A Contribution to the Debate on the Recolonisation of Africa*

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If it is not indecent for an ' outlander' whose only justification for speaking out is the dubious honour of being an ' Old Man' , a title given to me by African friends. I would like to enter into the inter-African debate launched by an article by Professor Mazrui (*International Herald Tribune*, August 4, 1994) and continued in the columns of the *CODESRIA Bulletin* (issues 2 and 4 of 1995). Firstly, it is imperative I comment on a matter of form. It saddened me to note that among the comments made on Ali Mazrui' s article, there were several *ad hominem* attacks directed against a colleague and compatriot who, in his own way, has helped spread a current of African thought. The urgent need for this has already been pointed out by M. Kamto. Characterizations such as ' completely dishonest discourse' and ' retrograde ideas' are not acceptable. No one expects that kind of treatment in the academic milieu. Differences of opinion are no excuse for reflections which are at the very least discourteous and which do nothing to further intellectual debate.

The right and, indeed, the duty to criticize are part of the intellectual' s mission. However, as Konrad Lorenz and Karl Popper pointed out, ' it is important for politeness' sake and it is extremely important for democracy' s sake…that criticism be as objective as possible instead of succumbing to the urge to cut down he who dared think the unthinkable and cast out the demon, the unpure' .

Now my readers must also pardon me for pointing out that most African states are undergoing a profound crisis, whatever the cause [the causes of the crisis have been analyzed among others, by Samir Amin (1995)]. Professor Mazrui is legitimately worried about the failure of policies implemented since the 1960s and one cannot blame him for being naïve enough to suggest a solution which could only be reproved by any African wanting to preserve an independence which was won at great cost. How could one imagine a single instant that a state such as South Africa, which has been on ' a long walk to freedom' (title of Mandela' s autobiography, 1995) since the beginning of this century, might agree, as suggested by Mazrui, to collude in placing its sister States under a protectorate? Moreover, at the end of his original article in the *Herald Tribune*, Mazrui clearly indicated that his idea would provoke opposition from ' proud peoples who have shed so much blood and used all the political will necessary to liberate themselves from the yoke of European powers' . It would only be fair to give Ali Mazrui the benefit of this statement. It would also be fair to admit that the author sees his idea as a ' last resort' . After all, he suggested in this conclusion that ' it would be even better if Africans conquered themselves' .

Therein lies the real problem. Professor Mazrui can be reproached with resuscitating an old idea whose origins are themselves suspect. In 1990, an American journalist, N. Pfaff, broached the subject in a *Herald Tribune* article (April 24), when he spoke of the need for an ' international recolonization of Africa' . A year later, B. Lugon, in a paper on ' The Results of Decolonization' , concluded with the question: Should Africa be recolonized? Quite rightly, he felt that recolonization would be of no help for Africans and suggested they instead practice the old saying. ' The Lord helps those who help themselves' . An African would probably equate that with the saying from Burkina Faso: if you go to the pond and someone scrubs your back, the least you can do is scrub your own belly!

In this contribution, Bangura (1994) addresses the real problem: remaking the state. One may dream about a United States of Africa and integration on a regional and sub-regional scale. That is probably the future of Africa. But one must admit that the road to integration has been long and hard. I have already pointed out the obstacles in the path of

politically – and/or economically integrated assemblies (Gonidec, 1987).

For the moment, reality lies in the irreducible state, which is sovereign although it is not a nation-state.

How can the state be remade? Bangura (1994) proposes ' a radical reform of the nation state is urgent for political stability and economic development' , two objectives which, according to Mazrui, have not been reached due to Africans' inability to ' band together' .A radical reform of the nation state, or rather, a plan for a nation-state, since there is as yet no nation, would be the solution to the crisis. I think the real solution is even more daring. It is essential to break away from the imposed ideology of the nation state.

Like all states, African states are the product of a long history, dating back to precolonial and colonial times, as well as a more recent post-colonial history. Realistically, if Africa is to progress, the state must be made, or remade, using the materials at hand. At the present stage, not all the materials necessary to create a nation corresponding with the state are available. Thus, nation-making can only be carried out under conditions similar to those in Europe, that is, under the auspices of a dominant ethnic group bent on imposing unification. This is hardly an acceptable solution, since it goes against the grain of democracy. Indeed, spokespeople for ethnic minorities cut off from power have just that reproach to make against the post-colonial state and those who control it: they are victims of a dominant ethnic group which benefits from what Bayart (1993-94) calls ' politics of the belly' .

f progress is to be made, this reality must be accepted and African states must be accepted as they are, with all their internal diversity. In that case, African leaders must agree to modify the form of the state in order to adjust to social reality. The national is not a reality. As the Ethiopian constitution wisely states reality is the ' nations, nationalities and peoples' (Constitution 1993, Article 8) of Ethiopia, defined as ' groups of people who share a great deal of common culture or similar customs, who mutually understand each others' languages, believe in a common or closely affiliated identity, and of which the majority live in identifiable and contiguous territory.

These nations, nationalities and people closely resemble ethnic groups, which are wrongly seen as characteristic of Africa alone (Cf. *Herald,* 1971). We must put the misuse of ethnic realities behind us (ethnicism or tribalism as opposed to ethnic group or tribe) and concentrate on ethnic difference as a rich contribution to the diversity of cultures.

Having thus defined the elements that give the state its human foundation, the constituent uses this as a basis for the form of the state. The Ethiopian state is a federation with all that entails in terms of legal institutions that protect, in the name of the rights to difference, the national treasure of cultural diversity. Under this system, federal powers embody the necessary unity of the state, while local powers, recognized by the constitution, are the expression of a diversity which is constitutionally guaranteed. Thanks to a lesson learned from bitter experience (Eritrea) the constituent goes very far indeed in terms of the right to diversity, since the right to secede is recognized under certain circumstances. This concession can calm the passions that spark rebellion in oppressed peoples.

South African has also taken the path of wisdom, although, in terms of sheer mathematics, the ANC could have simply imposed its will. Although it rejected the federal solution, which is not the only way to combine unity and diversity, it has effected a compromise which recognizes a large degree of political autonomy for the provinces, since each province has its own constitution and its own institutions. According to the 1994 South African Constitution (Annex 4-XI), ' diversity of language and culture shall be recognized and protected, and the conditions for their promotion shall be fostered' . Besides autonomy for the provinces, there is local self-governance which includes traditional institutions, including the Zulu monarchy.

These two examples should be considered, along with the plans for a pluralistic state and democratic society developed by Mwayila Tshiyembe and Mayeka Bakasa for Zaire (see also the thesis presented by Tshiyembe at Nancy in 1995).

In any case, wisdom (or realism) means proceeding from the complexity of society and affirming the imperative of pluralism (Kamto, op.cit. p71).

Of course, it is not enough to radically change the form of the state while taking diversity into account and organizing it. Recognition of pluralism of all kinds (cultural, judicial, economic, social, political) within a state whose form combines unity with diversity also implies the need for institutions (both public institutions and those of civil society) that are able to overcome the many contradictions affecting African states. This problem raises another debate, which is no longer on the form of state, but on the form of government.

Today, only those who look back on the authoritarian regimes with nostalgia (some still do) would dream of suggesting that the objectives mentioned both by Professor Mazrui and Bangura (namely political stability and economic development) can only be attained through authoritarian government.

The current trend is to seek democratic solutions, but the problem is what form of democracy? Whatever form is chosen. It seems necessary, according to the logic of a pluralistic society, that democracy itself be pluralistic, whether it is seen as a means, or tool; or as an end in itself, or philosophical value. From this standpoint, democracy cannot be arbitrarily reduced to its judicial-political aspects alone, since these are too easily borrowed from foreign systems. Economic, social and cultural democracy remains to be invented, and will require deep reflection in order to define the respective roles of the state apparatus and the various organizations representing civil society which have recently mushroomed in Africa and which have been the object of countless studies (see especially the Dakar conference, March 15-17, 1993).

Debates on the concept of civil society have occasionally blurred the distinction between ' state' and ' civil society' . But that means ignoring the idea of a totality which implies, as Gramsci demonstrated that a society which has reached the level of a state necessarily includes both a state (in the sense of a state apparatus), and a civil society, which is the social sector voluntarily and spontaneously organized, to a great degree independently from the state. Naturally, the state and civil society cannot be dissociated and must work together for the greater good of society as a whole, civil society, which was absorbed by the state (apparatus) during the times of monocratic and autocratic government, is reawakening and bringing social contradictions to the fore, including pluralism in African societies.

This reawakening of civil society, manifested by a sort of ritual slaying of the state by society in sovereign national conferences, which are dreaded by some

governments, should not mean the state is sacrificed to civil society, or vice-versa. Given the current state of the Democratization Process, democratization reached by African societies, a strong and well-structured civil society has an irreplaceable role to play in consolidating democracy and thwarting attempts of former monocrats to regain their monopoly on power. Conversely, too strong an emphasis on civil society leads to a risk of weakening the state. In Africa, civil society could hold back the development of a strong state if the process of making or remaking the state does not keep up with that of civil society. In a democratic system, a strong state and a strong civil society must coexist in a situation which necessarily includes both tension and conflicts as well as cooperation. Such a system is dangerous and its results are difficult to predict, but that is the price that must be paid to preserve Africa from the recolonization proposed by Professor Mazrui.

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