Book Reviews


From this book, readers will learn a great deal about University of Oxford-educated Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (popularly called Taju, for short, by friends and colleagues) as a person, a public intellectual, and a convinced activist as well as his positions about change and progress, coupled with his thoughts about Africa and her diverse peoples and political leaders within the imperatives of the global system. However, the 253-page book is neither Tajudeen’s biography, nor is it his autobiography, a self-contained narrative or a self-described manual. Rather, this very useful publication is an anthology with topics and topical themes that, holistically, represent Tajudeen’s political worldview through a very sharp Pan-African lens.

In some serious book reviews and even in some review essays, it is often expected that an author’s methodological and theoretical perspectives, his/her unit of analysis, the quality of his/her hypothesis and consistency or inconsistency of his/her arguments and views, and so forth, are very often scrutinized. Yet, since the contents of this book are not distinctively a disciplinary classical social science book – and the author is not around to revise it for future editions – certain required nuances can be relaxed. Instead, it is very useful to underscore that all the above-listed dimensions are synthesized in a coherent manner. This book, indeed, is a compilation of Tajudeen’s essays made available by Ama Biney and Adebayo Olukoshi, who have also provided an introduction, with the preface written by Salim Ahmed Salim, and a foreword “on restoring the centrality of the African peoples in the struggles for freedom” provided by Horace G. Campbell. In sum, the publication is a critical reflection about where Africa is localized in the world system, how to understand her dynamics and how to change the current situation. Despite sharp attacks on poverty, human rights problems, gender inequality, dehumanization of Africa, etc., Tajudeen did not project any Afro-pessimism that is strongly associated with some African and Western scholars.

On the onset, it is also important to point out unambiguously that this is not a book about African metaphysics or any particular disciplinary-based science. It is more about an effort toward an understanding of the complex reality of contemporary Africa as it is, rather than an interpretation of the reality in a political vacuum. The essays are organized into 10 topical parts, namely: (1) Taking a stand for gender equality and justice; (2) Speaking truth to power; (3) Africa must unite – now; (4) Transforming cultural thought and...
values; (5) the African Diaspora and Africa; (6) Building democratic institutions; (7) Imperialism at work; (8) Africa and the World; (9) Fighting for Millennium Development Goals; and (10) For an Africa of free, equal and dignified citizens. These various parts were neither hierarchically arranged nor ranked through any chronology. Perhaps, the quality of the logical relationship between them was taken into account in the arrangement. Thus, “taking a stand for gender equality and justice” becomes the primary as well as central bridge in relationship with other topics.

Tajudeen’s work, as published, does not have any separate sections on methodology, analysis and conclusion. However, these items are incorporated into the political pragmatism of Tajudeen’s monistic thoughts, including the clear-cut expression that Africa is not an abstraction. Perusing the book, one can agree unequivocally that such issues as dictatorships, poverty, wars, violence against women, corruption, terrorism, etc., are a real part of Africa’s dilemmas and ultimate degradation. Every item is focused on a problem, followed by an analysis or a description, and ends with policy or political recommendations. Without equivocation, Tajudeen claims the authorship by emphasizing the “I.”

These weekly postcards were written between 2003 and 2009 as sharp responses to specific issues that occurred in an African country or any sub-region of Africa or in the African Diaspora, or within the world system, which would have an impact on Africa. They were not written from any determining dominant intellectualistic position. As he said himself: “One of the hazards of being a self-opinionated columnist is that you get all kinds of unsolicited answers, requests, and invitations. Not all of them will be complimentary or flattering. Some may expect you to have answers for all kinds of issues and scenarios that you may not have even thought about or that are unlikely to be your cup of tea” (p. 117).

The compilation was meticulously done to preserve Tajudeen’s distinctive voice and language (p. xx). As Biney and Olukoshi, inter alia, stated: “These essays collectively comprise a Pan-African legacy of Taju’s political, social and cultural thought” (p. xx). “He had a superb intellectual ability – some might even say gift – to express complex ideas and issues in an engaging manner, simultaneously erasing ideological cobwebs and instilling laughter and hope in his audience. Taju’s tomahawk tongue pierced reality” (p. xx).

Who was Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (or by his ‘African’ names) as he said: “Abayomi, Amao” (p. 118) – the names that most people did not know about him? And what approaches and strategies did he use to advance his ideas? Among other laudable details, Biney and Olukoshi stated: “He was a discerning observer of social, political, economic and cultural developments in the global and pan-African world. This is because, without ever consciously defining himself as such, he was a public intellectual who was constantly reflecting, breathing, living, dreaming of how to solve the problems of African continent, and contemplating Africa’s engagement with the world via the so-called benign face of globalization, which he considered to be recolonization in disguise” (p. xix). Professor Campbell, in his very useful foreword, stated that Tajudeen “was operating as a writer and a diplomat for Pan-Africanism,” (p. xv). Subsequently, Campbell added: “Tajudeen worked for the United Nations as the African director in the Millennium Development Goals Campaign. But he did not allow his service as an international diplomat to silence him in relation to the exploitation and impoverishment of the poor. He used his position as another platform to be an advocate for the oppressed” (p. xviii). Former Ambassador Salim Ahmed Salim described his approach as follows: “Tajudeen tackled issues head-on, had no sacred cows, and could be a fierce critic, even of his closest friends and comrades”