

It is with a dose of nostalgia that one recalls the halcyon days when the voices of African scholars resonated in debates about the currents and trends that shaped the different prisms through which Africa was viewed. Refreshing but critical appraisals were offered in an intellectual mix that was mostly dominated by a hegemonic epistemology originating in the West, primarily in the United States, France, and Britain. The terms of contestation often evolved around how, if anything, western scholarship shared in the ex post facto complicity that helped to entrench the ‘curse of Berlin’, which originated in that infamous conference of fourteen European powers in 1884-1885 presided over by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and which carved the continent into enclaves for colonial annexation. For instance, the post-war British school of social anthropology led by scholars such as E.E. Evans-Pritchard, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Meyer Fortes, and Max Gluckman provided a rich vein of field-work that informed the Colonial Office’s methodology of indirect rule. Rooted in the ethos of Berlin’s political alchemy and ideological sophistry that concocted the subtle poison of colonialism in Africa, they very much legitimised a political economy of accumulation, extraction, and control in the same manner as their French structuralist counterparts did with the policy of *assimilation*.

However, amid Africa’s decaying post-colonial research, publishing, and academic infrastructure there emerged the Kenyan-born Ali Mazrui, who was trained in the best of British traditions at Manchester and Oxford with, sandwiched in between there, a post-graduate exposure to the United States at Columbia University. No sooner had his professional career taken off than he was hounded out of Uganda’s Makerere University by Idi Amin’s repressive and idiosyncratic rule. Mazrui then found refuge in American universities and, despite the physical displacement, never lost his organic connection to the continent. With these as formative experiences, he became a leading exponent of a different interpretation of Africa that examined the complex matrix of domestic and international contextual factors that conspired to either reinforce the status quo or were the harbingers of change on the continent. This found its apotheosis in his nine-part documentary, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. Above all, Mazrui challenged established political, cultural, and intellectual orthodoxies so much so that his work is an amalgam of cogent scholarship, irreverent iconoclasm, and sardonic polemics with its own panoply of devoted adherents and acerbic detractors. This is the hallmark of an expansive canon that defines Mazruiana; indeed, an annotated bibliography published by the Foundation for Global Dialogue in 1999 has close to one thousand entries.

It is no small wonder then that Adebajo dedicates this book to Mazrui, whom he describes as the ‘...foremost

Prophet of Pax Africana and the undisputed doyen of Africa’s international relations’. Mazrui’s influence and example is palpable throughout this book and, indeed, he provides a fitting preface which is vintage Mazrui in terms of its panoramic remit, pithy turn of phrase, and analytical insight. It is appropriately titled, ‘Black Berlin and the Curse of Fragmentation: From Bismarck to Barack’. While nominally a preface, this is more a penetrating essay that lays bare the anatomy of the curse and how its various paradoxes and manifestations have shaped not only Africa’s physical borders but also its existential, mental, and material boundaries. This instrumentalisation of borders and boundaries plays itself out in a fatal combustion of religion, ethnicity, identity, resources, and ultimately, in war and conflict. In exploring the pathologies of the curse from the historically divisive (Bismarck) to the contemporarily unifying (Barack and Mandela), Mazrui is never lost in his pursuit of a Pan-African vision. Mazrui, thus, contributes a forceful backdrop to Adebajo’s cognate mosaic. The book, in a sense, marks the proverbial passing of a generational torch as far as the study of Africa’s international relations is concerned.

Adebajo’s intellectual trajectory and biography is equally arresting and it is here that we discover his affinity with Mazrui and how this book of essays has evolved. A Nigerian by birth, he began his academic career at the University of Ibadan as a student of German which also took him to Germany for a year where he discovered Berlin. Coinciding with the fall of the Berlin Wall, he then won the prestigious Rhodes scholarship which took him to Oxford, where he studied international relations and from which he emerged with a doctorate. Adebajo’s five year tenure with the International Peace Academy in New York gave him unique insights into Africa’s evolving yet fragile regional architecture and the (dys) functional machinery of the United Nations. This was followed by what he calls the ‘return of the native’ to head up the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) in Cape Town, South Africa. Adebajo began with CCR providing him the institutional platform and widely informed by his travel through twenty-six African countries – with something approaching evangelical zeal – to shape and advance his own etymology and definition of post-Cold War Pan-Africanism, but one that traced its genealogy right back to Mazrui. This book is a result of that odyssey,

grounded in Mazrui’s plinth. Thus in tribute to Mazrui, Adebajo writes: ‘Few have thought as profoundly, or written and spoken as eloquently, about Africa as this committed Pan-African Prophet’.

