

Intertwining Development concepts and Socio-Cultural Alienation: An ethno-linguistic analysis of cultural identity Crisis in Sub-Saharan African Countries

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Abstract

It would be inappropriate to discuss issues of development without taking an overview of some of the factors that influence it. From our analysis of development strategies and projects carried out in developing countries, a study of the views and concepts of development in various parts of Africa south of the Sahara in general and Cameroon in particular reveals a tremendous degree of cultural value degradation. This study seeks to show to what extent popular notions of development lead to cultural alienation but without any real social impact in developing countries. In this study, I will equally analyse the prevailing situation of acculturation in Cameroon, provide some salient examples of adulterated development models which have not helped in reducing the general poverty index of the country.

The paper equally has as objective to demonstrate that western concepts of development are at the centre of African cultural alienation and how this shift is more of disillusionment.

Revisiting what some scholars like Verhelst (1990) Gheddo(1973) have clearly demonstrated in their works that the Western concept of development is a cultural illusion inferring that Africans should consider themselves as not only consumers but also creators of their own meaningful development independently of the western ideologies, this paper thus examines the implication of such a situation within the global context of cultural alienation, and the limited technological developments observed in African states south of the Sahara.

Key words: Cultural Alienation, disillusionment, environmental discrepancies, folkloric epiphenomenon, cultural imperialism.

1. Introduction

Insistences on the cultural uniqueness of different peoples abound in linguistic variance, cultural differences, and technological capacities, social and environmental discrepancies. These aspects have been used to legitimize an international division of development and to maintain the current international economic order. The problem in my understanding is not this division but what seem to, or what is happening to this order. For me, if I should go by the above working definition of development, there appears to be a very close link between development and cultural identity. Let us therefore tackle it,

within the framework of defining the term culture, whose very ambiguity reveals its extremely polysemic nature. This is vital, since the argument of the present paper relies essentially on a broad definition of culture before extending to cross-cultural communication. It is, therefore, not a question of culture in the narrow sense of the word, seen as a prestige commodity often reserved for an elite, or as a more or less folkloric epiphenomenon, but of culture in the wider sense of the word. In this respect, culture is actively present in every aspect of life: know-how, technical knowledge, customs of food and dress, religion, mentality, values, language, symbols, socio-political and economic behavior, indigenous methods of taking decisions and exercising power, methods of production and economic relations, and so on. It is important for us to include these concepts since the theories of development employed up till now often presuppose a much narrower notion. Though some international organizations like UNESCO and development agencies like USAID publications give the appearance of being aware of this problem by stressing the need to respect the local culture of communities, a closer look shows that what they mean by this boils down to art, music, dance and literature. Western development scholars have not really acknowledged that each people might have, as Gboku & Lekoko(2007) put it, “a technical, socio-economic and juridico-political culture which is peculiar to them and which it is wrong to suppress, even in the name of development” or democratic reforms. Present strategic programs geared towards sustainable development are having damaging effects on the cultural values that water the life spring of African nations and makes western development concepts the greatest catalyst of African cultural alienation

1.1. UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT: AFRICAN SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.

The basic problem of African countries south of the Sahara, that has ever relinquished them from the landmark of global development to the dreaded status of unprogressive stagnated nations of the world is not in my opinion underdevelopment which is a result and not a cause just like the persistent multiphasic world economic/political crisis and the inadequacies of the international organizations network. The basic problem as analyzed is the assassination of African civilizations whose societies up till date are in a state of identity crises, lost in the wilderness of development like a body without a soul. It is time that African political leaders, economic planners and social development experts torn between their original societies, that they have to serve and another or other mirage-societies which they rely on for support and towards which they are irresistibly attracted for being colonial masters of nations or who have pledged total support for the governments in exchange for the natural resources of the lands. It is time that these opinion leaders ask themselves certain questions; they who make absolute decisions in the name of their people, it is time they asked themselves if their choices are more valid than the profound needs and aspirations of the vast majority of their populations.

