

REFLECTIONS ON AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND THE LAGOS PLAN OF ACTION

Introduction

Some years ago, in early 1980s, I was invited at the University of Zimbabwe to give a lecture on Pan-Africanism. Before I started, I asked the students (some 30 of them) if they had heard of Julius Nyerere. All hands shot up. When I asked them if they had heard of Kwame Nkrumah, not one hand showed up. I was both shocked and baffled. How was it possible that Nkrumah, the most cherished votary of PanAfricanism was unknown to the students? I put it down to the 'dark days' of the Smith regime. But that did not explain everything; I was not satisfied.

However, one thought did occur to me after my lecture. We Africans do not celebrate enough our heroes who fought against the European Empire for our liberation. How could we have forgotten the memory of Nkrumah and Lumumba, and scores others? I find this galling because as I write this in Oxford (where I now reside) the University of Oxford has vociferously refused to take down the statute of Cecil Rhodes from the Oriel College. The 'Rhodes must Fall Movement' led by Ntokozi Qwabe (ironically, a Rhodes Scholar) mobilised students and some academia for the removal of the statue. Cecil Rhodes was a racist and a ruthless coloniser. But the British celebrate the man. By contrast, our youngsters in African Universities do not remember the heroes that fought for our independence.

This essay is not about Nyerere, Nkrumah, and other eminent political figures in Africa's recent past. It is about our intellectual leaders. If we don't celebrate enough our political leaders, we do even less so our intellectual leaders. This year in May, Pretoria will host the Sixth African Unity for Renaissance Conference. There will also be a one-day Roundtable on the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA). I want to take this occasion to reflect on the contributions two of our intellectual giants have made on the theme of Renaissance and connect their ideas with the LPA. This is the theme of this paper.

Remembering Cheikh Anta Diop and Dani W. Nabudere

Cheikh Anta Diop was a Senegalese intellectual and scholar of great eminence – historian, physicist, mathematician and anthropologist. After his death in 1986, Senegal honoured him by re-naming the former University of Dakar as Cheikh Anta Diop University. Nonetheless, outside of Senegal and Francophone Africa, he is virtually unknown. Even at a young age, as a student in Paris from 1946 to 1960, he researched and wrote many essays challenging the distorted myths about Africa's history written by Eurocentric (and racist) historians. Not unexpectedly, the essays triggered sharp criticism from some European historians and anthropologists, but he stood his ground, and later scholarship vindicated many of Diop's finding, although the controversy still remains.ⁱ

Diop is often credited with articulating the concept of African Renaissance as never before and seldom since then. He argued that the political struggle for African independence would not succeed without acknowledging the civilizing role that Africa played in ancient times, basing his conclusion on his anthropological research. He maintained that the Sahara was not a barrier as made out in much of Eurocentric literature; that there was a basic unity based on both the Nile and the Sahara. Diop also showed that many African societies in past times were matriarchal. Taking an Afrocentric perspective, he argued that matriarchy is an 'ensemble of institutions favorable to womanhood and to mankind in general'. Few people today cite him even as we struggle against embedded patriarchal systems in our own times. There is still not adequate recognition of the pioneering work done by Diop at a time when original research by Africans on Africa's own past was derided and ridiculed by colonial apologists.

In recent years, the idea of African Renaissance has resurfaced. In several speeches since 1997, former President Thabo Mbeki has popularised the concept of African Renaissance, which is a welcome development. He has been emphasising its importance in developing a post-colonial and post-apartheid intellectual discourse, though, sadly, he has made no reference to Diop. Nonetheless, we have made some progress. On 11 October 1999, at a conference in Pretoria, the African Renaissance Institute (ARI) was founded with its headquarters in Gaborone.

Dani Wadada Nabudere was another such man. He was one of the most enigmatic revolutionary African figures of the 20th Century, a prophet of a man. And yet he was not very well known outside the circle of people who crossed his path. He was my compatriot (Ugandan), a colleague at the University of Dar es Salaam, political mentor, and an activist in the struggle for African independence and pan-African unity.

