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Exploring Thought Leadership, Thought Liberation and Critical Consciousness for Africa's Development

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Abstract

It is argued that any discussion of Africa's social and economic development has to take into account the three critical issues that remain pressing constraints for the further advancement of well-being in Africa: thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness. These three 'ingredients' should anchor aspects of the socio-economic development model. As I have discussed elsewhere, the twenty-first century will most likely be remembered as the Asian century fundamentally, and secondarily as a South American century. Africa will most likely miss the twenty-first century as its own and should be putting in place what is needed to ensure that Africa indeed captures the twenty-second century.

It is in this context that this article argues that thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness should ensure that Africa robustly addresses whatever constraints that limit Africa's progress. The three 'instruments' – *the trio* – should be pursued concurrently, for thought leadership without critical consciousness is useless. Thought leadership without a liberated mind is futile. Higher levels of consciousness, based on comprehensive understanding of phenomena, make for a better thought leader. It is also argued that African thought leadership must be able to produce not only a critical but also a conscious African citizenry that is grounded in pan-Africanist philosophies and driven to implement the African renaissance agenda. To do this and to successfully pursue other pertinent issues, Africa should build on its glorious past. The article also demonstrates the importance of knowledge production, its dissemination, organization and the implementation of revolutionary praxis.

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Résumé

Il a été soutenu que tous les débats sur le développement social et économique de l'Afrique doivent prendre en compte les trois questions essentielles qui restent les contraintes urgentes pour améliorer le bien-être en Afrique : le leadership éclairé, la libération de la pensée et la conscience critique. Le modèle de développement socio-économique devrait s'ancrer dans ces trois « ingrédients ». Comme je l'ai souligné ailleurs, on se souviendra très probablement du XXI^e siècle comme du siècle de l'Asie d'abord, et ensuite comme celui de l'Amérique du Sud. L'Afrique manquera très probablement d'en faire son propre siècle alors qu'elle devrait mettre en place tout le mécanisme nécessaire afin de saisir le vingt-deuxième siècle.

Dans ce contexte, le présent article soutient que le leadership éclairé, la libération de la pensée et la conscience critique devraient permettre à l'Afrique de faire face de façon vigoureuse à toute contrainte limitant son progrès. La mise en œuvre de ces trois « instruments », le trio, devrait se faire en même temps, car le leadership éclairé sans conscience critique est inutile. De plus, le leadership éclairé sans un esprit libéré est futile. Une meilleure prise de conscience, fondée sur la compréhension globale des phénomènes, permet d'avoir des leaders plus éclairés. Il a également été soutenu que le leadership éclairé en Afrique doit pouvoir produire une citoyenneté africaine non seulement critique mais aussi consciente, ancrée dans les philosophies panafricanistes et orientée vers la mise en œuvre de l'agenda de la renaissance africaine. Pour ce faire et traiter avec succès d'autres questions pertinentes, l'Afrique devrait tirer parti de son passé glorieux. L'article montre également l'importance de la production et la diffusion de connaissances, l'organisation et la mise en œuvre de la praxis révolutionnaire.

Introduction

The paper contends that the much vaunted socio-economic transformation of certain African states will not be able to monumentally move the continent forward. Essentially, the socio-economic development that the African continent needs should be informed by *thought leadership, thought liberation, and critical consciousness*. The three 'instruments' – the trio – should be pursued jointly, for thought leadership without critical consciousness is not helpful.

The central importance of thought leadership to Africa's renewal and development is arguably compelling, especially in view of the low and peripheral position that the African continent occupies in the global political, social and economic order. The dominance of foreign thought in the conceptualization and implementation of developmental and other policies, the inevitable abysmal failure of such thoughts to bring about

the much needed transformation in Africa and the world at large, the entrapment of African leadership and citizenry by said foreign thoughts make thought liberation an inescapable overdue imperative. The low levels of (critical) consciousness ensure, sadly, that Africa and Africans remain in chains, hence the case for higher levels of critical consciousness.

As argued elsewhere, thought leadership connotes a leadership orientation underpinned by unconventional ideology that is historically nuanced, culturally sensitive and contextually grounded. Thought leadership – distant from and more critical than other forms of leadership – has to be about ‘leadership that is based on progressive ideologies, beliefs, orientations with significant pragmatic and impact appeal’ (Gumede 2015: 9). To be sure, thought leadership is different and encompasses intellectualism. Ali Mazrui (2005: 56) defined an intellectual as ‘a person who has the capacity to be fascinated by ideas and has acquired the skill to handle many of them effectively’. There are, of course, other interpretations of the role of thinkers. For instance, Souleymane Diagne (2008) writes that Ahmed Baba, one of the early greatest African thinkers, made a point that ‘the ink of the scholar is more precious than the blood of the martyr’.

