

African Renaissance
Vol. 8, Nos 3 & 4, 2011
pp 7-20

Whose Values Are Promoted in the African Union's Shared Values' Project?

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Introduction

The African Union has introduced the concept of 'Shared Values' to tackle some of the precarious problems the continent is facing in the areas of peace and security, democracy, good governance, human rights as well as in the development sector. Several organs were constituted within the AU structure to deal with the various areas of the program in order to achieve its goals. Although from the surface the project seems to involve only what the various member nations of the AU may share as values, at another level it shows heavy Western involvement whose agenda the AU and African leaders seem not to emphasize.

From that background, we should not turn a blind eye to the gaps in the ideological tenets of the project and its far-reaching implications for African society in general and beyond the short term narrow interests of a few dictators in the leadership that could be potentially exclusively served through this project as well. Such a concern triggers our "individual consciousness, which is bound to question the logic of communal values," (Ahmed, 1996:35). By doing so, the divergent scholarly thinking examines the possible advantages and disadvantages the 'shared values' project holds for the unsuspecting African people (including the unborn) who have already been fallen prey to enormous debt loads inherited from corrupt leaders. The entanglements inherent in the dilemma require what Ahmed (1995:144) would critically view as "a sober analysis," one that intersects through the undercurrents and crosscurrents of the political conundrum under observation, and embraces dialectical reflection "for critical consciousness," (Ahmed, 1996:65).

As Aristotelian thought has it, "Deliberation is concerned with things that happen in a certain way for the most part, but in which the event is

obscure, and with things in which it is indeterminate," (Pp.969-70). Accordingly, the aim of this essay is to deliberate on the African Union's 'shared values' project. To do so, the first part of the essay will begin with a definitional approach of the term 'values', followed by a section on leadership. It will be the task of the third part to provide an account of 'peace and security' while the fourth part will dwell on the ubiquitous suspicion over certain Western political behaviors which may undermine the goals of the project if not adequately and transparently addressed. The last section will draw the concluding remarks of the essay.

Methodologically this essay utilizes secondary data from existing literature from various sources, including electronically accessed information from the web. It also considers the views of a few informants in different geographical locations with whom we discussed for the purpose of this study.

Whose values, anyway?

Values constitute not only what we share in common but a variety of other important traits that we may or may not share with others. Along this line of interpretation, Berlin (2000) suggests "...that not all the supreme values pursued by mankind now and in the past were necessarily compatible with one another" (P.7). As he explains, "Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is possible only because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them. But our values are ours, and theirs are theirs" (P.9). He provides the separation or incompatibility of these values because, when more closely observed, "Values may easily clash within the breast of a single individual," (P.10). In view of his potent analysis, "These collisions of values are of the essence of what they are and what we are," (P.11). The ideal of Berlin's model of values "...is dictated by the forms of life of the society to which one belongs, a society among other societies, with values held in common" (P. 15).

Kluckhohn (1951:395) extrapolates values as a "conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable, which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action." Giddens (2002): Values— Ideas held by human individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad. Differing values represent key aspects of variations in human culture. What individuals value is strongly influenced by the specific culture in which they happen to live (P.701).

While sharing of values is appreciable, we need not overlook or altogether undermine the divergences remarkably engrained in the cultural

contours of the agents to be brought together aboard the 'shared values' ideology. Available AU as well as Western documents seem to explain the phrase 'shared values' within the premise of *-peace, democracy, governance, human rights* etc, leaving us in a vacuum of the context in which these will be (or have been) formulated, effected and implemented: Western? African? Christian? Muslim? Ethnic? Or what? Though the terms in the framework seem easy to comprehend, they lack a clear definitional reference; at the same time they are loaded with ambiguity in the interpretation of what they may constitute or stand for in terms of individual social culture or values. Given this assumption, the West may benefit from linguistic advantage *over* its counterpart; a point which neither the AU nor the Western or G8 nations have come out in the clear to explain.

