

Making Hay While the Sun Shines

S'ha acabat el fet que, durant el període de la guerra freda, el moviment dels països no alineats fos la veu del Sud. El Nord va crear un nou ordre econòmic mundial que ha tingut com a impacte global una marcada recessió. Un a un, els estats nacionals van començar a caure en un sistema econòmic globalitzat controlat pels Estats Units. De fet, els més rics del Nord, a les seves reunions de Davos, Suïssa i el Fòrum Econòmic i Social es dediquen, mentre sigui possible, a treure profit d'una situació que els hi és favorable sense fer res per solucionar els problemes: «segar el fenc mentre brilla el sol». Malgrat tot, quan la globalització intenta humiliar una cultura indígena, poden haver-hi casos com el de Chiapas a Mèxic amb el despertar de la dignitat dels drets culturals indígenes.

Se ha acabado el hecho de que, durante el período de la guerra fría, el movimiento de los países no alineados fuese la voz del Sur. El Norte creó un nuevo orden económico mundial que ha tenido como impacto global una marcada recesión. Uno a uno, los estados nacionales comenzaron a caer en un sistema económico globalizado controlado por Estados Unidos. De hecho, los más ricos del Norte, en sus reuniones de Davos, Suiza y el Forum Económico y Social se dedican, mientras sea posible, a sacar provecho de una situación que les favorece sin hacer nada para solucionar los problemas: «segar el heno mientras brilla el sol». A pesar de todo, cuando la globalización intenta humillar una cultura indígena, pueden haber casos como el de Chiapas en Méjico con el despertar de la dignidad de los derechos culturales indígenas.

It is no longer the case, as it was during the Cold War period, that the movement of the non-aligned countries is the voice of the South. The North created a new world economic order whose global impact has been a marked recession. One by one, the national states began to fall into a globalised economic system controlled by the USA. In fact, the richest countries of the North, at their meetings in Davos, Switzerland and the Economic and Social Forum dedicate their efforts, while it is still possible, to benefiting from a situation which is favourable to them without doing anything to solve the problems: to 'making hay while the sun shines.' Nevertheless, when globalisation attempts to humiliate an indigenous culture, there can occur cases such as that of Chiapas in Mexico, with the awakening of the natives' cultural rights.

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As we enter this millennium, major issues continue to confront Africa. The culture of peace remains a sloganeering symbol as we witness slaying of Presidents, sham democracy, while a conference on racism is to take place in South Africa soon. While globalisation is the buzz word, through which information technology ravages the continent people still look for the might of the South, and are aware of the need to build the bargaining power that they had once.

Thus here in Africa, concept of Pan Africanism refuses to die a natural death while Organisation of African Unity (OAU) continues to impact minor kicks here and there.

In the meantime regional leaders seek out each other to revamp the lost unity as in the case of East African Community (EAC) and the lake regions peace initiative tries and struggles to come together to resolve the crises of the Congo.

In the cold war era the South had an identity, stature and dignity. The non-aligned movement had a voice and operated as a bloc of the South. Organisations like the OAU, Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Southern African Developing Countries Confederation (SADCC), were but some of the economic and political trade unions in Africa. There were also a few in Asia which applied trade pressures for equity in the global economic power arena. In the mid 1970's the South reached its peak powered up by the actions of OPEC.

The non-aligned movement presented an identity to its members enabling them to stand together as the South. This identity created a force which made the North sit up and take notice. It is during this era we begin to see the politics of language being used to begin to thwart out confrontation. We begin to hear terms like the *new economic world order* being coined and used. In 1974, Canada and OPEC member Venezuela convened in Paris to chart out this so-called new economic North-South order. What it was, was the realisation of the industrialised countries that they were being confronted with the need to take developing -countries' agenda seriously across a range of issues.

These issues included the international monetary reforms, organisation of commodity markets, voting power in the multilateral financial institutions, the

assurance of an adequate transfer of real resources to the developing world etc. In other words, equitable trade agreements and a just system of distribution of resources. As a result this era begins to see the establishment of reform bodies at IMF headquarters in Washington.

In the development world, that is the world of donor agencies, we begin to hear the language of partnership, co-existence empowerment as a psychological tool to vent out pent up emotions of the people of the South who were feeling exploited. The 1979 Iranian Revolution again confronted the economic and political power of the developing world which in turn now turned to erode the power of the South.

The beginning of '80s saw two factors at play. Many developing countries had borrowed heavily from the international private banks to finance their balance of payment deficits. These debts had accumulated. The U.S. Federal Reserve raised its interest rates to fight inflation domestically.

This had a marked recession impact globally. In 1982, the Mexican default led to a debt crisis. Governments of the South quered up at Paris Club to seek debt relief. This debt crisis took hold and forced the South to open up their doors to direct market economy. Liberalization, was equated to democratisation. Multi-partism became the buzzword pushed down the throats of the developing world. The nation states had an autonomy and had acted effectively as a body in the wake of post independence era. It was time to thwart their powers. The North lost no time. One by one nation states began to fall prey to a globalized economic system controlled by U.S.

By the end of the '90s most of these nations with a strong political voice including Tanzania subscribe into a ghetto, designated as heavily indebted poor countries of HIPC's. The cold winds from North had also brought with it a "bubble" economy in the name of globalisation. A demand for free trade with open borders of the South became the norm while the North unified and continued to control their borders in the form of European Union and stringent policies against the immigrants from the South.