Thought liberation, on the other hand, and as I have argued elsewhere, is a complementary requirement for thought leaders who are encumbered with the responsibilities of bringing about transformative changes in their environments. Thought liberation, unlike ‘liberation thought’, is a call for the rediscovery of a *self* as an able and capable being that can produce progressive thought, actions and achievements. For critical consciousness, I draw on what the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire termed *conscientização* – referring to ‘learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (1970: 35). Thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness should assist also in ensuring that Africa pursues its own development path which is ideal for obtaining conditions and given the history of the continent, and in order to avoid dominant powers interfering with Africa’s development processes – Thandika Mkandawire (2011: 6) makes the point that as and when Africa pursues development, the dominant powers disrupt the process of development in Africa, and in the world, at worst by ‘bombing countries back to the stone age’.

Conceptual Reflections

To start with, the debate about the definition or the idea of what came to be known as ‘Africa’ has been going on for decades. Some have argued that the name ‘Africa’ comes from ‘Afrui-ka’, an Egyptian language referring to

birthplace, hence some use Afrika (instead of Africa). Valentine Mudimbe, for instance, made the point that ‘the very name of the continent is itself a major problem because the Greeks had named the continent as Libya’ (1994). There are many also who have viewed the African continent essentially in terms of ‘geographical expression’. Simphiwe Sesanti details this conundrum and takes a position that embraces ‘the term “Africa” as an African creation, not an imposed one’ (2015: 355) given the history of what we now know as ‘Africa’. I associate myself with Sesanti’s position. With regards to Africans, I have in mind those of African descent whose generations have endured the various unpleasant experiences of slave trade, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism – and coloniality¹ of late – which have combined to condition the minds of Africans to feel inferior and seemingly incapable of creative endeavours.

As Karl Polanyi (1944) argued, experiences of slavery dehumanize and disempower the victims, even to succeeding generations. Frantz Fanon has more to say about this² – that colonialism did not only distort African history but it truncated and destroyed it. The various works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), among other thinkers, address this issue.³ The naivety and/or stupidity of the colonialists, if not their ignorance and arrogance, allowed them to believe that Africa had no history and/or were sub-human (Davidson 1992) Walter Rodney (1972), on the other hand, explained how Africa was systematically underdeveloped through colonialism and imperialism. As Molefi Kete Asante (2007), among others, has argued, the totality of the historical experience of the African continent and peoples of African descent should be taken into account when dealing with the challenges and solutions pertaining to the further renewal of the African continent and for the advancement of the well-being of Africans wherever they are.

Raising critical consciousness among Africans involves a deliberate effort to deconstruct and reconstruct their sense of being – away from political apathy, collusion with the domestic and transnational elites in perpetuating the current unequal and unjust disorder, satisfaction with mediocrity, gullibility to vague political promises and leaders fanning the ember of nationalism, ethnicity and xenophobia, dependency on the West, or the East (lately), for development assistance, uncritical acceptance of exogenously scripted development strategies and general acquiescence-cum-susceptibility to neo-imperial designs. It is in this context – and also because imperialism remains unabated – that various scholars have argued that experiences of slave trade, colonialism and contemporary patterns of relations of Africa with the West have been informed by the notion that the continent is a

dark continent in need of civilisation, enlightenment and assistance (Mpofu 2013). In addition, Ndlovu-Gatshehi (2013: 338) argues that 'the idea of race was deployed to justify such inimical processes as slave trade, mercantilism, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid as well as authoritarian and brutal colonial governance systems and styles'. It is in this context that thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness are critical for the further renewal of the African continent.

The dominant approach has been the neoliberal (economic) doctrine in which socio-economic development is defined by the West and in Western terms. By following this paradigm, Africa has failed to grasp the salience of ideological dominance, historical trajectories of the political economies of the dependent and colonially created 'micro-states' that make up the continent and the reality of power relations that continue to define the way in which the West relates to the African continent. As Gumede (2015) puts it, the 'neoliberal economic agenda or dogma is mainly based on market fundamentalism that has been prone to crises'. It should also be noted that, as various scholars have argued, the historical processes of state formation in Africa are different from those of the West, especially Europe. Differences are manifest in the capacity or lack of capacity of the state to bring about the development of endogenous capitalism and its transformative effects on the society (see for instance, Robinson 2004; Ake 1981). Differences are also manifest in the ability of the state to mobilize capital through the development of its productive capacity. In the main, the states in Africa were created for extractive purposes, domination, exploitation and violence, as many have argued. To a very significant extent, states in Africa have been 'successful' in serving the interest of the metropole and not the peoples of Africa.