When a consensus of a clear interpretation of the codes of reference is absent, there is likelihood the trend may set a devastating trap for unsuspecting Africans to pool their support towards a policy that may in the long run rob them of both sovereignty and natural resources. But at the moment, the African players in the 'shard values' game, the so-called leaders, are "focused only on immediate personal gains than long term continent-wide development," Ali M. Osman, without considering the African peasant's factual view of "A cultural attitude that does not go beyond the values of a given ethnicity" (Oruka, 1998:106). This begs for a clarification of whether we are talking of peace, security, democracy, governance, etc as "...components or elements of the essential parts of the African way of life," as elucidated in Odetola and Ademola (1994:46); or whether the ideology is based according to the doctrine of the developed economies. Whatever the definitions, a project of huge global scope needs strong support from the beneficiaries it claims to serve, while a major part of its success or failure depends on the credibility of the leaders on the ground. The significance of the leadership factor takes us to the next stage of the essay.

Self-serving leadership

Leadership is signified as an area Africa has dwelled at the bottom with a chronic under-performance. Malfeasance, avarice, nepotism, tribalism/ethno-centrism, poor human rights records and lack of institutional and human development have collectively contributed not just to the brain drain in which the continent lost to the rest of the world some of its best brains, but potentially also to the eruptions of violent conflicts in which key human agents to development and needed properties were wasted in reckless wars, "...characteristics that are not in harmony with

accepted norms of ...society," to draw upon Ahmed's (1996:65) literary thought. For these obvious reasons, the leaders' acts of brutality have reduced the trust between the ruler and the ruled, the core relationship in the sociology of meaningful democratic politics. It consequently raised the curtain for suspicion and mistrust between the ruling minority and the ruled majority.

Protection of human rights remains another factor Africa is among the poorest performers, with violations occurring frequently and in multiple forms. Existing reports of violations by African leaders are widespread and known to the African Union and the international community, but the fact that this is a recent pop up in the 'shared values' project itself generates a fresh degree of distrust which begs for a critical observation of the objectives buried underneath the program and beyond the rosy words of the political leaders. The reality at the national/continental level reveals the African countries' non-compliance with the existing international human rights treaties; yet they are embarking on another initiative of constituting and ratifying a new continental policy framework on the same agenda. That aside, the statement of Julia Jolly Joiner, the African Union's Commissioner for Political Affairs pleading for "efforts big or small, financial or moral" entices a reevaluation of the project's ownership in terms of who the real beneficiaries might be: Africa or the West?

The Commissioner's statement, though diplomatically asserted, is a clue of where the objectives of the African leaders are directed to: Western sponsorship to serve Western interest. Though the sponsorship deal stands as a bridge between the Western and African leaders, the ordinary African masses hardly seem to have been approached with sufficient information of what the project entails. In addition, the amount of support the project will receive will most likely be determined by the leaders' credibility in "getting people to believe the message" Kotter (1998:46). For any audience to welcome a message, they need to review "the track record of the person delivering the message, the content of the message itself, the communicator's reputation for integrity and trustworthiness, and the consistency between words and deeds," qualities not attributed to the African leader we know today, and therefore a recipe for the project's failure.

However, the intrinsic risk of the project increases as the African leaders scale up their advocacy to dupe "...progressive and unsuspecting intellectuals"(Ahmed, 1996:102) into the procurement of the project, not sparing civil society groups who, like their political leaders, would deliberately or inadvertently "compromise their political ideologies for the sake of foreign aid," (Oruka, 1998:74) thereby rallying the massive popu-

lation of the continent into what could be a total submission to re-colonization and imperial domination more deplorable than what we think of it today. An African graduate student, Mohamed Yacoub, wonders "Why the leaders would seek popular support for a program whose core values they disregarded and refused to ratify for so many years, unless they have experienced pressure from the Western powers!" In the same vein, Abdelkarim Chami expresses, "It is obvious that our leaders are corrupt, demeaning their people's rights and depriving them from their basic needs."

On the other hand, denying the masses a detailed account of the project will enable the leaders retain the leverage to manipulate the situation; for, as Fromm (1942:20) substantiates, 'If a well informed person comes to discuss with one who has little or no information at all, it is clear that the former will reap the advantage.' Hence, information accessibility and transparency will permit the people to have their own independent visualization of the program and a doorway for self-expression; something akin to the Kantian philosophy where no one compels the other to feel happy in their way. A measure of this kind will contain the paternalistic attitude of our Machiavellian-like African leaders.

