

African Unity, Religion, and Philosophy

I would like to consider three critical issues that, I believe CODESRIA should pay more attention to in the upcoming years, or let us say, in the next decade. The first one is African unity and regional integration on the continent; the second relates to religion and the third one is about my discipline, philosophy.

As far as African unity is concerned, first I would like to point out that the context of the 2010s will coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of most of African states access if we consider the year 1960, as it is generally the case, as the year of independences. Accordingly, some events have been slated to mark this anniversary. Then it seems to me that in the next few years, CODESRIA should steer its research agenda to focus on a forward-looking reflection upon the new meaning of African emancipation by asking the following question: 'What is the journey so far with respect to emancipation after fifty years, and what are the new frontiers to confront?' Actually, nowadays there is a broad consensus that Nkrumah's 'Africa must unite' mantra has become the catchphrase for a new pan-Africanism that many refer to by the term 'United States of Africa.' The fact that some African leaders have latched onto this expression and tried to clumsily rush

Souleymane Bachir Diagne
Columbia University
New York, USA

things in a context of reluctance of other heads of state does not change the reality that the creation of a true African economic and political environment is not only the continent's most appropriate response to the challenges of globalization, but also the new window of opportunity to be offered to Africa's young people who overwhelmingly cling to the belief that emigrating to the outer world will offer them a brighter future.

Against this backdrop, it is CODESRIA's mission to pave the way and spearhead proposals for decision-makers such as the heads of state, regional authorities and the bodies of the African Union (AU). Of course, regional integration is part of CODESRIA's research topics, but I would like to focus on the need to adopt a real proactive attitude that will practically address the issue of the 'Construction of the United States of Africa'.

The second issue which has become increasingly important in recent years in the world of the social sciences in general is

religion. Religion, until a decade ago, was hardly a topical question for social sciences. Today, it has become a crucial issue everywhere, owing to concerns about modernity, democratization, secularisation, and women's empowerment. I would take just one example to discuss the considerable success of the bulky book by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, which traces the history of the secularisation in the Western Christian World and which questions the forms of modernity that would not necessarily amount to the replication (or the desire to imitate) of the trajectory of one part of the world. Important meetings were held in the United States and in Europe around this book and the way it allows us to raise issues of our time; in particular the issue of modernity in relation with religions. From a practical and political standpoint, we know that Taylor chaired a committee in charge of advising the Government of Quebec on the content of secularism in a more pluralistic and multicultural Quebec society. Nowadays, such questions have emerged everywhere (in France Baubérot, the sociologist of religion and author of a book on *Les Laïcités* played a similar role with the French Government) in the world as a result of the observation made by social sciences which posit that



the Weberian model establishing an identification between modernization, the 'disenchantment' of the world and secularization, has no universal validity. It is certainly important for Africa to embark on the same questioning. When CODESRIA decided to select religion as a subject of reflection, it merely listed it as an ancillary topic under the main thrust 'African Popular cultures'. This is not enough because it does not really delve into the issue. This issue should be captured as a full theme for instance under

themes like 'African public spaces, religion, secularization and women empowerment...'

Third, I think it is really advisable for CODESRIA to initiate and support a reflection on 'African philosophy and intellectual history.' For over a decade now, African philosophy has experienced significant evolutions and has become, in many American universities in particular, a full component of philosophy curricula. *A Companion to African Philosophy*, published by Blackwell under the supervision of Ghanaian Kwesi Wiredu, is in-

deed a major intellectual breakthrough. It actually shows that today the debate on African philosophy, which two decades ago only amounted to a confrontation between euro-philosophers and ethno-philosophers, gave way to other questions that are worth being addressed as part of the discussions conducted by CODESRIA. Moreover, the research on African intellectual history in general and on non-Europhone intellectuals conducted in recent years under the aegis of CODESRIA would perfectly be consistent with this theme.