Post-independence African leaders have surreptitiously and possibly also inadvertently formed alliances with global capital in what William Robinson (2004) calls the 'transnational capitalist class'. Susan Strange (1994) discusses the internationalization of production networks as an inevitable outcome of global capitalism in which corporations seek outlets for cheap labour, higher returns on investments and freer trade, investment and capital regimes. Adebayo Adedeji (2002) talks of *Development Merchant System*: a deliberate design by the global capitalist order to perpetuate a socio-economic and political system that advances interests of the West and maintains the peripheralization of the African continent. It is not by chance that Africa finds itself in the shackles it is in and that there is always an external agenda that interferes with whatever Africa pursues in the interest of the further renewal of the African continent.

It is in this context that the development process in Africa cannot make sense until there is a conscious effort to decolonize the process itself, among the many aspects of Africa that need complete liberation. The envisaged decolonization process must involve deconstruction of the mentality of African leaders, despatialization of the arbitrary and artificial boundaries that the colonialists bequeathed on Africa and intellectual redirection of the orientation of citizens from waiting to act by holding governments accountable at all levels. Political leadership in Africa, however, cannot be exonerated from its glaring failures. As George Ayittey puts it:

The nationalist leaders, with few exceptions, adopted the wrong political systems, the wrong economic system, the wrong ideology and took the wrong path. Equally grievous, perhaps, was the low calibre of leadership... the leadership lacked basic understanding of the development process. (2005: 92)

With regards to a decolonial epistemic perspective in a nutshell, this

...aims to critique and possibly overcome the epistemic injustices put in place by imperial global designs, and questions and challenges the long standing claims of Euro-American epistemology to be universal, neutral, objective, disembodied, as well as being the only mode of knowing. It is 'an-other thought' that seeks to inaugurate 'an-other language,' and 'an-other thinking' that has the potential to liberate ex-colonised people's minds from Euro-American hegemony (see for instance Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 396; Riberio 2011; Grosfoguel 2007).

Unlike other theories which seek to interpret the African conditions within the superstructure created by the colonialists, decolonial epistemic theory offers a profound interrogation of these conditions, their causative elements in form of structures and institutions, human agency, and importantly, the continuity of colonial legacies and inherent contradictions in this system that obscure any possibility for transformation and development in its current form. Scholars of the decolonial epistemic perspective have located their theory around four main pillars or concepts vis-à-vis the past and present relations of Africa with the West. These concepts are: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of nature.

As alluded to earlier, the decolonial epistemic perspective finds currency in Susan Strange's idea of 'the internationalisation of production networks'. Also, in tandem with William Robinson's idea of a transnational capitalist class, the notion of coloniality of power enables us to further understand the power dimension of the relations of the West with Africa in respect of the continuing domination, exploitation and imperial control of the supposedly independent states. With this understanding then comes the

challenge for progressive forces in Africa to seek to reclaim the pursuit of Africa's development through another perspective – African renaissance and pan-Africanism,⁴ reconceptualized and made practical.

Political Leadership

It is important to indicate that I am not discussing (African) political leadership as a concept that operates as a 'top down approach'. Rather the notion of African political leadership that I am concerned with is one that ultimately shepherds citizen's socio-economic interests through governmental structures and nuanced socio-economic policies. This complex and challenging responsibility has not always been executed in the manner required by the African political leadership. Rather than taking fundamental decisions that can alter the balance of power in favour of the peoples of the continent, post-colonial African leaders, with very few exceptions, have not only betrayed the hopes and aspirations of the people but played to the gallery of foreign powers, who have no other interest in Africa than exploitation, subjugation and peripherilization of the African continent and its peoples.

It is for this reason that I argue for a new breed of African political leadership to be formed and encouraged to come to the fore. While I acknowledge past and present African political leaders I contend that the need has arrived for a new generation of African political leadership to vigorously advance a new African agenda for the twenty-second century and steer the requisite socio-economic discourses needed to transform the socio-economic and material conditions of the majority of African citizens. However, this new agenda cannot flourish or fully come to the fore under the current paradigm of thinking and operation. The African Union's Agenda 2063, for instance, though a step in the right direction, falls short because it would seem that Africa hopes for assistance by others in advancing well-being of its people. Put differently, Agenda 2063 should have been anchored on an overarching philosophical framework that should assist in shaping Africa's developmental efforts, and policy issues should have been sufficiently elaborated. In addition, there are other issues that would impact on how Agenda 2063 would be achieved (e.g. how we are to interface with the rest of the world). Also, 2063 is too far off and it is already very late for Africa to have its own 'development agenda' (that is cognisant of global power dynamics, to put it simplistically).

This article addresses the need for the continent to claim the twenty-second century, taking forward the argument made in Gumede and Poee (2014), not out of chance but rather from a realization that the twenty-

first century is slowly drawing to a close (and is about eighty years away). The current and subsequent African political leadership needs to start planning for the subsequent century. Africa might have already missed the twenty-first century – for the twenty-first century would be, socio-economically, remembered as one that firmly established the ascent of the Asian sub-continent and economies like the People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and also, secondarily, the rise of South American and Latin nations (e.g. Federative Republic of Brazil, Republic of Chile and United Mexican States). Social and economic indicators suggest that Africa remains far behind South America and Asia, at least as far as human development is concerned.

Therefore, African political leadership, along with local communities and citizens, needs to engage and where possible explore the means to transform policy structures and institutions that benefit society. While it is acknowledged that certain problems plaguing the continent need long term solutions, the first step towards achieving lasting solutions entails a deliberate programme of action to unlearn, relearn, un-think and rethink dominant thought patterns which Africans and their leaders have acquired in the process of their encounters with the imperial powers over the last 500 years or so. The new African development narrative needs to occur within a firm framework that acknowledges that African political leadership, much like African society, has suffered from learning and thinking incorrectly concerning firstly itself and secondly socio-economic development. The devastating ramifications of colonialism and imperialism should never be taken for granted.

It is further argued that through being able to achieve this unlearning and unthinking the African continent would be able to more constructively deal with the already highlighted problems of orthodox economic planning and development. Without a doubt, Africa needs more thought leaders who will dig into the archives of history, explore the diverse and rich cultural landscapes of the continent before colonial intrusion and adapt with contemporary scholarship and ideas that have been championed by Africans to get the continent out of the current socio-economic doldrums as well as the political quagmires. I must hasten to indicate that the debate about what has limited development in Africa continues and how we interpret the state of affairs regarding Africa should not use the narrative of the West. The most recent appraisal by Thandika Mkandawire (2015) of various perspectives that have claimed to identify the 'African problem' is a case in point.

In arguing for the process of unlearning and unthinking, this article is highlighting the fact that African political leadership needs to firstly

understand what its historical mission is and secondly be courageous enough to lead a new form of socio-economic narrative for development. The argument of utilizing history to shape the development and future of Africa has been discussed by others. Thandika Mkandawire (2011), for instance, argues that

The idea of ‘catching up’ entails learning not only about ideas from abroad but also about one’s capacities and weaknesses. ‘Catching up’ requires that countries know themselves and their own history that has set the ‘initial conditions’ for any future progress. They need a deep understanding of their culture, not only for self-reaffirmation, but in order to capture the strong points of their culture and institutions that will see their societies through rapid social change.

Thought Leadership

As indicated earlier, thought leadership is of paramount importance in the pursuit of Africa’s development. Part of the challenge that Africa faces, as reflected above, has to do with an inability to fully appreciate the underlying or fundamental causes for Africa’s continued underdevelopment. To be clear, when I talk of development, I have in mind Claude Ake’s definition of development: development as ‘the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realise higher levels of civilisation in accordance with their own choices and values – development is something that people must do for themselves’ (1996: 125). A similar perspective on development, among others, is that ‘development is a process. The process is resistance – relentless opposition to the imperial system... until liberation’ (Tandon 2015: 145). Yash Tandon concludes that ‘all development under conditions of exploitation and oppression is RESISTANCE...resistance against imperial domination is the first law of motion of development’ (*ibid.*: 158).

With regards to underdevelopment, I am guided by Walter Rodney’s conceptualization. As Walter Rodney put it ‘at all times, therefore, one of the ideas behind underdevelopment is a comparative one. It is possible to compare the conditions at two different periods for the same country and determine whether or not it had developed; and (more importantly) it is possible to compare the economies of any two countries or sets of countries at any given period in time’ (1972: 14). This would contrast with perspectives of development such as those espoused by Amartya Sen (1999). For Sen, the people should be able to guide the development process and also have choices for their livelihoods. Then there are what could be termed Fanonian perspectives on development. Frantz Fanon viewed development

as associated with socio-economic freedom. Fanon went a step further because he also approached development from a psychosocial perspective. At issue, effectively, is inclusive development.

In the context of thought leadership, it would be incorrect to lay the blame for Africa's underdevelopment solely at the hands of Western imperialist forces. There is need for deep introspection and learning from the mistakes committed by African leaders, particularly since political independence. African political leadership has to deal with its shortcomings (e.g. lack of willingness to accept correction or criticism from people that occupy 'lower echelons' and even from electorates and pride of position which leads to alienation of others). While these vices are not unique to African societies and political leadership, as many have argued, at a policy and institutional levels such vices and other human failure have held back the continent's socio-economic progress and development (Edigheji 2004). Indeed, for the most part of the post-independence period, African leaders have adopted cosmetic approaches to addressing the problems that the continent faces. Rather than taking fundamental decisions that can alter the balance of power in favour of the peoples of the continent, most post-colonial African leaders, with very few exceptions, have not only betrayed the hopes and aspirations of the people but played to the gallery of so-called foreign powers.