This is a real challenge for present African decision markers if they have to move African nations out of the present devastating economic situation. There is no doubt that our present leaders are aware of the fact that current development policies lead to the destruction of the personality and integrity of the African peoples which, in certain aspects, is even more serious than that brought about by colonization. In this same vain, Bhola and Gómez (2008) in *Signposts to literacy for sustainable development* declare

that:

All over the planet, the cultural integrity and vitality of the different human groups find themselves threatened by development strategies which stress economic growth and institutional efficiency at all cost.... Too often the values of the developing nations are irredeemably damaged by models of social change based on consumption, competition, acquisition and on the manipulation of human aspirations.

UNESCO, conscious of this state of affairs has been seeking a new approach to development and cultural preservation through programs like the World Decade for Cultural Development 1988-97, to try to promote a global approach to development. Other international Organizations like the Society for International Development have also come up with cultural identity preservation programs, but disturbingly remains the difficulty of preserving African cultural values which are not only nerve binders for these communities but the very canons on which any sustainable African development concept must be nailed on if it has to bring about some meaningful changes.

Regrettably, after fifty years of mis-development being celebrated under the banner of African nations fifty years of independence, many African scholars especially those who have studied abroad and understand the values of social development are becoming more critical on the catching-up theory of development which conspicuously is guilty of excessive Eurocentrism. It is unnecessary here to reiterate this theory of development-as-Westernization of Africa, which has not only failed in its ambition to rescue Sub Saharan Africa from poverty, but also dangerously increased its dependence in economic, political and cultural terms as well as, in certain cases, accelerated the disturbing depletion of its natural resources and quality of life.

What is less obvious is that the theory of dependence and the practice of self-development resulting from a process of independence are also tainted by a kind of cultural imperialism which is all the more persistent for being unconscious in the minds of many African leaders or members of governments who believe themselves to be anti-imperialist. The failure to set up a strong cultural policy that reinforces a determined and constructed self-reliance development strategy has rendered African cultural frames weak and vulnerable to western concepts that rather annihilate and devastate our cultures - the social fabrics on which genuine African development must be built.

2. DEVELOPMENT: A CULTURAL ALIENATION

Cultural groups and social scholars have recently been sounding the alarm with increasing frequency. Not only do they feel their cultural identity threatened by the ideology and the alienating mechanisms of international capitalism, but also by the weight of globalization which does not only have a devastating effect on youths behavior but equally neglects the people's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Relating to the works of African social development consciousness-raising literacy programs, Desmond, S. and Elfert, M. (2008) argue that, when development programs are not rigorously applied to shared cultural values and principles, they lead to the compulsory introduction of foreign ideas. According to them, these foreign ideas allow an unconscious surfacing of the key words which are problematic for the members of a given community, and the use of these words to awaken a critical, militant awareness regarding the alienation and exploitation to which they are subjected. There is a tacit recognition in

practice that these programs do not fit into the culture of the groups in question. One might be tempted to well ask if the result is not the imposition of a new depository of concepts whose contents are meant to be liberating but whose origins are foreign. One falls back into a bank account perspective, where one gives and the other receives, one thinks and the other is thought. That is why understandable, programs of this nature are doomed to failure.

When I look around me, the reality of this statement can be seen in the histrionic projects ranging from HIV/AIDS to the Roll Back Malaria, initiated and implemented by the Cameroun government since 2003 and where expected results have never been achieved due to over domineering Western ideologies in the conception and implementation strategies. Although there have along been many Cameroonians involved in the development and implementation phases of these projects, they themselves are so ignorant about particular local culture that ended up as socio-cultural barriers to the overall implementation of the projects and obtaining the expected results. The general tendency in Cameroon is that, when people from different ethnic groups or culture are called to implement a project in a different region other than that of their ethnic origin there is bound to be a social resistance to the project no matter the impact the incidence may have on the receiving population.