Self expression and morality feed from the intuitive emotion and consciousness of the human. But by considering the thought that "morale is closely related to leadership," and that "it is strongly influenced by personality," measured on the rate of "success and failure," (Palmer and Perkins, 2002:77) it seems to us that these remain as critical factors deficient in a majority of the African leadership whose oppressiveness and paternalism is analogous to what Kant would categorize as "the greatest despotism imaginable" as cited in Berlin (P.208). From that point of view, a comment on the Modernghana website accuses, "To date, the performance of most African leaders has been nothing less than shameful." A similar contention is shared by Sudanese intellectual Mubarak Taj El Sir who asserts, "The more the people suffer, the less the leaders care." Indeed it is the prolonged period of despotism and the leaders' lack of consideration for change that often led to the catastrophic situation the continent has experienced since independence, especially over the last two decades or so. The anomalies at the leadership level and other emerging trends, particularly peace and security, make Africa more vulnerable and in an urgent need for stability. But how do we explain peace within the framework of the 'shared values' and what is Africa's take on that?

Peace and stability

A shift has been in order for some time now, particularly after the 9/11 tragedy in the US in 2001. Ever since that incident a lot has changed in the global peace and security landscape. However, as indicated by experts, *peace* is not only complex in nature as its rival *conflict*, but both are described as dynamic and fragile. It creates more anxiety "As the line between peace enforcement and war has become blurred" (Othieno and Samasuwo, 2007:35) and certain scholars like Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1988) have considered a redefinition of what constitutes peace and security in a broader spectrum.

This characteristic nature makes peace and conflict in the African context also issues in need of urgent solution while "...Africa's political, financial and operational constraints" (Othieno and Samasuwo, P. 37) offer the Western powers a gap to access and intervene in the African affairs and subsequently manipulate the situation for their own economic interests. As Othieno and Samasuwo analyze, "More often than not, Western countries are likely to join a mission or intervene when the issue at hand appears to be related to its political culture," (Othieno and Samasuwo, P.36) under the pretext of restoring peace and security among the conflictants. To implement their commitment, a UN Security Council resolution is hastily passed, and a military mission deployed forthwith by a UN mandate, since it is no longer secret that "the West controls the United Nations" (Mazrui, 2006:282).

On the indispensability of peace and stability, Morgenthau (2001:122-123) defends, "The greater the stability of society and the sense of security of its members, the smaller are the chances for collective emotions to seek an outlet in aggressive nationalism, and vice versa." But the tendency for peace and stability bears much weight on the phenomenon of the national morale, "the degree of determination with which a nation supports the foreign policies of its government in peace or war" (Morgenthau, P. 153). Although we coincide with Morgenthau, we somehow emphasize that in our current case, due consideration should be deemed whether the African people in the diverse countries who belong to the divergent ethnic groups and cultures are in moral consensus in support of the 'shared values' ideology, regardless of the so-called leaders' signatures of approval. More importantly, have the people been educated on the *hidden* level of the sharing of these values with Western countries or those belonging to the G8, as demonstrated in several documents some of which are inaccessible to the majority of the African people who do not read or write?

Our argument is supported by the cultural reality of diversity which makes "the same item of information and the same idea mean something different to an American, a Russian, and an Indian" (Morgenthau, P.284) - or an African (in our current concern). According to the discrepancies within, the different minds in Africa and the West may belong to different readings of the term *-peace* and its twin *security*, and the implications related to them. This is to say that certain aims of the West's peace and security agenda, specifically military intervention, democracy, rule of law, and terrorism, bears a remarkable difference from the way an African may conceptualize the attainment of peace, addressing a conflict, or even the interpretation of the term *terrorist* or *terrorism* and who/what would qualify as such within that paradigm. An African does not need to look far for an example; until recently, when the West felt threatened in and outside their countries by organized terror groups, the term *terrorises* (among others) was the preferred epithet used to criminalize and viciously penalize the leaders of the African nationalist movements and freedom fighters. This interpretational dilemma of the codes in context is what basically the so-called African proponents of the 'shared values' ideology should crystallize before dragging the African people into fighting wars that are not their own.