The lack of vision and short-sighted approaches to development have resulted in African economies not being able to fully progress, and more worryingly created an unhealthy dependency on foreign products and assistance (Jerven 2010). As indicated above, the predicament the continent finds itself in is not thus solely due to foreign forces who only exploit African weaknesses and lack of planning, but is also the fault of African political leadership itself (as George Ayittey (2005), among others, has argued). Further compounding the leadership question is the precarious situation the global economy finds itself in. As Joseph Stiglitz et al. (2013) put it:

It took the 2008 Great Recession to bring about a wider understanding of the deficiencies in the conventional wisdom and in the standard models upon which they rested. Those models failed, by all the most important tests of scientific theory. They did not predict that the financial crisis would happen; and when it did, they understated its effects. Monetary authorities allowed bubbles to grow and focused on keeping inflation low, partly because the standard models suggested that low inflation was necessary and almost sufficient for efficiency, growth, and prosperity.

At a more practical level, perhaps, there is a need to utilize and engage with thought leadership. It did not have to take the global recession, or Joseph

Stiglitz and his disciples for that matter, for Africa to realize that a different socio-economic development paradigm was necessary. Essentially, we require praxis of ideas that are contextually sensitive and environmentally adaptable and relevant, not just an inspirational or transformational leadership, as many have suggested, but a critically conscious and mentally free leadership. It is this approach to African leadership⁵ that is a critical first step towards not only dealing with the numerous continental socio-economic failures such as poverty, poor resource management and the like but also the poverty of ideas emanating from neoliberal dogma.

In the pursuit of thought leadership, we need to tap into the as yet unmined riches of Africa's past leadership experiences. Although there were challenges in early Africa, we must learn from the glorious past such as the victories of the Ethiopian Adwa, Khoi resistance against Portuguese colonialists, Impi yaseSandlwana and many others,⁶ which prove that African societies long engaged with the process of thought leadership during trying times. Even much earlier, as epitomised by what is captured in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*,⁷ Africa had thought leaders. Molefi Kete Asante (2000) has also discussed the very early thinkers (i.e. Imhotep, Amenemhat, Amenhotep, Akhenaton and many others) in ancient Kemet, demonstrating beyond doubt that Africa is not only the originator of civilization but also that the ancient African thinkers were very advanced. Talking about Imhotep, for instance, Asante (ibid.: 24) explains that 'as vizier, Imhotep was the King's Prime Minister. He was responsible for the daily running of the administration of the country'. However, as indicated at the very onset, *thought leadership* alone is not enough; it needs to be aided by thought liberation and *critical consciousness*.

Thought Liberation

Thought leadership is intertwined with thought liberation. Thought leadership, in the main, has to do with better understanding of the fundamental challenges confronting humanity. For Africa, it involves understanding the socio-political and economic issues and possibilities or options for the further advancement of the human condition in Africa. Essentially, thought leaders are change agents who rigorously advance intellectualism for a better Africa, in our context. Thought leadership has always been priced higher in Africa, even much earlier as indicated above. Souleymane Diagne (2008), for instance, tells us that 'Ahmed Baba insists [insisted] on the value of knowledge with the precision that knowledge is authentic and complete only when it is a way of life'. Diagne indicates that Baba argued that 'one hour of a scholar laying on his bed but meditating on

his knowledge is more valuable than the worship of a devout person during seventy years' (*ibid.*). Our great thinkers, such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Theophile Obenga, among many others, are testimony to the importance of knowledge that becomes a way of life – these two greatest African thought leaders worked tirelessly to demonstrate, as an example, the African origin of civilization.

The process of thought liberation, similarly, involves the very process of unlearning, relearning, unthinking and rethinking dominant thought patterns which Africans and their leaders have acquired in the process of their encounters with the imperial powers over the last 500 years or so (as indicated earlier). Thought liberation should assist the rest of the world, too, to come to an understanding that socio-economic development cannot be left to the market alone. Recently, Mkandawire (2015) and Nzau (2010), among others, have made this point. The many works of Samir Amin and of Claude Ake discuss the trouble that market fundamentalism causes in Africa, and the world at large. Amin (1997: 95), for instance, argued that 'contemporary society is manifestly in crisis, if we define crisis as a situation in which the expectations of the majority cannot be satisfied by the logic of the [capitalist] system'. Amin goes on to say that 'capitalism and crisis are not incompatible: far from it, because the logic of capital necessarily generates crisis. The solution implies a modification of the rules of the game...an alternative social project'.

