounded political development theory and ascribed or presented development (economic and political civilization) as Europe's unilateral possession. He categorically contended that Africa was not a static society that is plagued by disorder, before its contact with the post medieval Europe but like any other distinct group of human society, Africa was evolving and developing in response to her physical and socio-cultural environment. He further argued that delaying worthwhile heritage and civilization to victims of European imperialism was essentially circumstantial excuse, pretence or alibi to justify unfair and selfish treatment of non-European peoples and social formations. He finally opined, though subtly, that the present day political and economic crises in Africa have their roots in Africa's recent historical experiences which he dates from 1500 AD upwards.

Chapter two is devoted to conceptualization and clarification of concepts. Concepts such as civilization and heritage are operationally defined. The author before conceptualizing civilization examined the meaning given to the concept by Preiswerk and Perrot (1978). They identified three major conceptions of civilization in the use of the term "civilization". They are monopolistic, restrictive and pluralistic conceptions. The author joined the authors in exposing the limitations of these conceptions of civilization. For instance, he posited that the monopolistic view of civilization which is an ethnocentric claim of Western scholarship is as "fallacious as claiming monopoly of logical thinking" while the absence of a scientifically based indices of civilization poses the problem of whose discretion, values and valour would be important in establishing the rightful parameters or yardsticks of civilization, became a serious limitation of the restrictive conception, the pluralist conception is attacked by its creation of a simplistic division of humanity into civilized and barbarian on the basis of self-centred selection of criteria. Against this backdrop, and taking cue from the definition of "World Book Dictionary", (2001) the author conceive of civilization as "evident" progress in the innovative interaction with the material environment leading to conditions of marked or substantial advancement from a pre-existing socio-political, economic and legal order.

The author's concept of heritage is related to that of civilization. He moved from the ordinary meaning of the concept in recognition of the peculiar circumstances of the African condition and contextually conceived of the concept. This contextual conception was broadened to encompass all the substantial advances that Africa as a population have experienced or inherited in its continuing interaction with its physical and social environment. Having conceptualized the key concepts, the author was set, using the historical method to illustrate that Africa and her socio-political and economic heritage is a product of over five thousand years of not only social life but also state formation and practices.

In chapter three which the author titled; character of contemporary Africa, he identified six salient interrelated features considered as characteristics of contemporary Africa. He submitted that these features are products of Africa's unique geographical position and profound historical experiences which have not only impacted on the pattern of inter-relating legal order and political organization but also her relationship with her neighbours, over the ages. The factors are: Inorganic state structures; here the author observed that African states (with the exception of Ethiopia which was not colonized and has a long history) do evolve organically into their present status. They are artificial creation during the scramble for and partitioning of Africa by Europeans. According to the author, in the Berlin conference, pencil lines were used to invent, decree and allot (what later became African states) areas of influence to various European powers. Thus, foreign interests decided the creation of African states. The implication of this is that contemporary African States are mainly pervasive and yet not autochthonous.

In addition to the fact that they are not products of social interplay between internal contending forces, their prevailing structures and apparatuses are foreign and accordingly relate only artificially and superficially with the indigenous societal values and processes. Again contemporary African states appear and exist as predatory public forces represented coercive apparatus in their relationship with their prey (citizens). This, according to the author (like others before him), has alienated the citizens from the political process as they tend to see government and its institution as external to them. A major consequence, which the author identified rightly (taking cue from Ake) is the inability of these states to transform power into authority and domination into hegemony. This has not allowed for the required stability for progress.

On over developed state, this to the author is a situation where the state of Africa appropriated to itself powers that are far beyond what is necessary for its functioning. This is fall-out from the colonial state that used maximum foreign economic interest. The contemporary African State, unlike her foreign counterpart, plays a dominant or predominant economic role. On neo-colonialism, this is the practice of informal imperialism such that direct political control of the territory is no longer deemed a necessity. According to the author, with deeply entrenched technical, financial and socio-cultural structures of dependence fully in place, and maintained by trans-national

corporations, colonialism under this new guise still thrives unabated in Africa's states. He also identified globalization as a worse neo-colonial exploitative regime. Consequently, contemporary states in Africa are unable to deal with the issues of conflict, corruption, military incursions into politics, debt management, economic crises etc.