With the fall of Berlin wall in 1989 the cold war tension ended. With it the strategic bargaining power of the developing nations fizzled out to be replaced by a single superpower. Some tactics of co-option were placed in order to disorient the South.

A major realignment like submitting Mexico into the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) happened. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris admitted South Korea and Mexico as a member on condition that it gives up its membership to G77. There was an unmistakable attempt to diffuse the South as a united force.

Globalisation became then presently is the buzzword. The doors of the nation states of the South continue to be pressurised to open widely to global market forces while the North continue to form solid blocs. Today we grapple as a people to deal with *yuppie* Coca-Cola culture as our youths get more and more drawn to it. We wonder if this is freedom? Did we really throw out colonialism, we ask ourselves? What went wrong? Did our nation state take power at face value and claimed legitimacy? Was the nation state in Africa born within the paradigm of rights of the western nation and now finds itself caught up within this nozzle.

At independence, the state had assumed the responsibility to deliver justice. These rights demanded freedom of individuals against the state as procedural. These rights do come in direct conflict with the cultural rights embedded within a community. The State itself is unable to handle demands of these rights from its citizens be it community based or individual based. Recent history in Africa shows how people have heralded freedom of expression and trade liberalisation and equated it with concept of democracy. The process of globalisation has continuously put the ruling elite under pressure of depriving them of state resources. On the other hand, it has effectively used and are using economic aid as a tool of keeping the nation states in Africa in line.

State socialism has seen its hey days. Nations states in Africa find themselves more and more alienated from its people. The nation state seems to have its ability to fulfil the aspiration for development on their own terms curtailed. It continues to use and deliver language of justice from above and impose it often times undemocratically. It also increasingly turns to use of armed force to control forces of change. Those directly affected from the process and the nature of justice feel excluded. As a result people take situation into their own hands. Either it culminates into mob violence or into civil wars.

In Africa then, the history of rights has heavily depended on the artificial legal formations embedded in wordings and interpretations of the law. While these and that proceedings are going on land continues to be looted and while democracy is equated to voting, people continue to go without education and health facilities. Where is democracy when one can not feed ones family on wages. Where is democracy one may ask when one is forced to produce what one does not consume and consume what one does not produce – this too in the name of global economy.

Globally, the history of black Africa has played a major role in making and shaping ideologies. In the earlier empire-building epoch, the notion of race was comfortably adopted and practised. That notion of race legitimised slavery. It was about control of a peoples and their exploitation which given the right

direction are worth the effort for they produce profit. Race was the ideology of the market economy then.

That era passed and with the struggle of civil rights movements and anti-apartheid movement, it cannot be used in at least formal documents. As we came to grips with the way power is distributed globally, we began to be aware of the growing centrality of culture as an explanatory tool. Differences in people were attributed in cultural forms. Race has replaced culture as an ideology. People are different because they are from various cultural backgrounds. Yet when we examine the place and dignity of a local culture, it is least recognised or protected constitutionally by nation states.

The inherited state machinery as it exists now is incapable of protecting this rich heritage without fundamentally changing its constitution. The South African Constitution, the newest in Africa has paid some attention to this fact in terms of recognising the African customary law of the family and personal law in its constitution and in that sense gave culture a space and position formally at national level. Of course the difficulties arise when these customary laws comes in direct conflict with the Bill of Rights e.g. on the issue of polygamy, lobolo-brideprice to name a few, which are classified form of kinship and social parenthood.

The nation states in Africa have inherited a western cultural assertion of rights, which can only take assertions of rights of the people at face value and thus its failure to deliver to its own citizens. In many cases, in present day Africa, it takes a political action to create the legal space for positive social change. The political struggle presently waged in Tanzania based on constitutional reform is a case in point.

Many global social movements encompass the culture of black people as a symbol of resistance and empowerment. When one looks at the role jazz has played, to the carnival culture to reggae music to art forms, when renowned artist like Picasso uses African mask to make his statements. Presently there are the wiggies, some rich white kids who use black rap culture to rebel against their parents in the west. There is a recurrent thread here. Black cultural forms are being used as symbols of resistance. But the daunting reality is, it has yet to uplift the black people themselves.

As a people in Africa, we have yet to root our own development paths within the rich cultural heritage we have. As long as we do not know our potential and recognise our strengths rooted in our history, we shall remain shuttled like a ping-pong ball between world economic global forces. It is like the plight of a woman. With all the layers and layers of oppressive forces on top of her she remains confused and abused whether mentally or physically.

She is incapable of coming to her own as she is preoccupied with keeping the children from starving. But one day that slap awakens her to her own dignity and her right as a person. She stops crying and awakens to the larger issue. With this comprehension, there is no holding her back. Violation of that dignity, the slap, eventually culminates into a revolt.

Could it be that this revolt rooted in its own identity of a people gives rise to a bigger force? Could it be that once awakened, Africa will not only come to its own but the South of the North will also arise to its own the way the civil rights movement did? Until then globalisation can continue to enjoy the image of a Masai in its advertisements, with a Nokia mobile phone to his ears. This image may be sexy to a global *yuppie* audience, but we are aware that sex is a potent force. If unprotected, it can devour the very existence of life, and in this sense it is short-lived! Thus, when globalisation tries to debase an indigenous culture, the awakening to cultural rights does begin, and an existence of peoples in its full dignity arises as in the case of Chiapas of Mexico.

In the meantime, the North, with its globalisation flag, and its exclusion policy heavily guarded through its arm forces of the kind we saw in Devos, Switzerland at the Economic and Social Forum, can continue to make hay while the sun shines!