Of late, Joseph Stiglitz et al. have reiterated what many African economists and political scientists have been saying, that 'the global financial and economic crisis has also brought to light the fact that market forces do not exist in a vacuum, and that they are all shaped by laws, rules, and regulations, each of which is never truly neutral, as it explicitly or implicitly favours or discourages particular industries, sectors, firms, and social players' (2013: 7). Over and above merely wanting African governments and political leaders to move beyond believing in global financial and economic neoliberalism, thought liberation should help Africans (and those of African descent) deal with the long running negative psychological effects of colonialism and apartheid rule. The ramifications of colonialism makes many Africans feel inferior to their white counterparts, thus necessitating various attempts to look, speak and act European, by way of example. At the policy level, the psychological legacy is manifested in the infantile deference of African leaders to so-called experts from the West on various issues that concern the continent even today. As Issa Shivji (2009) and others have demonstrated, colonialism and imperialism were very significant in Africa and not comparable to any other region. It is therefore imperative that

we deal with the challenge of ‘mental slavery’, as Biko (1978) and others argued. Essentially, many Africans find themselves valuing the wrong things (e.g. what represents the standard of success in life).

Critical Consciousness

As and when thought leadership occurs and thought liberation plays the necessary role, critical consciousness must be prioritized in order to, among other things, manifest and reshape the socio-political and economic trajectory of the new African agenda for the twenty-second century. It is through critical consciousness that leaders in Africa can truly serve the citizenry and the people can hold leaders accountable. Raising critical consciousness involves sensitization of the citizens to be self-aware of the rights that nature and the constitutions confer on them as free born citizens. As the saying goes, a people deserves the kind of leaders that they have. For too long, African citizens have been the victim of power-play and unholy alliance between the indigenous comprador bourgeoisie and their international counterparts.

It must also be mentioned that critical consciousness should be raised to redirect the attention of progressive forces in Africa to reclaim the lost glory of the continent (Mbeki 2014). Through having an African citizenry that is imbued with critical consciousness, questions about neoliberal policies and agendas will come to be understood and stopped where necessary by not only African political leaders but by the citizens – of course the African intelligentsia and other role players are equally important. This most perplexing situation, where African interests are held ransom by foreign interest through an unthoughtful leadership and unliberated thought class of African political leaders, would come to an end (Adedeji 2002). The citizenry has a critical role to play because the elite becomes distant from the real issues and often gets co-opted by capital if not directly becoming agents of global capital in the context of obtaining and sustaining a capitalist-imperialist world disorder. It is in this context that other forms of ideological struggles, such as African feminism, could be an answer to the post-colonial development project in contemporary Africa – the neo-colonial state is failing, if it has not already, and liberation movements seem to have failed to transform themselves into vibrant political parties that are capable of pursuing autonomous development paths.

As Paulo Freire (1970: 35) argued, we need to be ‘learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’. Critical consciousness implies that the citizenry should act as change agents – once contradictions have been identified, action must be taken to address them. This also means that

the citizenry is in a position to change the elite that is not addressing core developmental challenges faced by the African continent. By implication also, the citizenry needs to rid itself of inappropriate thought patterns and borrowed improper behavioural patterns. Too often, what Africans see as a good standard of progress is what comes from the North, and most of the behaviours that are problematic are learnt from the Euro-American consumerist world. Critical consciousness should ensure that Africans liberate themselves from the various destructive thought patterns.⁸

Knowledge Production

Colonialism pursued an education policy that distorted African history, de-emphasised creativity, ossified critical thinking thereby emasculating the consciousness of an African in identifying who s/he is, his or her intellectual acumen, cultural pedigree and capacity for good. A psychological warfare, which reified the colonialists as superiors and better human beings, was relentlessly waged against Africans, the result of which is the prevalence of a sense of inferiorization in tastes, ideas, consumption and the general world view of an average African today. That systemic and psychological warfare was more pronounced in education and curricula. As Simphiwe Sesanti puts it, 'through colonial education, Africans have been alienated from, and reduced to being strangers to their own selves. In the process, Africans were made to feel worthless by being told that they had no history, culture and philosophy' (2015: 356).