By this radical tone, we do not mean to undermine the indispensability of peace and security in Africa, but the notions, aims, and values are apparently divergent. Unlike the African scene, the Western paradigm of peace and security is activated and intensively participated in transnational and, more often than not, transcontinental operations that are not meant to defend their (West's) national territory or sovereignty, but to secure and safeguard Western interests; which many believe as "an expansion of colonialism and imperialism rather than maintaining a moral command against exploitation, domination, and double-standards," explains Mohamed Eid Suldan. These Western immoralities of past and present, from slavery and colonialism to the current economic and political domination, have made the African very suspicious of the constituents of Western ideology of *peace, security, terrorism, stability, democracy, development* etc, terms attractive on the surface but catastrophic in depth.

Suspicion, mistrust: A reason to worry

The political raw deal and economic imperialism of the West have caused discomfort to the African and attracted global criticism to which the West turns a deaf ear. Instead; they drop large amounts of funds in aid and grants to compromise the ideological equilibrium of African politics. The

ensuing moral contamination related to the money, allows the West to create and nurture certain leaders as puppets, even exempt them from criticism in their acts of violence and dictatorship while others are invaded, sanctioned or accused at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. These inconsistencies and lack of Western fairness have taught many an African to view his world environment with difference but also with sober mind. "This sobriety has developed the African to attend to certain Western-related matters with a high degree of caution and to take reservations in others," stated Kenyan lecturer Dr. Anthony Osambo. And as Richard J. Mainga and his colleagues at Nairobi's *Jua Kali* market believe, "Despite independence, the heavy presence, influence, and dependence on the West means that Africa is not yet free from colonial domination."

The call of the proponents of the 'shared values' project, and their recruitment of members of the civil society organizations on board, seems to us a mere normative social interference posed as a gesture of impression management, whose aims serve the dual purpose of: a) seeking a token of approval to claim a society-wide participation of the project — first by hoodwinking the local civil bodies; and b) using the civil society organizations as a showcase for soliciting funds from the Western partners who are the donors as well as core beneficiaries of the end product. This end product may ultimately include (but not limited to) the promulgation and ratification of treaties and charters that will *bind* the West for a *legitimate* involvement and interference in the domestic issues, a scenario with a potential to lead to what they (West) will later claim and define as a legitimate measure for intervention (meaning *conquest*).

Thus, the image we see through the 'shared values' plan appears to be one in search of recruitment of a large number of unsuspecting Africans to be used as 'the consensus of the majority' when it could actually be a project engineered to mislead the public and serve the objectives of a few covetous political con men with high expertise in soliciting and ambushing funds from the West. As Oruka would argue, such problems are likely to become "more acute when the government is not one that serves the interests of her people" (Oruka, 1991:72). This is what the case of 'the shared values' project seems to be, considering that France already committed to donate Five Million Euros as empowerment funds, and much more expected to be allocated in due course if the leaders succeed to sell the idea to the African people. This type of sponsorship/partnership clearly bankrupts Africa's potential to bargain effectively in the global political domain, hence justifying Oruka's hypothesis that these leaders are not in power to execute the interests of their people but "to please their economic superiors" Oruka (1991:73).

African intellectual Abdulkadir Abu comments, "No African initiative can take off from the ground if indeed the AU membership seeks external sponsors to foot its operational bills." As Abu contends, "It is also unthinkable that an institution of over 50 independent nations seeks funds from outside its members to address crucial matters related to their security." As Muhuddin M. Kaalmooy thoughtfully put it, "Unless African nations refrain from the disgusting habit of seeking aid here and there from the West and elsewhere, they will not be deemed as a reputable organ of the world community, but as survivors on foreign handouts."