Above all, he was a great scholar. Well before the post-2007 global financial collapse hit the stock markets, Nabudere had already predicted it in 1989. In a small pamphlet - *The Crash of International Finance Capital* - published by SAPES (Southern African Political Economy Series) founded by Ibbo Mandaza in Zimbabwe, Nabudere described in scientific detail what later came to be known as 'financialisation of capital'. He elaborated on this theme in an over 300-page manuscript, written whilst in exile in Helsingør in Denmark. The book was printed in 1990 by *Africa in Transition*, which I had founded. This book – *The Rise and Fall of Money Capital* – is probably the most comprehensive analysis of money (as distinct from capital) since the early writings, among others, of Marx, Engels, Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg, and Keynes, all of whom came under Nabudere's well-reasoned critique. Nabudere made the prediction that money will eventually overcome capital and then meet its own demise as an instrument of credit. This is what in fact happened in the first decade of the 21st century.

In his later years – following his leadership of the struggle against the dictatorship of Idi Amin in Uganda under the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) and his ceaseless efforts to develop grass-roots based democratic dispensation in the country – he devoted his time and scholarship to expanding on his vision of African unity. He believed, much like Diop, that Africans need to challenge the stereotypical and racist narrative of Africa's past. In his later life, he devoted his energies to the broader agenda of encouraging a pan-African consciousness among the younger

generation of Africans towards a "new universal order based on basic pluralist-humanist principles", in which Africa would play a distinct role. He founded the *Marcus Garvey Pan-Afrikan Institute* in Mbale, Uganda, later to evolve as a university. "...the model that I am advancing here," he wrote, "is a direct reflection of our general experience under the global capitalist system and a reasoned response to its impact, which we can refer to as a 'post-capitalist synthesis'." He advocated "the restorative governance and justice" aimed at restoring "new balances that can enable people in the communities to regain control over their lives." He was particularly emphatic on the restoration of African languages in popular discourse, because the unfamiliarity with colonial languages denied the African people a meaningful inclusion in the democratic processes. *Afrikology*, he argued, requires scholars, students and practitioners "to liaise with the language communities in understanding what they know and mean". Going beyond Africa he proposed "The horizontal restorative epistemology" -- worldviews (cosmologies) that are responsive to nature and that take into account "our cosmic relations with nature".ⁱⁱ

The Lagos Plan of Action: The UNECA versus the World Bank

The question is: how does the above relate to the Sixth African Unity for Renaissance Conference in Pretoria, and the Roundtable on the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA)?

One of the best efforts at giving concrete expression to African unity at the level of concrete economic policies was the LPA. Somewhat unexpectedly it came out of the United Nations system. Unexpectedly, because the UN Commission for Africa (UNECA) – unlike its sister organisation, the ECLAC – the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – was not known for taking a view that challenged the dominant economic discourse. Indeed, Professor Adebayo Adedeji, in his earlier years as the UNECA's Executive Secretary (1978-1991), was a distinguished neo-classical economist. In 1989, he became the motive force for the crafting of the LPA. What radicalised him only he can tell, but it might have to do with his association, whilst in Addis Ababa, with the OAU – the Organisation of African Unity - or the influence of the Dar es Salaam school of radical thinkers in the 1970s.

But there were also some external factors. Following a prolonged drought between 1968 and 1973 that hit the Sahel at its worst, Africa had become a net food importing continent. Despite two decades of donor assistance, growth had more or less stopped, and the social conditions in most countries in Africa were worsening. African leaders, in this context, considered that the only way left to them was to pull themselves out of their predicament through their own efforts, and that whatever assistance came from outside in the form of donor funds, must be regarded as secondary to these efforts at self-reliance. The leaders meeting in Lagos set the year 2000 for achieving an "African Economic Community so as to ensure the economic, social and cultural integration of our continent".

Thus the 1979 Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000 committed Africa to establish, by the year 2000, an African Economic Community in order to foster the economic, social and cultural integration of our Continent. In its analysis of why despite its rich resources Africa was still poor, it said that the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the World Bank and the IMF were primarily instrumental in Africa's industrial demise. The LPA put emphasis on self-reliance and African ownership of and control over its own resources. It put forward a bold program of action based on regional building blocks that would eventually lead to the economic unity of the African continent.