The various colonial policies were centred on building cadres and officers that could serve as clerks to colonial officers or at best produce an elite cadre whose orientations were/are directed towards the satisfaction of the departing colonial masters, rather than the people (Falola 2004). Colonial education tried as much as possible to erase any sense of African history, thus privileging European history as the authentic history, as Simphiwe Sesanti (2015) and others explain. In addition, colonialists left a legacy of imposition of foreign languages as a means of communication on Africa. Ngūgī wa Thiong'o, among others, has wrestled with this issue. The issue of language is extremely important, as many African thinkers have emphasised that Africa cannot develop while using someone else's language.⁹

Although the poverty of thought leadership and the deficit in consciousness are manifest in various areas and ways in contemporary Africa, one major concern relates to economic thought and economic policies. Since the end of the Second World War, the world has come under the dominance of a virulent form of neoliberal economic thought which prioritizes private accumulation at the expense of societal progress and stability. This neoliberal

brand of economics operates with a messianic zealotry, hegemonizes ideas, obliterates alternative reasoning and compartmentalizes itself against other disciplines. It is what Ben Fine (2009) calls *Zombie Economics* and Samir Amin (1990) calls *Vulgar Economics*. The overarching influence of this economic thought on policy in Africa, its failure, as well as micro and macro implications on the continent, warrant thought liberation and critical consciousness.

Economics is arguably one of the academic disciplines whose rethink is long overdue. Even so-called leading economists such as Joseph Stiglitz have somersaulted of late, discarding the neoliberal dogma that they fed the world for decades; the neoliberal dogma that finds the world we live in today a worse place than the place our grandparents before colonialism lived in – surely the worse place that our children and their children will live in if we are unable to change the status quo. As Yash Tandon (2015) puts it, ‘all economic theories, without exception, are ideologies. As such, they have a certain descriptive content based on social, economic and political realities on the ground, and also a normative content – on how society or economy should be organised’.

In the context of pan-Africanism and African renaissance, education, or knowledge production broadly, should be based on an Afrocentric paradigm¹⁰ – African thought leadership must be able to produce not only a critical but a conscious African citizenry that is grounded in pan-Africanist philosophies and driven to implement the African renaissance agenda.¹¹ The curriculum, put differently, has to be shaped by the lived experiences of Africans and must be about what Africans want or would like to be as well as how they would like to live. The content knowledge of the subject should arguably take into account *African economic renaissance*.¹²

The packaging and delivery of content should be about raising critical consciousness and should be forward looking. There is also a need to re-write economic theory or to come up with better applications of economic theory in the context of Africa’s development – we must, more importantly, question existing imported theories and develop new ones which are more relevant for our contexts. Even though many leading economists, such as Amartya Sen, are aware of the constraints of economics as a social science, not much has been done to re-think economics. There has, for instance, been a heated debate of late regarding Gross Domestic Product but no alternative has been put forward as far as a better measure of well-being is concerned. It is therefore no surprise that we still predominantly use the outdated macro-economic framework¹³ – national income identity – which excludes many important variables for socio-economic development. As Lansana

Keita (2014) puts it, ‘in its present dominant configuration as “neoclassical economics”, [economics] presents itself as a species of engineering thereby ignoring its evolutionary history’. Economics, as a field, has to be rescued.

Foundations for a Glorious Future

Essentially, Africa needs more thought leaders who will dig into the archives of history, explore the diverse and rich cultural landscapes of the continent before colonial intrusion and adapt with contemporary scholarship and ideas that have been championed by Africans to take the continent and peoples of Africa forward. Such thought leaders must be able to combine theory with praxis of ideas that are contextually sensitive and environmentally adaptable and relevant. The challenges confronting Africa are significant and historical, and require not just an inspirational or transformational leadership, as many have suggested, but critically conscious and mentally-free thought leaders.

Another important task for African thought leaders is to better understand the history of the evolution of Africa as a continent where humankind originates and great thinkers that have existed (see, for instance, Cheikh Anta Diop 1955) – early African thought leaders such as Al-Umari, Ibn Battuta and Leo Africanus, among others, and prominent later Kings/Emperors such as Senzangakhona kaJama, Moshoeshe, Sobhuza II, Haile Selassie I, among others, developed ideas that guided the governance of ancient kingdoms and empires such as (in) Egypt, Kush/Nubia, Axum, Lesotho, Ghana, Mali, KwaZulu, Songhai and Karnem-Borno (Martin 2012). Some of the thought leaders mentioned ensured that a handful of Africans who were poorly armed, compared to the Europeans, resisted occupation. In addition, the thought leaders in pre-colonial Africa also ensured that the continent administered an economy that was robust and advanced before the imperial intrusion and colonialists’ distortions as Walter Rodney (1972) and others have written. Africans also had a way of life and philosophy that shaped the African economy and social interactions before colonialism interfered with it as Walter Rodney (*ibid.*) and Samir Amin (1972) have captured.