The failure of so many rural extension programs in Sub-Saharan Africa is also a cause for concern. The cases are rare, too rare in terms of the efforts expended of peasant or urban groups genuinely engaged in a radical process aimed at liberation in the long term. At the macro-social level, results are even poorer. Without underestimating the responsibility of imperialism in the situation, one is forced to acknowledge that attempts to resolve the problem – independent trade unionism, militant peasant movements, civil rights committees, liberation projects – are both rare and precarious. It must be admitted that solidarity work and NGO projects in Sub Saharan Africa seldom arouse much enthusiasm. So many failures baffle those who would like to see the African masses liberate themselves from exploitation, hunger and sickness.

So many blighted hopes in sub-Saharan Africa call for a critical look at reconciling development and indigenous culture, to carry out an in-depth analysis of the extent to which the revolutions that have taken place, the regimes that have resulted from them and the programs launched by those regimes have been of a truly indigenous, and therefore popular, nature. For the disciples of globalization, a concept that developing nations are still struggling to fit themselves into without any real power to bargain what so ever to their advantage, this critical appraisal or in-depth analysis also involves a personal examination of conscience.

Should development move the receiving communities from their sociocultural norms or should it reinforce these norms with foreign insights - Eurocentrism and mimicry?

The theory and practice of development as modernization and catching-up have mainly failed in their bid to help the masses of the developing nations. On the contrary, they have helped to maintain and even aggravate the often appalling social conditions in which they find themselves. The approaches resulting from analyses and strategies of development as liberation reveal shortcomings, partly due to Eurocentrism considered as imperialistic. Since nearly all models of development are conceived from the lens of Western preconceptions the indigenous cultures of the receiving communities have been largely

neglected. There is an urgent need to pay much greater attention to these than we have in the past. The reason being that, when communities do not match development programs with their immediate needs, any attempt to impose such a project will infringe on their customary life style and provoke resistance to the change needed.

For any development program to be sustained within the Sub Saharan African context, there is the need to recognize the enduring quality of indigenous cultures and discovering their vitality. Without this, we will be unable to appreciate the extent to which they succeed in putting up a fearful resistance to development projects conceived in the West, a resistance which often explains the mishaps that befall such projects. We therefore notice how indigenous cultures are more than just obstacles to a development that tries to impose cultural alienation.

2.1. INDIGENOUS CULTURES AS FOUNDATIONS FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

We shall look here at their powers of resistance and creative vitality in the realms of global economy. In the vast area of social life, a choice has to be made, since it is impossible to deal with everything here. The choice fell on traditional forms of practical know-how as an aspect of social life. It may well be that people's capacity to ensure their self-development and, particularly, their self-sufficiency in food, may depend on recognizing this know-how.

African nations' indigenous cultures contain within them the seeds necessary to give birth to societies which differ from the standardized and devitalized model that has spread over the world. But what exactly are these differences?

In defining what characterizes non-Western/Northern peoples and distinguishes them from whatever constitutes both the beauty and the deficiencies of the European/American spirit, the Indian philosopher Panikkar has used the terms *anthropocentric* and *cosmocentric*. The distinction is a useful one since from it derives everything one can say of Western development ideology when, embarking on the great adventure of globalization, he places himself at the centre of the universe: his linear as opposed to cyclic conception of the universe; his need to conquer nature and others as opposed to a taste for harmony with the environment; the priority accorded to doing and having as opposed to a sense of being. For some, it all began with the Sophists, the Greek philosophers of the 4th century BC who propounded the following: "have the strongest possible desires and find the means to satisfy them". Since then, growth and progress have never stopped, along with material consumption.

Henceforth, unlike the cultures of other continents, the only relationship man will envisage with nature is that of domination, and he will never cease to aspire to and covet the omnipotence of the gods.

This is what Garaudy calls the "secession of the West", implying by this that the other peoples of the world possess a set of common values different from those now prevailing in the West. It is these people who inhabit what is nowadays called the Third World or sometimes politely framed as developing countries.

Culture and tradition is the hallmark of African civilization. Whereas the scientific and technological West tends to reduce the world to a collection of objects to be mastered, the African concept of development sees it as a single body to which it itself belongs. The African world has a fundamentally

different conception of the human body and nature, of development and history. People do not look so much to the future as to the past or rather the present in all its profundity. This is not the case with Western /Northern concepts of development which are very different from the rest of the world which they are in the questdominate and “develop” in the belief that they are bringing ‘civilization’. Nowadays we are realizing that, although there has certainly been intense cultural deracination and a great deal of borrowing, there has been, for all that, no real process of Westernization in depth.

2.2. AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE WITHIN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

That Africans possess specific preconceptions and methods of economic organization is beyond doubt. What is less clear and much more problematic is the way values and patterns of traditional economic behavior have endured in their complex modern societies.

In sub Saharan Africa, failures to increase productivity are countless. One African in two suffers from hunger. A recent study devoted to Cameroon, but which is relevant to all sub-Saharan Africa, shows that the situation has greatly deteriorated in the last thirty years. The real value of Cameroon’s Gross National Product now reaches only one-third of that of 1990. The agricultural sector has regressed in absolute figures and in relation to other sectors of the economy, especially the non-productive ones. Unemployment has increased in a public sector with 60% of youth population unemployed. The average worker’s salary is now worth less than 60% of its value in 1990. Transport and marketing systems have been disarticulated. Hence the importance of unofficial, alternative channels of income and provisioning, especially since the cost price of cash products is too low to be an incentive for farmers. The disparity between town and country, between certain advantaged regions and the rest of Cameroon and between the privileged minority and the masses has been accentuated. Vast areas of the interior have been virtually excluded. The same study is crammed with negative examples: the deforestation of increasingly large areas outside the towns, the de-electrification of the urban centres of the interior, the de-equipping of rural areas, and so on. The growth in productivity that Africa so urgently needs has therefore not been achieved. It is this which absolves the cultural question of any accusation of being academic or irrelevant, whatever the ‘realists’ may think. In reality, instead of progress in Cameroon/ Africa, there often seems to have been deterioration, regression with regard to the imported economic model and, notably, a return to an economy of self-subsistence.

Some private companies employ their staff for only a few hours a day so as to allow them to work the family land or kitchen garden, which often seems to be the only sure source of subsistence. Thus monetary economy is losing ground and in some places one witnesses the partial return of the barter system. The African peasant’s economic behavior patterns seem to involve a delicate balancing act between the economic rationality prevalent in the West and certain non-rational social pressures or even beliefs which escape the more utilitarian, materialist and individualistic logic of Western capitalism. Understanding this rationality from outside poses two problems: one has to abandon a technico-rational view of the world meanwhile avoiding the pitfall of the myth of paradise lost that ignores the harsh reality of the power relationships in play (mechanisms of exploitation and domination, and so on). Obviously, the recession witnessed in Africa cannot be exclusively attributed to non-progressive

rationality. If peasants return to self-subsistence, it is also due to the fact that galloping inflation and persistent devaluations of local currencies have eroded the value of money and that the continual exploitation of the peasantry by the towns has ended by making them 'delink'. But recognizing these factors does not allow us to dismiss certain alternative socio-economic patterns of behavior.

The African is so anxious to maintain the harmony of the social group to which he belongs that he brings into play a series of subtle behavior patterns whose aim is to avoid excelling or being superior, which would endanger the coherence of the group. Those who have worked in the field have observed this attitude, whether it be in matters of economic production or in any other domain. The sense of community takes precedence over individualism and the competitive spirit.

Development projects in Sub Saharan Africa often fail because they set up exogenous structures and try to introduce goals which are alien to tradition and to the local perception of needs. The economic successes of ethnic groups like the Bamileke in Cameroon confirm the above. The basis of their success appears to have been their powerful tradition and an extremely close-knit kinship system.