This prologue is important because it helps to frame the significance and path-breaking nature of this collection of essays, eight of which have previously been published but substantially revised and six of which are new additions. Among its many virtues and rare for a volume such as this, the fourteen chapters (which include an inviting introductory chapter) make up a coherent and trenchant narrative whose essential premise and argument is to demonstrate that ‘...Africa suffers from the curse invoked in Berlin’. Tellingly, in the century and a quarter after the Berlin conference, the horsemen of the apocalypse continue to traverse the African landscape, leaving in their wake war and conflict, social deprivation, corrupt and autocratic leadership, and failed institutions. The ‘bondage of boundaries inherited from the era of the Berlin conference’ thus still haunts the continent. However, Adebajo is quick to point out that, notwithstanding Berlin’s tragic colonial and post-colonial heritage, Africans were not simply hapless subjects of history but active agents in trying to forge their own destiny against insurmountable odds and constraints in a mercurial global context. An important notional and conceptual thread that animates the book is Adebajo’s attempt to grapple creatively and inventively with the policy challenges and governance dilemmas which arise from the curse and which have continued to afflict Africa after the Cold War. The book, therefore, brackets an era of momentous geo-strategic change, and indeed tectonic shifts, in Africa’s international relations from 1989 to 2009 but with the effects and legacy of ‘Bismarck’s sorcery’ at the Berlin conference providing the sordid tale as sub-text. And Adebajo quotes Mazrui who points out that: ‘One of the great paradoxes about Otto von Bismarck was that he united the Germans and helped to divide Africa’.

As a purgative to break and reverse the ‘curse of Berlin’, those whose inheritance was post-colonial Africa have been forced to seek the three magic but elusive kingdoms of security, hegemony and unity, themes that also concerned and occupied Mazrui through his four scholarly decades. In a manner of speaking, these quests constitute the

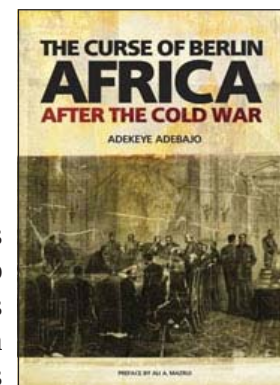
normative edifice of Adebajo’s Pan-Africanism and how these unfold in the context of Africa’s international relations after the Cold War anchor the thematic organisation and analytical coverage of the book.

The book’s chapters fall under three parts: the Quest for Security; the Quest for Hegemony; and the Quest for Unity.

The first part has three chapters. The second chapter broadly maps Africa’s evolving security architecture inspired by Mazrui’s important work on the subject, *Towards a Pax Africana*; the third chapter examines

the continent’s interface with the United Nations in the context of rising asymmetries between the rich and developed North and the poor and underdeveloped South (what the author terms ‘global apartheid’); and the fourth chapter provides a contrasting portrait of two very different African ‘faces’ of the UN, namely, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan. Hence, even with a maturing regional and sub-regional framework of institutions, an osmotic presence in the fabric of the UN, and two figures who tried to reshape the UN’s *raison d’être*, Africa’s security dilemmas persist.

The second part, titled ‘The Quest for Hegemony’, deals with the dialectic of countries’ leadership styles and interests in Africa across a changing geo-strategic and geo-political landscape. The thrust of the five chapters that shape the thematic contours here depicts and elaborates the impact which different country actors have exercised – directly or indirectly – on Africa’s hegemonic quest, critically understood as the ability and space to act autonomously. Thus, with regard to South Africa’s post-apartheid role in Africa, Adebajo examines in Chapter 5 whether this must be construed as that of a messiah or a mercantilist, that country’s fateful repressive past remaining an incubus on its promising democratic present. Nigeria’s role in Africa is viewed through the optic of a troubled Gulliver, a continental giant which, according to a lead-in citation to the chapter by Africa’s great elder scholar, Adebayo Adedeji, ‘...is reputed to be one of the most corrupt societies in the world, has no moral basis to lead others. If it tried to, it will be resisted’ (Chapter 6). The ambivalences in the foregoing two chapters provide a useful base to consider, in Chapter 7, whether the strategic partnership between South Africa and Nigeria is an ‘axis of virtue’? There is much in this relationship and the personalities that drove it that is complementary to and salutary for the continent but there are also tense rumblings and competitive undercurrents in the bilateral chemistry, especially with the exits of Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo from the African and global stages. Chapter 8 comes with a scathing but balanced critique of the role of three external actors in Africa, namely, China, the



United States, and France; Adebajo contemplates whether this trinity make up an ‘axis of evil’, borrowing George Bush’s infelicitous phrase. The author, however, reserves his sharpest sabre for France and its *folie de grandeur*: ‘a chronic delusion of greatness’ as he puts it. This part concludes with Chapter 9 on the implications for Africa of South Africa’s increasingly close relationship with China. On the basis of their comparative footprints across a range of case studies, Adebajo suggests that the record is an ambiguous one, meaning that ‘... both Pax South Africana and Pax Sinica could come to represent a new breed of economic exploitation and political imperialism in Africa’.

The final part and its five chapters bring into stark relief the elusive but important quest for unity in Africa and the role played by certain personalities, institutions, and shifting systemic forces in advancing the Pan-African ideal. The antinomies of Nelson Mandela and Cecil Rhodes and their historical bequests are brought together as a ‘monstrous marriage’ in the Mandela Rhodes Foundation founded in 2002: one ‘a nation-builder par excellence’ and the other an ‘expansionist *empire*-builder’, one ‘An African Avatar’ and the other a ‘Colossal Imperialist’, in short, the

incarnation of ‘Good vs. Evil’. Has the Foundation and the symbolism that it embodies taken the idea of reconciliation too far? (Chapter 10). The entire Chapter 11 is next devoted to Thabo Mbeki as Africa’s other philosophising, next to Kwame Nkrumah. The subtitle, ‘A Nkrumahist Renaissance’, is apt, for Mbeki strove to ‘...restore Africa’s past glory through his promotion of an African Renaissance’. And so Adebajo compares and contrasts these figures as the two main *dramatis personae* in Africa’s unity imperative and does so on the basis of the monarchical and prophetic traditions in African politics pioneered by Mazrui. The metaphor of ‘Towers of Babel’ is most appropriate for an examination of the institutional and normative integrity of the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) and the moral enterprises of their visionary founding fathers: Adebayo Adedeji in the case of the former and Jean Monnet in that of the latter, both of whom provided the philosophical foundations for the respective evolutions of the AU and EU. These institutions very much represent the construction of heaven-reaching towers of unity interrupted by the confusion of tongues that make up their memberships (Chapter 12). In the penultimate chapter, Chapter 13, there

is a serious attempt to search for the meaning of Barack Obama in terms of relations between America and Africa, crucially given his African ancestry and hope for a progressive front in forging a new African and American unity and identity. Sadly, it seems the euphoria of ‘Obamamania’ has given way to the *realpolitik* associated with the ‘Avuncular Sam’. The book attains a crescendo in the final Chapter 14, which shows how Africa and Asia as the ‘Heirs of Gandhi’ have changed the world. The Mahatma was a creature of the two universes and immortalised their struggles, very much incubating the idea of Afro-Asian solidarity and South-South cooperation that was forged in the crucible of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. However, this warm inductive promise of unity still has to do battle with the cold reality of Berlin’s curse.

Ultimately, this is a very satisfying and important book and it is difficult to find major faults with it. While very well written, some might be put off by the overkill in rhetorical embroidery, mixed metaphors, and tendentious labelling of countries and personalities,

but that is part of Adebajo’s oeuvre and allure, again imbued with the spirit of Mazrui. The book could also have been better rounded off with a final reflective and synthetic chapter that is forward-looking as far as the dynamic intersections of the curse and the three quests are concerned, including what this portends for the future of Africa. Moreover, notwithstanding a gold-mine of footnotes and given the book’s obvious importance for future scholarship and research, it could have used with a bibliography. However, it is decidedly superior in its conceptual organisation, substantive reach, analytical breadth, technical preparation, and depth of research; the footnotes alone take up sixty pages and the book has a most user-friendly and well-crafted index.

That said, this book is not only a fitting salutation to Ali Mazrui and an acknowledgement and celebration of the great Mzee’s contribution, but in a major way, it defines a new paradigmatic frontier in our understanding of Africa’s international relations by an African scholar who is as passionate as he is meticulous about his subject.