Upon the announcement of the establishment of a US-backed African army after the 9/11 incident, Muslims in Kenya have cast doubt and suspicion over the initiative, and rejected it immediately, because of the belief and practical experience that "The West has been trigger-happy in responding to Muslim political challenges," (Mazrui, P. 14). Many innocent people were arrested and tortured for mistaken identity, mainly due to their Muslim names and Islamic faith. Yet Africa has been proxy to the viciousness related to the calamities of terrorist attacks targeting the US. In one such comment Mazrui highlights, "Violence between Americans and Middle Easterners had been spilling over into Africa for decades," (P. 202) which Kenya, among other nations, has suffered very devastating consequences of an attack its people were not the prime targets.

From historical perspective, realities teach us that it was only by God's grace that African "Countries like Kenya were spared the fate of an African Israel on their soil," though in later times some of them "have not been spared the global repercussions of the unholy alliance between the legacy of Lord Balfour and the aftermath of Adolf Hitler" (Mazrui, 2006:203). By this piece of writing, Mazrui refreshes our memory regarding the British government's proposal to settle "a people without land (the Jews) some land without people." As the distinguished scholar further elaborates, such ideas were brewed out of the rationale that "The British authorities regarded East Africa at the time as 'land without people'—partly because they did not recognize the 'natives' as real people" (Pp. 195-196). Despite the destructive incidents and Western prejudices toward the African people, a 'shared values' project is underway without a pre-evaluation of the undesirable consequences Africa may suffer at the hands of America and its allies in one situation, or in those of its enemies on the other.

Observing the American policy from the perspective of market economy (exploitation), geopolitical gerrymandering (double standards), and the globalization of the world political economy (interest for resources), as well as the UN's selective policy that favors pro-Western leaders;

Africa should not be oblivious to speculate the existence of invisible projects underway as part of the West's strategic future plans for the world, which have not yet come up to the surface. And the 'shared values' project could be a sub-sector of that global mega plan fulfilling the Western doctrine of the *just war theory*, but doing so in the undercover of terms like *human rights, democracy, -peace and security, terrorism, good governance, gender equality, inclusiveness*, a selected body of corpus used to obscure that reality.

The 'shared values' institution might as well be at the far background of a military plan by which "rapid deployments could easily be facilitated outside the auspices of the UN in situations where powerful countries (such as the US) can take the lead in providing funding, equipment and training to 'lead states' or regional powers," which are recruited to implement Western goals on the African continent (Othieno and Samasuwo, P.29). But observers and analysts suggest that the stretch of the project is much further than the US reveals, since it may include also the setting up in the Horn of Africa of "a base from which to launch attacks against terror groups in the area and the rest of the Middle East." Paraphrasing Ruiters, able analysts (Othieno and Samasuwo, P. 32) write how such security agendas may become "both a source and a magnet for Africa's destabilization." As the two learned scholars forewarn, "...the AFRICOM project will ensure that Africans unwittingly fight the US's unilateral 'war on terror.'" These are some of the facts of the suspicions precipitating in the African sociopolitical atmosphere that need not be taken either lightly or indifferently.

Conclusion

The chapter has discussed some of the issues related to the AU's Shared Values program, highlighting a few of the possibilities that may cause misunderstandings of the said values at later date. It also noted the poor quality of leadership in the African context, the political and economic biases of the West, the suspicion prevailing over the trustworthiness of Western political ideology, and the African people's desire for a West beyond bias and double-standards.

With all these views in mind, it is vital for the African leaders and their appointed experts to clear the dust and establish a guiding framework for the exclusive meanings of the codes of reference and the contexts in which they will be implemented in order to save what is left of the continent. When the borderlines of what constitutes values in African terms and what values could be shared with the West and other related terms of reference have been adequately explained, a roadmap could then

be charted based on the common grounds agreed. Only upon achieving those clarifications and a common continent-wide agreement by the African people should the project proceed — but not by following the so-called leaders' 'eat-and-rule' agenda that defies African ethics. That said, bare terms of references or theoretically well-designed projects alone may not bear much significance either, if the leadership morale is decayed with corrupted values. Africa should evaluate appropriately the doctrine of Western values and morale based on facts. One of the best ways would be for Africa to cease or minimize the mean habits of dependence on Western aid. Obviously, that takes the moral determination of ardent leadership that puts social development and well-being as priority rather than special individual interests and indulgence in dictatorship, oppression and personal accumulation of public resources.

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