

## **Time for South Africa to examine itself**

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As we celebrate the life and times of the all-time larger-than-life, extraordinary and incomparable Tata Madiba, we are fittingly called upon to reflect on what has become of our country and the wider African continent. It is obvious that we have to self-examine and self-introspect, as a society and as Africans in particular. Complete liberation is an indubitable imperative for South Africa, because the political independence of 1994 merely translated into the change of government from white hands to the hands of Africans – the cracks are increasingly glaring!

Seventy years ago, in 1943, the Bill of Rights in the *Africans' Claims* declared that “African people in the Union of South Africa, urgently demand the granting of full citizenship rights such as are enjoyed by all Europeans in South Africa.” Twenty years later, in 1963, Emperor Haile Salassie – in his 23 May 1963 speech at the launch of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) – pleaded that “unless the political liberty for which Africans have for so long struggled is complemented and bolstered by corresponding economic growth, the breath of life which sustains [Africa’s] freedom may flicker out.”

Thirty years later, Tata – in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 – assured the world that “we live with the hope that as she battles to remake herself, South Africa will be like a microcosm of the new world that is striving to be born. This must be a world of democracy and respect for human rights, a world freed from the horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance...”. And in 1994, at his inauguration as the first African president, Tata proclaimed that “we have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all

our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination”.

Twenty years since the end of apartheid colonialism in South Africa, it would seem that full citizenship rights have not accrued to all South Africans, the breath of life which sustains [South Africa's] freedom is flickering out, many South Africans have not been freed from horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance and the bondages of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discriminations remain.

I venture to argue that what is happening in South Africa, twenty years since political independence, as unfortunate as is, is not surprising.

A glimpse at the twenty years or so of the post-colonial development experience in Africa imply that chicken do come home to roost after two decades or so of political independence. This is because of many reasons.

Among the most intractable reasons is the interminable imperial global order that ensures that the status quo does not change – the artificial handover of political office, from the coloniser to the liberator, gets done in such a way that the complete liberation and decolonisation remain pipedreams. Linked to the imperial global order is the configuration of state-market relations which subordinate people while privileging capital. The third reason has to do with the repulsive historical experience of apartheid colonialism which has left untold scars on the nation we have come to know as South Africa. These three factors ensure that although South Africa is free, we remain in chains.

One of critical points less discussed is that Africans, South Africans especially, suffer from immense psychosocial damage that the brutal discriminatory system relentlessly unleashed for centuries. The historical experience of colonialism, broadly for the continent, and the evil apartheid colonial system imply that to transform our society (and Africa

broadly), we must be bold, radical and fearless – but also smart. So far, we have been merely scratching the surface. Two cases illustrate that the post-apartheid dispensation has merely been scratching the surface: land and education. Education should be radically transformed in order to undo the psychosocial damage caused by apartheid colonialism. Land should be redistributed in order to reverse the historical injustice committed by non-Africans to Africans.

Madiba and his generation were bold, radical and fearless for the mission they pursued – and they brought about political liberation. However, political liberation is only a starting point to real freedoms. Ending formal machinations of a system does not mean that true change happens! Tata and his generation solved part of the puzzle. The bigger and far more profound struggle is a lot more challenging. The battle for true freedoms has to be fought at different levels and through different means.

It is in this context that whatever attempts or initiatives, policy and otherwise, that post-colonial Africa has pursued have not worked. In South Africa, it is now conspicuously evident that policies pursued since 1994 could not deliver on the promise of a 'better life for all'. Neo-colonialism or the colonialism of a special type (as the Communist Party put it) and the privileged position of capital (in the context of the global order) maintain the colonial apartheid status quo which perpetuates white privilege and sees Africans as subhuman.

Tata, without doubt, was mindful of what I call *the South African challenge* – the challenge that to transform SA, primarily, the state-market relations need reconfiguration. I also have no doubt that Tata was fully cognisant of the limitations to transformation imposed by the global order – many have anyway written extensively about the order in question, particularly Claude Ake, Adebayo Adedeji and Thabo Mbeki to

name a few. There are also those who view the political transition to democracy as having been for the elite and or a compromise.

I have argued that South Africa was gradually becoming a developmental state. On further research, it is increasingly clear that SA is unlikely to become a fully-fledged developmental state. The obtaining global order and the existing state-market relations require that there must be deimperialisation of the global order and decolonisation of the colonial matrices of power, as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni would put it, are a prerequisite. Perhaps that is why the National Development Plan argues for a capable state instead of the developmental state. The social democracy aspired for also remains in tatters.

The policies that have been pursued since 1994, aimed at creating a South African developmental state, have failed – I have argued elsewhere that what constrains socio-economic transformation in SA is policy failure. I have also made a case of an alternative socio-economic development model based on different social processes than the predominant capitalist economic system – as Samir Amin argued, the world needs an alternative social project.

Others argue that the fundamental challenges have to do with poor capacity, corruption, weak leadership etc. And there are those that argue that the problem is fundamentally with the ANC. I find all these arguments simplistic. A careful study of Frantz Fanon makes it very clear that what we see are simply pitfalls that all post-independent African states are enduring. This is not to say that there are no challenges in the ANC – my point is that, in the context of socio-economic transformation, South Africa would have been standing still no matter who was in power. Of course corruption, weak leadership, inappropriate policies, poor capacity etc should be addressed.

To honour Tata appropriately we must ensure that there is complete liberation, in our lifetime, no matter what this takes. The starting point, informed by our collective historical experience of apartheid colonialism, should be that thought liberation – complete liberation that, in the main, has to do with undoing the psychosocial damage caused by apartheid colonialism and continued coloniality – is an imperative for the further advancement of South Africa's development. Tata was prepared to die for this ideal.