On Socio-cultural Influence, he points out that Africa's geographical proximity to the source of two of the world's most propagated religion; Christianity and Islam readily made Africa's socio-cultural attitude, more than anything else, impacted by these two religions. Their damaging effects on the traditional religions cannot be over-emphasized. That writers and commentators often refers to these religions as heathen, pagan or animist is to the extent they deviate from the practice of these two religions. The author referred to the native religions as organic African religion and showed how resilient they have been in the face of denigration by these rampaging religions. Today Africa's legal systems are profoundly coloured by these two religions. Even their religious and social interaction are shaped by them, especially in the urban areas. Although the author did not include the fact that these two religions are also veritable sources of conflict in some African states where they compete for relevance, for instance, in Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria etc, this fact is supported by other scholars liked Eke (1993:14).

On manipulated severance from the roots, according to the author, unlike Europe who recaptured herself after roughly a thousand-year hiatus in what is now known as Dark or Medieval Age, through the writings of eminent scholars like Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli etc, Africa has not been able to come to terms with her past, let alone to harness its strength. This unlike in Europe where the industrial revolution period was largely a maturation of home grown and fermented thinking, there is hardly any link with the roots in the case of Africa. No serious effort has been made or currently being made to correct this disconnect as contemporary African leaders still put trust in external solutions such as foreign direct Investment and foreign financial and technological transfers in Africa's internal problems. The author is right when he says that they are getting greater exploitation and underdevelopment instead of development. The author while blaming Africa for this pathetic condition was also quick to blame external factors as he believed that the severance was manipulated especially during the colonial epoch when the colonial masters did everything they could to ensure that Africans were alienated from their useful past. On under developing structures and processes, instead of highlighting the causes of the under developing structures and process and their effects, the author rather attacked the appellation used by the West to refer to third world countries - "developing". He said African countries are not developing, at best they could be said to be "under developing" or "underdeveloped". His argument is that being replete with under developing structures and processes (the increasingly inability of the structures to attend to the identified and identifiable tasks of overcoming Africa's social and physical environment) contemporary Africa cannot in all honesty be said to be developing. He also quarrelled with the appellation of "developed" used to refer to the advanced societies of the West. He is of the

view that since development is a continuous process, as there will always be need for improvement, to use the word “developed” means that they have concluded improving on the current level. This we think is quite logical on his part. However, our worry is that the author appears to have contradicted himself when he accepted the term “underdeveloped” for Third World countries whose “structures are increasingly unable to attend to the tasks of overcoming their social and physical environment”. A logical extension of his earlier argument for the use of the term “developed” ought to have informed him that there is hardly any stagnation in the process of development. It is either a country is “developing” or “under developing”. Thus accepting “underdeveloped” but rejecting “developed” to us is playing double standard.

In chapters four and five, the author deals with the African origin of man and state. In chapter four the author was able to make a sound argument for Africa as man’s original home. This, he was able to do by reliance on archaeological findings and scientific discoveries of fossils in different continents of the world. In spite of some frantic efforts made to dispute Africa as man’s original home, the veracity and authenticity of evidence (scientific) settled the controversy in favour of Africa. What appears to still be in contention is the route to migration the African original man took. Here the author aligned himself with Nwanunobi (2001) and conjectured that early man probably followed the Great Rift Valley and forked out in various directions. The author started chapter five by trying to conceptualize the meaning of the state and theories about the origin of the state. He thus took an excursion into various conceptions of the state, starting from Aristotle to Machiavelli, to the anarchist conception, to Marxist, to liberal, to social contract, to evolutionary theory etc. Having done this, he appears to settle for the evolutionary perspective of the state. Understandably it is this conception of the state that can help him trace its historical origin which is the main objective of this chapter. He thus defined the state as “a coercive organization with the capacity for and claim to primacy in decision making and the use of force within a delimited territory”. Having so defined the state, he identified factors such as kinship, religion, economic, conflict and wars as well as quest for power and influence as factors which favour the evolution of the state.

In locating the origin of the state, the author admitted that state practice is a product of steady evolutionary process whose origin is now shrouded in the obscurity of the band system. He further appreciated the fact that it is now impossible to indicate the exact point in time in human history when the state may be said to have come into existence. In sharp contrast to this position, he held that “there is no doubt that it must be located within the beginning of Africa’s history”. Here he joins Davidson (1992:77) to trace it to:

... the onset and spread of farming after the seventh millennium before the Christian era: after say about 6000BC... (and that it) entered a new phase, ancestral to modern times, with the introduction of iron-bladed tools, above all iron bladed hoes around 500BC.

In accordance with this line of thought he opined that the first and best known transformation of society into state occurred in 3200BC. To him this was the year the ancient state of Egypt emerged. This made him to conclude that Africa occupies prime position in the state formation enterprise. Thus in these chapters, the author was able to argue that Africa is not only the original home of man, or man's first home, but it is also the continent with the longest of group life, politics and state practice as epitomized by Ethio-Egyptian epoch

Having established or argued that Africa is the original home of man and state practice began in Africa first, he devoted chapter six, seven and eight to explore the political and historical heritage of man before 332 BC to 1500AD and thereafter. In these chapters the author is committed to not only debunking the views of some Western political historians that Africa's history is only traceable to their contact with the whites, but also to show that Africa is indeed the cradle of human civilization and has a lot of things worth celebrating, which they contributed to human civilization. To fully appreciate the high points of Africa's evolutionary growth from the cradles in antiquity to the present, the author identified and classified seven periods or epoch. These are: The Cradle Stage-Before 6,000-3200 BC, Ethio-Egyptian stage, 3200-332BC, Post Ethio-Egyptian Stage, 332BC-450AD, Sudanic Growth Stage, 450-1500AD, Mutual and Disarticulate Contacts Stage, 1500-1800, Resistance and loss of Sovereignty Stage, 1800-1900, Formal colonization, Decolonization and Re-Colonization Stage, 1900-to Date. It is interesting to note that in these seven epochs, the first four have nothing to do with contact with the European. In these epochs the author showcased Africa's attempts at state building, starting from the Ethio-Egyptian State, the centralized political organization and the art of empire building by Africa long before the Greek or Roman civilization was buttressed. These states ranging from the Ethio-Egypt to Kanem-Bornu not only show mastery in socio-political organization but also excelled in science, technology, trade, diplomacy, art etc. manifested in the great pyramids to the different arts culture, the formal diplomatic relations with some societies in Europe, the application of irrigation to Agriculture in arid lands etc.

In chapter eight the author captured the contact stages of Africa. Here he was able to show that empires such as Bakongo, 1300-1665, Oyo Empire, 1500-1806, Benin Empire, 1200-1898AD, were well organized prosperous states before the advent of Europe in African soil. At the initial stage such contacts were cordial and symbiotic, over time they became disquiet leading to often fierce resistance put up by Africans. One question which the author addressed was why the Europeans were able to subdue the well-organized African states in spite of fierce resistance put up by some of them. Three factors were identified that made this possible viz: spy work carried out by compatriots of European powers in the immediate post medieval era (this contributed in swelling the aggressor's knowledge of African territories and her people), the slave trade of about four centuries (which carted away the able bodied men that would not only have worked for the

economic progress of Africa but would also have defended it) and thirdly benefit from the slave trade and later what they called the legitimate trade, which were all skewed in their favour, led to a huge gap between what was left of African States and their European counterparts. This was more profound in sea farming and armament.

In spite of these factors, African statesmen such as King Jaja of Opobo, Agaja Trudo of Dahomey and others like them put up spirited resistance to protect their states, properties and people, though to no avail. During the period of colonization, the Europeans, through various policies that will benefit them disarticulated and dislocated the African economy. These policies include; cash crop production, taxation without consent, forced labour, dysfunctional education, poor wages etc. Ultimately, the author noted that the contact produced a growing dependency and alienated development. The author was not slow to add that this condition continued even after decolonization through what is generally referred to as neo-colonialism by radical scholars. The process in recent times has been made worse by the advent of globalization which has brought African countries under the powerful control of international agencies and processes.

Chapter Nine, deals with an examination of the different colonial orders and their impact on African states. Thus, the British colonial order, French colonial order, Belgian colonial and Portuguese Colonial order are examined by the author. A common thread that runs through all these colonial orders is the use of coercion to maintain law and order while exploiting their colonies, although the volume of force varies from one colonial order to another. Again, all of them used the policy of divide and rule and differential development policy to reinforce this divide and rule policy. At the end of the day the vestiges of European exploits are evident all over today's Africa. For instance, four spheres of lingua franca: English, French, Portuguese and Arabic are evident in Africa. Beyond language and culture, the colonial legal order-legislative, judicial and political processes in contemporary Africa are influenced by the pattern of the development of the productive forces of the specific colonizer, the author rightly opined.