It is also worth highlighting that large and successful kingdoms and queendoms existed in Africa before the colonial intrusion. These kingdoms and queendoms related with one another on cordial terms, conducted relations peacefully and developed infrastructures and economic systems that ensured prosperity for the generality of the people. It is important to indicate though that as is a case for many states, African communities were also sites of dialectics or antagonistic contradictions which would get resolved using different means including diplomacy and wars. The pre-colonial

African thought leaders also advanced proverbs, mores, folklores, taboos and principles that ensured societal harmony, dignity, mutual trust, mutual care and the general well-being of the people (Polanyi 1944). Similarly, it should be remembered that in Walata and Timbuktu (Cleaveland 2008), Africa had advanced knowledge production institutions long before the arrival of colonialists – in fact, knowledge production dates very far back as, among other texts, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* demonstrates. There have also been many great thought leaders in postcolonial Africa. These include (nationalist) leaders such as Africanus Horton, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Amilcar Cabral, Thabo Mbeki and many others. The list is by no means exhaustive.

While the above chronicle may sound to some as a romanticization of history, I argue that it is perfectly in order to be conscious of one's past in order to confront present challenges – as many others have argued; we have to go back, way back, before we can move forward.¹⁴ It is precisely on this score that thought leaders are needed today who will not only bask in the glory of the past but commit themselves to learning from the thoughts of past African heroes and heroines such that they can lead Africa to the true path of renaissance and complete liberation from external influence and domination in its various forms and guises.

Conclusion

This article has, rather briefly, argued for three ingredients for taking the African continent further forward: thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness. These three critical necessities for the further renewal of the African continent – and the advancement of the human condition globally – would ensure that an appropriate socio-economic development approach is adopted and that a proper narrative of Africa's development is authored. For instance, the socio-economic development approach based on neoliberal dogma would be replaced by a contextually relevant and applicable approach.¹⁵ The article also briefly revisits Africa's glorious past and makes a case that African thought leaders can make Africa's past a foundation, as part of endeavours for thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness. Lastly, the article emphasised the importance of knowledge production, also its dissemination, organization and the implementation of revolutionary praxis.

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Notes

1. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 332), explains coloniality as 'different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to longstanding patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day'.
2. '[C]olonialism, by a kind of pervasive logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it' (Fanon 1961: 67).
3. In the context of literature, for instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986: 93) argues that 'African children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were thus experiencing the world as defined and reflected in the European experience of history'.
4. See Gumede (2013) for a historical exposition of African renaissance and pan-Africanism.
5. By African leadership, I have in mind the type of leadership that is centred on Afrocentric histories, philosophies, epistemologies and other pan-Africanist orientations/ideologies as well as respect for evolving African cultures.
6. For instance, other victorious anti-colonial struggles include the Tanzanian one in Iringa where African forces led by King Mkwawa wiped out hundreds of German troops.
7. See Allen, T.G. 1960. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago. Volume 82. University of Chicago. The Oriental Institute.
8. Some of the most disturbing thought patterns that Africans should extricate themselves from include over-indulgence in ceremonies of various kinds (this varies across cultures), lack of willingness to accept correction or criticism from people who occupy the 'lower echelons' and even from electorates, pride of position, poor team spirit, unnecessary envy and jealousy, preference for everything foreign, 'hero worship' and preference for mediocrity as against meritocracy.
9. Molefi Kete Asante (2007), for instance, indicates that Dame Babou said Cheikh Anta Diop argued that 'no nation ever developed using the language of other people'.

10. MolefiKete Asante (2007: 16–17) defines Afrocentricity ‘as a consciousness, quality of thought, mode of analysis, and actionable perspective where Africans seek, from agency, to assert subject place within the context of African history’.
11. It should be noted though that there are some who feel that the word ‘renaissance’ is inappropriate because it is associated with a particular European experience. Indeed, some of the concepts we use needs revisiting and should be made more applicable in African contexts.
12. African economic renaissance implies that Africans should decide on the African economy and or the socio-economic system that works for them. The point of departure is that Africans had, prior to colonialism and imperialism, an economy and an economic system that worked well for them. See more in Gumede 2013.
13. The macro-economic framework, which is essentially, an account of what makes up an economy considers a few variables: consumption, investments, expenditure and net trade.
14. For instance, Africans should revisit, if not undo, the artificial borders drawn up by a handful of European countries in 1884/85 – what came to be known as the Berlin Conference.
15. I have proposed that a new socio-economic development approach for Africa could be anchored on communalism. Walter Rodney (1972: 7) defines communalism as a system where ‘property [is] collectively owned, work done in common and goods shared equally’. This is in sharp contrast to capitalism, which came with colonialism, which, according to Rodney, resulted to ‘concentration in a few hands of ownership of the means of producing wealth and by unequal distribution of the products of human labour’.

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