Another subject that demands consideration is the number of central treasurers and ministers who have disappeared with public funds, the high prevalence of corruption, the extent to which public funds are misappropriated, all these reveal an attitude so widespread that it cannot be analyzed in ethical terms alone, nor can it be solved solely by repressive measures. Surely it calls for consideration of the cultural aspect of the traditional African attitude to money. Are we not forced to see here a kind of non-cooperation with the monetary system, or, at least, a very different perception of it? The general tendency in Sub Saharan Africa is that, anyone who has access to money comes under great social pressure. He or she is obliged to share the benefits with his innumerable and less fortunate brothers and cousins. Misappropriation of funds is, therefore, not entirely a question of personal enrichment as in the West, but is rather a question of obligations of social solidarity deeply rooted in tradition. Loyalty to the clan is seen as more important than loyalty to the employer, whether it be the state, the capitalist boss or a development project.

3. AFRICAN SOCIOCULTURAL CONCEPTION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The question of a truly African conception of economy development has yet to be established. Hopkins rightly warns African intellectuals against "culturism" and merely looking to the past for solutions to Africa's current problems. He reminds them that whatever remains alive of African culture is in actual fact upheld by a people oppressed and exploited by a system as modern as it is familiar, that must be resisted. While warning against romantic dreams about economics in the abstract, he himself, nevertheless, acknowledges that the problems confronting African people is the notion that Africans are negotiating reality with a Eurocentric consciousness. This Eurocentric consciousness, while projected as normal, is actually a major source of the social, political, economic, health and psychological problems of Africans. Hopkins believes that every African, man or woman, can make very good use of Western rationality and will not be indifferent to it as long as he or she does not feel their identity is being threatened. Having a long history of being plundered, they want to be sure of the path on which they are embarking; otherwise they prefer to stick to familiar things. It is their very survival that is at stake! Each

time the meaning of life is brought into question, the African will turn to traditional references. Hopkins, whom one could hardly accuse of being obsessed with the past, thus recognizes the importance and the persistence of African tradition.

This survival instinct is coupled with the great African myths and archetypes whose wisdom Europeans can vaguely perceive. But to do so, they must remove their blinkers. It is only thus that Western nation will cease to reproach so-called underdeveloped countries of their notorious 'lack of initiative and responsibility'. For their part, Western/Northern countries have paid a terrible price for progress. Sigmund Freud has given it a name: anxiety. Now, it must be pointed out that certain prohibitions peculiar to the West have no currency in the African village. There, the infant is king. The mother's breast is always nearby and available; the warm, constant presence of the mother gives the child a feeling of total security. To survive, it has only to melt into the maternal bosom represented by the group, the community. But the penalty to be paid for not making one's children unhappy, for not living under constant stress, is low yield per hectare, insufficient speed on the assembly line, both mortal sins vis-à-vis 'the demands of global development'.

Traditional patterns of economic behavior in Africa, and in many populations around the world survive and resist. Renouncing the accumulation of possessions, these communities esteem harmony above wealth, intuitively feeling that such accumulation will bring in its wake jealousy, conflict and fragmentation of the social body. This is not necessarily an idyllic attitude. The retaliatory measures taken in Africa against personal ambition are well known, as well as against creative imagination and originality. In this domain, accusations of sorcery play an effective and formidable role. It is not a question of idealizing traditional reality, but of finally recognizing it as such, different, disturbing and often full of a wisdom that the modern world could well use.

Reacting to the tendency of development activists to confuse poverty and misery, some people have tried to revalorize simple means and modest goals.

This is the case with Adama and Glanz (2010) who argue for a model of society not centered on the race for power and profit, but on a frugal well-being, incorporating the values of local culture. There is no question of denying the need to combat dire poverty of the kind that destroys body and soul, but of throwing new light on ways of life which, although not Western, are nonetheless far from worthless. On the contrary, such ways of life constitute the expression of peoples' culture and of their real aspirations. They are, therefore, apt to be more efficient, as is evidenced by the growing importance of the 'informal sectors' in the economics of developing countries south of the Sahara.

What conclusions can we reach from these observations on the 'convivial economies' of the Third world? Basically, that there are other economic cultures than those of capitalism or socialism. Non-Western cultures perceive economy in their own ways, which vary according to the productivist, individualistic, materialistic mentality. Such cultures are based on values of conviviality, sobriety and mutual aid, on mechanisms aimed at maintaining social stability at all cost, on acceptance of hierarchies and respect for the natural order, on a sense of solidarity reinforced by adherence to a particular lineal, residential or religious group. At times, these cultures are vehicles for an acute sense of equality, at other times for acts of jealous repression of any expression of individual success. They foster loyalty and sacrifice to other

ideals than those propounded by Western ethics.

It is important first of all not to make judgments, not to consider a particular characteristic inferior or superior. Rather, it is a question of observing closely, for these alternative economic behavior patterns are the cause of many failures as well as the key to unexpected successes. Today, an Africanist agronomist as well informed as some western scholars can state that growth in productivity will not be guaranteed by Western-style productivist agriculture. Perhaps it is not inevitable therefore, that the economic model currently dominant should spread across the entire planet. Nor indeed, is it desirable that it should spread, for even in the West this model is far from having proved its ability to produce, over and above the GNP, the famous 'Gross National Happiness' that was dreamt of in at the verge of independence. Furthermore, because of the way it forcibly establishes itself everywhere, this model has become an obstacle to the right to be different.

There is much food for thought in all the preceding, not only for economists, state planners and development bureaucrats, but also for the organizers of urban and rural grass-roots communities, and all those engaged in relations of solidarity with them. Without abandoning their socio-economic analyses, NGOs must intensify their sense of dialogue and be on their guard against any inopportune tendency to expect others to display reactions and behavior patterns similar to those of their own Western culture. The enormous muddle that almost everywhere accompanies the introduction of foreign technology and machines is well known. Who has not come across 'ready-to-operate' factories or other 'turn-key' projects operating at less than half their capacity, or witnessed the tragi-comic spectacle of the tractor stranded somewhere in a village, rusted by tropical rains and already overgrown by weeds, parts of it having been rescued by the local blacksmith for some completely unrelated purpose? Not all foreign technology is good for African consumption.

3.1. THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Traditional, non-imported agricultural systems have worked for centuries and managed in the past to feed the populations concerned. Today, malnutrition and famine are spreading, especially in Black Africa. This is due to various factors, such as wars and political instability, repressive governments, the exploitation of the countryside by the towns and their dealers, the deterioration of the terms of trade and the international economic (dis)order, the irregularity of rainfall and in certain cases, demographic explosions. But another, equally decisive factor is agricultural research and training. These generally emphasize cash-crops and recommend monocultures for export (coffee, tea, cotton, etc.) while ignoring the farming systems established over the ages by local populations. By farming systems is meant here the types of production which take into account climate, biological capital, soil and equipment and which assure productivity by means of specific combinations of soil and plant and by crop rotation and ingenious cyclical changes of location. The training given to peasants usually takes into account only the plant in question, killing off everything that surrounds it. In the tropics, such a practice is disastrous. This is why the local peasants practice polyculture, where everything grows side by side in apparent disorder but which produces the organic matter the soil needs. To the Western mind, poverty equals ignorance, one producing the other and vice versa. Moreover, as we have seen, 'developers' consider virtually all non-Western life-styles as

tainted by 'poverty'. This belief is extremely widespread but is often a wrong, since Eurocentric interpretation of social reality, experts and general public alike constantly trot out insulting fallacies along the lines of 'the minute you turn your back, the peasants, through mistrust or fickleness, do the opposite of what you told them; you can't trust these people; they are ignorant because they don't have any education, they're illiterate; they're poor and dirty because they're lazy; they have no sense of responsibility and need guidance; we have to teach them and take culture and education to them! These elitist reactions stem from an essentially apolitical conception of development according to which poverty is to be tackled only by means of rural adult education programs, functional literacy campaigns, courses on hygiene and nutrition, classes in embroidery and pattern cutting and so on. In certain contexts, such activities can be useful when they derive from a concept of liberation. Otherwise, they allow a discreet veil to be drawn over the real causes of the problems, too politically sensitive to be tackled. Progressive NGOs no longer make such mistakes. They have dismantled the economic mechanisms that cause poverty. But have they examined the cultural dimension of the problems? That is the question.

3.2. POLITICS: STATELESS NATIONS AND NATIONLESS STATES

If different peoples have developed their own specific cultural characteristics in the economic and technological fields, the same applies to the legal and political arenas. Although profoundly influenced by the Western juridico-political system that dominates all states in the modern world, tradition remains a factor that still has to be taken into account. It is not as though state organization was unknown before the arrival of the Whites. The Zulus, the Khmers and the Incas all had strong states. Other groups lived in societies without states, or had types of intermediate organization (chieftaincies enjoying varying degrees of power). Most, however, had in common the safeguarding of public consensus, the balance of power and, if necessary, regional autonomy. The authorities were 'multiple, specialized and interdependent' states Etienne Le Roy, a specialist in African law. Nowadays, it has become obvious that most Africans hardly recognize themselves in the states their colonizers have bequeathed to them. Since the state sees itself as the driving force of development, the latter consequently finds itself profoundly handicapped. The frequency coups d'état reveals not only the behind-the-scenes intrigues of neo-colonialism, but also the shallowness of the regimes' roots in society, the unsuitable nature of their methods of government and the very nature of their power.

In reality, the post-colonial 'state-idolatry' is equaled only by the profound absence of legitimacy of the authorities. An artificial entity, from the points of view of both its frontiers and its history, the African state, far from being the product of a long and spontaneous process of nation-building, exists in itself, and very often for itself and for the bourgeoisie which has taken control of it. The people are elsewhere and define themselves by a sub-or trans-state identity. The party system and the accompanying ideology, far from bringing people together and mobilizing them, exacerbate the repressive, alien nature of the state. National feeling is extremely weak. How many people nowadays think of themselves as Cameroonians, Central Africans Chadians? As an elderly trader puts it, 'To me, Cameroon is just means tribalism and corruption. A case study carried out in Cameroon on the relationship between ethnicity and state reveals how paradoxical these terms have become nowadays. The state imposes centralization and

homogenization; ethnic groups demand the right to their differences and autonomy. Another colonial contribution, no less inappropriate than the state, is law. Although traditional societies have produced a rich, flexible legal system, well adapted to circumstances and, what is more, much less hostile to change than has been admitted, modern states have generally imposed a new legal system. This system, because it is state-oriented and imbued with foreign concepts, is inappropriate and incomprehensible to the great mass of society. Fun has quite rightly been poked at this ‘fantasy law’ whose ambition to change behavior patterns and encourage development is illusory. The term ‘fantasy law’ dates from 1920 and refers to the civil code which the Dutch tried in vain to impose on the populations of Indonesia. Since then, there has been little improvement, although several African states have tried to integrate certain aspects of indigenous law into their modern legislation or into a unified judicial system. In so doing, they have usually devitalized them for, rather than simply being a set of rules, indigenous law is a ‘way of being’, often irreducible to an article of law or a court decision in the Western sense.

What can we make of these observations on the state and law? First of all, let us establish the fact that the state apparatus and the legal system imported by colonization is characterized by centralization of power and –particularly when civil codes have been enacted, in the continental, Napoleonic tradition- by standardizing of customs. Independent states have generally clung to the imported legal tradition inherited from their former rulers. They often reinforced the centralizing, unifying tendencies bequeathed by their authoritarian forerunners. In countries endowed with a certain cultural homogeneity, centralization and standardization have, perhaps, some chance of functioning even if this is not necessarily desirable. In most countries, however, there is a plurality of cultures and consequently of indigenous legal systems. Furthermore, the decision-making process relies, in many non-European cultures, on consensus. It involves a slow, careful attempt to safeguard the collective harmony, whereas the Western-style process of decision-making, by majority over minority, represents for them a sort of brutality, lastingly harmful to the social body. Western juridico-political culture, although omnipresent, therefore does not suit all the peoples of the world.

All of which leads one to believe that many states would be well advised to promote administrative decentralization and legal pluralism, thus recognizing and valorizing the cultural communities who inhabit their territories. The legal system, if it is truly to serve people, their liberties and their specificities, ought to be endogenous, relatively plural and – when no widely accepted indigenous legislative power exists – essentially ‘customary’ and judge-made. In any case, the legal systems of Sub-Saharan African countries ought to depart from the Napoleonic model by which a given code freezes, devitalizes and standardizes customs, and imposes a state-oriented rationality.

3.3. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

If Africa offers striking examples of the alien, inappropriate and often despoiling nature of the state, as a research project in legal anthropology carried out in west Cameroon recently concluded, then Africa ought to call upon its age-old experience to limit the role of the state both in its manifestations of authoritarianism and in its tendency to allow the exploitation of its nationals to take place under its auspices. Failing such changes, there will be yet more direct confrontation, or spontaneous strategies of

evasion, by-passing and diverting state institutions. There is, therefore, a pressing need for civil society to rally and assume the role from which it should never have abdicated. African development scholars must work to reverse the centralized reducing diversity to unity model of the state which is the major cause of the obstacles to development, adopt new strategies and policies of self-development more respectful of local dynamics and overall pluralism that include legal pluralism.

Instead of opposing clanism as a source of parasitism and tribalism as worthless and a threat to modernity and the state, it would be better, according to consider the possibility that the larger African cultural groupings might constitute appropriate focuses of political life and power. There is therefore a pressing need to decentralize and deflate the state inherited from the colonizers. Africans must cease therefore to deplore the multiplicity of tribal and ethnic groups, for it is precisely these ethnic groupings which will allow the existence and the vitality of decentralized political entities, which, in their turn, ought to be founded on the participation of smaller ethnic groups.

4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the values, institutions and behavior patterns, as well as the means and techniques of production of the various peoples of the South, are full of potential for creating alternative models of society. They have also helped in real terms to check, deflect or slow down the advent of the monoculture type of society which “development” would have brought them. Judging by the state in which certain countries, such as Cameroon, find themselves, one might well ask if we are not witnessing “pseudo-development” and, in fact, the collapse of entire sections of Western-style modernity. We are witnessing, on the one hand, the deterioration of institutions of Western origin: the State, written law, public office, wage-earning and market economy, parliamentary democracy, technology in the areas of health and transport, commerce and industry, and so on. On the other hand, we can observe the vitality of the values and behavior patterns based on elements of local culture. This state of affairs raises important questions. The Westernization of certain countries seems to have been, in some fields, a purely superficial veneer. Eurocentric blindness, along with the setting up of neo-colonial elites fashioned along Western lines has meant that we have often taken for deep-rooted and widespread a process which was in fact nothing but a superficial varnish.

Some countries, instead of making progress, are regressing in the eyes of the “developers”. Yet, what have been called obstacles to development might well represent and unconscious reaction to the anticipated dangers of uniformization and a deep-rooted resistance to alienation. Who knows! Such resistance is perhaps fed by the instinctive feeling that a society fundamentally based on power struggle and caught up in a technologicalization that imposes its own rules and rhythms on human beings, is ultimately doomed to self-destruction. Certain peoples seem to resort to non-cooperation in order to oppose alien development. Their attitude could be interpreted as a kind of civil disobedience, in opposition to the obligation to develop in the Western manner.

It is time to recognize and pay tribute to these silent, multi-faceted forms of resistance which various peoples oppose to the impositions and seductions that threaten their cultural values. In some countries, the populations pretend to comply but, behind the scenes, there takes place a sort of subversion of the

logic accompanying the imported object or institution. Reginald Hopkins aptly speaks of “phagocytism”, a term used in chemistry whereby one cell absorbs and destroys another, and indeed one sometimes wonders who has actually absorbed whom. Desmond and Elfert also point out, in the two-way traffic between the original culture and the white institutions, all kinds of distortions contaminations, desecrations and corruptions of the system imposed from outside. It is in this light that I strongly advocate that all efforts at this level geared towards Sub Saharan African renaissance should be underpinned by a common culture and, consequently, towards a more real sense of nationhood and development.

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