Chapter ten and eleven are follow ups of chapter nine in highlighting the salient features of European colonialism in Africa. Thus under them, issues of politics and law, and the factors that affect contemporary legal order in the African continent are examined. Chapter ten is wholly devoted to understanding law. It deals with types of law, functions, characteristics and definitions of law. However, only a paragraph is devoted to the definition of politics. However, this is understandable as the author is more interested in asserting the heritage and factors of the legal order in Africa, which he also deals with in chapter eleven. He thus laid the foundation of chapter eleven here by almost exhaustively dealing with the conceptualization of law. He started by identifying two types of law viz: physical and social law, but chooses to concern himself with social law, which to him is characteristically normative, moralistic, instructive, coercive and dynamic. He succinctly elucidated on Nnoli's definition of politics in order to bring out his concept of state law. Once this is achieved he proceeds to examine many definitions of law-from Hart's

definition to Rodee et'al, to Radfield and Barker, to Wilson to Sottau etc., from these definitional views, the author came up with the opinion that there exists a symbiotic relationship between the state and law. Law is an instrument of the state or society, underlying the fact that a state without law is not conceivable. On the other hand, they also highlight the fact that state itself is also a creation of law. Having established this relationship between law and the state, the author proceeded to identify six primary characteristics which among others are: (a) Law is an expression of the will of the state, as expressed by constituted authority. (b) It is accorded recognition by the state. (c) It is concerned essentially with the external aspects of human actions (d) Universality, etc. The author closes this chapter with a brief highlight on the functions of the judiciary.

Chapter eleven is focused on investigating the factors that influenced contemporary African politics and law. Here the author identified three principal factors which affect legal order in contemporary Africa. These are (a) Organic African cosmology (b) Islamic influence and (c) Colonial legal values and processes. Talking about the organic African cosmology, which is the kind of law that was developed naturally as Africans organized themselves and interacted with their environment, the author identified societies that have centralized (like the ancient Oyo and Benin States) and decentralized (like Tanzania, Igbo States) political authority. However, there were checks and balances, even in the highly centralized states. The author uses the Oyo empires to buttress this fact. The laws were backed up with sanctions when they are breached and they were able to keep society in order. These laws also had religious influence greatly. The laws, though greatly affected by Islamic influence and colonial legal value, persist and to some extent shape contemporary Africa's legal order.

The spread of Islam in the 17th century in North and sub Saharan Africa has its effect on the legal order of contemporary Africa. Islam as way of life for its adherents is a fusion of politics, religion, economy, etc., such religion no doubt must have a great influence in contemporary African Islamic states where the sharia is practiced. Typical examples of states in contemporary Africa where sharia legal process occupy a pride of place are Morocco, Niger and Nigeria (especially Northern). Highlighting on the colonial legal values and processes, the author rightly stated that laws during colonialism was associated with force to compel obedience from the subjects. It was thus a tool for intimidation and oppression by the colonial masters in order to promote their selfish interest. Colonial laws were discriminatory as there were different laws for the "masters" and the "servants" (subject) or same laws applied differently. The author however noted that space was still granted to indigenous law even though it was not born out of respect for African civilization or legal system. In practice they only accepted pre contact laws that will not pose threat to their interest and reject those perceived to pose threat to their economic interest. Consequently, there became varying ratio of a combination of portions of organic African laws and European legal system in the colonial territories. It was therefore observable that each colonial power established legal system to rhyme its colonial policy.

The author also notes that a major impact of European colonialism in Africa is that contemporary legal order in Africa has continued to be heavily influenced by the legal traditions and processes imported into Africa by European colonialists.

Chapter twelve, thirteen and fourteen are the concluding chapters in which the impact of social and political changes in the evolution of institutions and orientations were highlighted or examined. Also some African Statesmen whom the author considers to be “icons of African heritage” are showcased alongside their achievements that stood them out from others. These chapters also provide space for the discussion of the future of Africa. In chapter twelve, the author first conceived of social and political changes as processes, which result in significant alterations of political orientations and social institutions leading to discernible political culture in a given society. To him this conception of change is fundamental to proper understanding and explanation of Africa’s social and political life and heritage. He thus highlighted two groups of change factors viz: physical and social change factors. Physical factors include climate, altitude (topography), deserts, rivers and other sources of water (river channels and basin etc), mineral resources etc. all these affects reality and changes that occur in Africa in a number of ways. They determine their cultural activities, their occupational types, settlement patterns, immigration, art, religion etc. In all of these much of low Africa has been the zone of immense activities in Ancient Africa as much of the ancient civilizations took place in low Africa.

The social factors identified by the author are conquest, migration or movement, religion, slavery, knowledge and colonialism. Of these the author accords conquest, a pride of place as a change factor, as it portends the most profound change particularly among the conquered communities. He pointed out the fact that war and conquest were dominant features in ancient Africa, and it led to the disruption of the existing institutions, systems or normative code of society. It also meant the demise of one state and emergence of another. This is however arguable as some would not agree but subscribe to colonialism as the most responsible factor of change in contemporary Africa. Other are migration which dates back to pre-historic and pre-state times and is responsible for multiplicity of language among other changes, religion which is made up of African Organic Religion and the two received dominant religions - Islam and Christianity. To various degrees, these religions influence socio-political life greatly in contemporary Africa. Sometimes conflict between any two of them leads to war or serious crises. This is especially so between Islam and Christianity, as experienced in Sudan and Somalia. Next is the slave trade which enslaved Africans for four hundred years. The effect on Africa was devastating. The brutalization, dehumanization and oppression of Africans led to the death of tens of millions of Africans. The process of acquiring slaves for the obnoxious trade led to a lot of inter-tribal and inter communal wars which led to near anarchy in Africa. There is also the psychological effect of the slave trade which produce inferiority complex on the part of Africa. Thus, in addition to the insecurity and instability that it caused, there was also gross

disarticulation of the socio-political and economic institutions and processes in the vast regions of Africa, particularly South of the Sahara. The last factor the author identified here is the state of knowledge. This was what partly was responsible for the greatness of the Ethio-Egyptian ancient state. Also writers, as purveyors of knowledge influence the trend of events in society in so many ways.

Chapter thirteen is dedicated to celebrate the achievements of some African Statesmen from the cradle to 1900. These men are referred to, by the author, as “icons” of Africa’s heritage. Five of them were chosen, two from cradle to 332BC, these are King Menes and Imhotep, to - Ahmad Baba and Mansa Musa are chosen from the second phase (intermediate Africa) while Jaja of Opobo is identified in the third phase which represents the contemporary. While some of these icons are appreciable for their unparalleled state craft ship in empire building, others like Jaja stand out in their stiff resistance to foreign rule and dominance, and their organization of trade, while Imhotep was reputable for his exploits in medical science and practice. The author probably focused on these men and their legacies to stimulate in the present generation a commitment to the rich African heritage and to debunk the lies that Africa has no history and has not contributed anything to human civilization.

Chapter fourteen which is the last chapter has to do with the challenge of Africa’s future and the author’s recommendations to deal with these challenges and reposition contemporary Africa. Recognizing the fact that today, the continent of Africa and her people are faced with increased dilemma and challenges of growing social and political changes, he admonished Africans to brace up to overcome the real and imagined predicaments of the present. To him, doing this will require, clear understanding or appreciation of the past and present in order to effectively respond to contending challenges. In doing this there should be a proper and deep-rooted analysis or diagnosis of these problems and challenges. This can only be achieved if there is proper interaction between individuals and/or institutions and specific ideas and ideals and general overhaul of inherited and received institutions and processes which now constitute an impediment to Africa’s progress in her march to civilization and greatness.

In addition to the above admonition, the author made the following recommendations. These include: fresh focus on African studies, the periodization of African heritage, non-outward oriented institutions and processes and self-driven development. To him these provide the solution to Africa’s myriad of problems and predicament.

To us, these are the author’s sincere and passionate contributions to what he thought will help salvage or heal ailing Africa. However, we do submit that the author’s non-inclusion of attitudinal change, especially on the part of current crops of African political leaders that are enmeshed in corruption and self-interestedness will not allow these salient suggestions to work out the required outcome. In line with this we rather would think in harmony with Marxian prescription that the consciousness of the masses be raised to the point that it will overthrow the existing capitalist mode and system and established a mode

of production that will not be in discordance with the African cherished values. This however may appear an uphill task, but extra-ordinary problems also require extra-ordinary solutions. Without a genuine people's revolution in Africa, there appears to be little prospect to change Africa for the better. Already in many African countries, history has been reduced to a second fiddle among subjects studied by our leaders. How then can African studies be promoted? In most African university faculties of social sciences, history of political thought as a course is studied as history of European political thought. This is same with economic thought. How can these same leaders spear head African studies? Only time will tell.

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