

Conclusion

Professor Mabogunje exhibits a strong concern for the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged.

Professor Mabogunje's last major work, *State Of The Earth: Contemporary Geographic Perspectives*,¹ a collection of essays by top geographers which he edited, provides a comprehensive overview of the geography discipline. Geography can be defined in different ways, but in essence it is concerned with the description and explanation of the spatial patterns of phenomena on the earth's surface. The phenomena are both physical and human-created. They range from landforms and climate—to diseases, human settlements, population, agriculture, and industry—to poverty, crime, public services, elections, globalization, and international aid.

Since its inception, geography has undergone changes in philosophy, methodology and subject matter. As Johnston (1993, p. vii) has it, "change in the external world is one of the major stimuli to change in the discipline—on the theoretical apparatus on which it draws, in the research methodologies its practitioners employ, in the content of its educational curricula, and in its contributions to influencing change." The quest for social relevance was also an important stimulus for change. Among other things, *State of the Earth* reflects the shift from modernist to post-modernist approaches in Professor Mabogunje's work. The post-modernist approach is evident in his interest in community and situating discourses. His earlier works are characteristic of modernist stances and the use of grand theories. As a comprehensive account of contemporary geography, *State of the Earth* epitomizes the paradigm shifts in the discipline.

State Of The Earth is part of the UNESCO/Blackwell Series on Contemporary Social Sciences, "an attempt to provide readers with a general picture of the present state of the geographical discipline" (p. 1). The picture presented is far from general. Indeed, it is a comprehensive view of the subject matter. As stated in the intro-



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Professor Akin Mabogunje, center, and some members of the PAMP Committee

duction, “the thrust of the volume is to focus on specific topics and issues that constitute areas of current geographical research interest and address some of the fundamental challenges facing the human race at the end of the twentieth century” (pp. 1–2).

The book begins with a discussion of the fundamentals—how geography organizes knowledge about the world and the changing theoretical perspectives used in explaining spatial patterns. These perspectives range from the environmental determinism of the late 19th century, to the so-called theoretical revolution in geography, to the present day post-modernist perspectives, which reaffirm real world complexity and reject grand theories. All the same, some of the grand theories in geog-

raphy are discussed. These include location theories that borrow substantially from spatial economics and include the agricultural and industrial location theories. Other theories include spatial diffusion, spatial interaction, and urban and regional development.

The quantitative and theoretical revolution represented a major departure from the previous approaches in geography. Among other things, the revolution facilitated the formulation and testing of hypotheses and the construction of models. Subsequent developments, including computers and global information systems, improved the analytical skills of geographers. Society-nature relationships are also discussed in the book, particularly “the role that technological creativity and social organization have played in equipping human beings with the capacity to completely change the face of the earth” (pp. 4–5). Climate change is discussed as an example of the changes caused by human action. Also covered are responses to environmental hazards and natural disasters.

The book examines the societal processes and their implications for spatial structures, spatial organization, globalization, and the role of transnational corporations and world cities in spatial organization. Transnational corporations are significant not only because of the size of their revenues (larger than the GNP of many states), but also because of the multi-locational

nature of their activities around the globe. They relocate their operations at will in search of more favourable conditions. World cities facilitate the flows of capital and information that underpin this locational behaviour. This capacity to relocate undermines the ability of national governments to implement economic policies. It is, therefore, argued that globalization, along with the activities of transnational corporations, is eroding the sovereignty of states. As he observes, “this volume on the state of the art in geography depicts a subject in considerable ferment. The complexity of the reality it is attempting to understand is being matched by the growing sophistication of its own philosophical, theoretical and analytical capabilities” (p. 9).

EPILOGUE

Professor Mabogunje’s work reflects the plurality of perspectives that characterize human geography. His specializations cover the entire spectrum, from the ecological or regional approach, to the spatial analysis approach, to the political economy and post-modernist perspectives. Although he began as a student of cities, this initial interest led him to focus on related urban and regional development issues. His writings stress that cities should stimulate regional and rural development by supporting linkages with rural and regional economies. In

the past, industrialization strategies have not emphasized such linkages.

He exhibits a strong concern for human welfare, especially the welfare of the poor and other disadvantaged groups. Access to land, housing, social services, mortgage finance, micro-credit, and other resources are topics that feature repeatedly in his works. For example, he has long been an apostle of mortgage finance as an avenue to mass housing and home ownership. Similarly, he has been an advocate of micro-finance institutions as a means of ensuring that poor people have access to credit. His works have had a significant influence on Nigerian policy. He was instrumental in the establishment of community banks and successfully promoted incorporation of the spatial dimension in development planning in the country. He also played a major role in the review of Nigeria’s urban and housing policies and the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

He recognizes the connection between poverty and environmental degradation, especially in cities. Equally important is his concern for good governance systems that are participatory, transparent, accountable, and open to all stakeholders. He argues in support of decentralization and devolution to empower local communities and neighbourhoods. Most decentralization efforts, he believes, have been

limited to government activities, not the devolution of power.

He asserts that poor management is the most pressing problem for cities in Nigeria and elsewhere, pointing to the weakness of institutions and administrative machinery, inadequacy of institutional frameworks, and lack of administrative and revenue-raising capacity. Capacity building is needed to improve management skills as well as ability to raise revenues. In particular, he promotes the capital market as a source of local government revenue. To take advantage of the capital market, local governments need good credit ratings, which in turn promote good governance.

A related issue is the strengthening and use of community institutions, their recognition by governments, and their radicalization. Many developing countries are noted for their local institutions, important resources that should be utilized more effectively. In his view, it is more effective to rely on local institutions than to bring in outside and unfamiliar organizations. Taken together, all these measures will promote urban and regional development while recognizing the role of civil society in the process. Professor Mabogunje is truly a scholar-practitioner whose policy prescriptions and development initiatives are strengthened by his scholarship.

His works also reveal his pro-market thinking. This is clearly evident in his arguments for the commodification of land. However, this pro-market stance appears to conflict with his concerns for the welfare of the poor. Commodification means that access would be a function of ability to pay and this would most certainly disadvantage the poor. This is an example of the contradiction between his Marxian analysis and some of his policy prescriptions as identified by Slater (1989).

Ali Kazancigil's observation in the forward to *State of the Earth* captures the essence of Professor Mabogunje's work. He notes that "the key person to the successful completion of this volume is Professor Akin L. Mabogunje, as its intellectual leader and author. An internationally respected geographer, he has an excellent record of scholarship, many publications and an extensive international experience. *He is open to all significant trends, theories and schools of thought in the discipline*" (emphasis added). The selection of his works discussed in this publication no doubt confirms the plurality of perspectives to which Kazancigil alluded.

ENDNOTE

1. *State of the Earth: Contemporary Geographic Perspectives*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (1997).

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