Why did the LPA not move forward? There may be several reasons, but in my view one stands out as the most significant – namely, that our political leaders believed (they still do) that the West and the institutions of global economic governance such as the WB and the IMF are benign partners in development. Soon after the LPA, the World Bank came out with its 'Berg Report'. It presented an alternative scenario to the LPA. Africa, the Berg Report argued, need not despair about the lack of aid from outside. More would come provided African governments were to make the necessary economic and policy adjustments. They had neglected the agricultural sector in preference to industries; that must be rectified. They had provided excessive subsidies to urban dwellers; those must go. There was too much interference by the state in the economy; they must give more free space to market forces. They had concentrated far too much on the internal market; they must go for export-led growth. And so on and so forth. Our leaders fell for this World Bank “medicine”, and the Lagos Plan of Action was put in cold storage.

In 1991, African leaders met again to assess the situation, this time in Abuja. The resulting outcome was the Abuja Treaty. It recalled the Monrovia Declaration of Commitment on the Guidelines and Measures for National and Collective Self-reliance in Economic and Social Development for the Establishment of a New International Order. It also recalled the now abandoned Lagos Plan of Action. That was the last that was heard of the LPA and the Abuja Treaty in the policy-making higher echelons of African governments. Africa soon drifted into an aid and foreign investments dependent policies. The Berg Report trumped both the LPA and the Abuja Treaty. The illusion of aid and investment triumphed over the reality of Africa's underdevelopment by the forces of so-called 'globalization'.

Lessons from the collapse of the LPA

At a conference called “*Problematizing the Neoliberal African Growth Narrative*” organised by the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute (TMALI) and the Mapungubwe Institute of Strategic Thought and Reflection (MISTRA) in November 2014 I questioned the wisdom behind NEPAD - the New Partnership for African Development - strategy. Whilst it claimed its inspiration and legitimacy from the concept of the 'African Renaissance', NEPAD, I suggested

was “like a two-headed animal”. It is as if the two parts of the document - the first diagnostic, and the second prescriptive - were written by two separate groups of people working independently from one another. There is very little either logical or conceptual link between the two. While the diagnostic section is reflective of a generally radical thinking, the prescriptive part is almost entirely from the text-book neo-liberal orthodoxy. Consequently, I had proposed the setting up of a 'Strategic Thought Group' (STG) to interrogate the NEPAD and go back to the Lagos Plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty which were hijacked by the World Bank and the so-called “donor” community.

I also suggested, among others:

- That there should be no 'open door' policy towards 'free trade' and Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) in general. They might be allowed as and when required by national consensus between the Government, the local (not foreign) private sector, the workers, small farmers, and other organs of civil society. The FDIs must operate under certain nationally determined conditions (for example, limited access to domestic savings), and they must conform to certain performance requirements (for example, effective transfer of technology and managerial know-how).
- That our political leaders should take heed of the financial crisis in the North and acknowledge that the North is taking measures to protect national economies from global shocks. We must challenge our intellectuals also to work out concrete steps towards alternative ways of organizing the financial infrastructure in Africa. This should include an African Central Bank and an African single currency. Without these Africa is subject to policy control from outside.
- That Africa should not sign the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Europe. Bereft of high sounding principles about 'free market' and 'reciprocity', EPAs are really a means for Europe to get out of its own economic crisis at the cost of Africa. EPAs will hang like a millstone around Africa's neck and deindustrialise Africa even further.
- That as for NEPAD, it should change to NEPPAD - New Economic Partnership with People for Africa's Development. It should become a people-centric (not 'partner'-centric) project.

Conclusion

At the risk of repeating, I argue, that at the Sixth African Union for Renaissance Conference in May 2016 we might want to encourage our youth to recall – and celebrate – the scholarship and wisdom of intellectuals like Diop and Nabudere. They were outstanding African Renaissance scholars with impeccable credentials as pan-Africanists.

Ideas matter. They influence policy. We must reject the 'free market' theories under which many of our countries accept aid and capital from Western countries. It is becoming clear that it is necessary to counter these ideas. Our intellectual leaders have an obligation to explain how these theories have undermined policy independence of our countries during the last 25-30 years. They must look for alternatives that draw from the ancient wisdom of our people and the practical experience of our peasant farmers on land and workers in factories and in the informal sector. They must above all consult our mothers who nurture our families.

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ⁱ Molefi Kete Asante, (2007), *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait*, (University of Sankore Press)

ⁱⁱ See Nabudere, D.W., *The Crisis of Modernity and the Rise of Post-Traditionalism in Africa*, 1998; *Afrikology, Philosophy and Wholeness* (2011); and *Afrikology and Transdisciplinarity: A Restorative Epistemology* (2012) - published by the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA).