



Leadership for Africa's development: Revisiting African traditional leadership and setting the agenda for political leadership

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Abstract

The African continent remains at the periphery in world affairs. Many scholars have advanced cogent reasons for this unfortunate reality. Mkandawire (2011: 6) makes a point, for instance, that as and when Africa pursues development, the so-called dominant powers disrupt the process of development in Africa, and in the world, at worse by “bombing countries back to the stone age.” The development of the continent is also unimpressive, relative to the potential of the African economies. Gumede (2011), following on footsteps of many others who have made the similar point, argues that Africa needs its own socio-economic development model instead of what appears to be inappropriate policies that are being implemented in most if not all African countries. Gumede (2013) advanced an argument that the 21st century would most likely be remembered as the Asian century fundamentally and secondarily as a South American century, and proposed aspects of what a socio-economic development model for Africa should be.

Other works, especially Gumede and Pooe (2014), have demonstrated that Africa would indeed most likely miss the 21st century as its own as many proclaimed at the eve of the millennium. Further work has been explaining what is needed for Africa to, possibly, recapture the 21st century or ensure that Africa definitely captures the 22nd century. This paper makes a case for African (traditional) leadership and examines political leadership in particular with the view of preparing Africa to reclaim its lost glory and recover its stolen legacy. By African leadership, I refer to leadership that is centered on Afrocentric histories, philosophies, epistemologies and other pan-Africanist orientations/ideologies as well as respect for evolving African cultures. It is argued that African leadership should be infused with thought leadership and critical consciousness.

Thought leadership, as Gumede (2014) puts it, is about leadership that is based on progressive ideologies, beliefs and orientations that have significant pragmatic and impact appeal. Critical consciousness, on the other hand, should be linked to decolonizing the minds of Africans, as NgũgĩwaThiong'o, MolefiKete Asante, Ama Mazama and ChinweizuIbekwe, among others, have argued. Knowledge production should, therefore, be a critical factor in redefining paradigms for African (traditional and political) leadership aimed at the further renewal of the African continent. The paper wrestles with these and other pertinent issues, including critiquing the 'Africa rising' narrative.

Introduction

There appears to be consensus that economically and socially, and perhaps also politically, the African continent remains at the periphery, remains weak in many ways or development has been poor. With regard to economic development, for instance, contrary to what some are arguing, or have been arguing, that Africa is rising; there are indications that such a characterization is inappropriate – poverty remains very high and increasing in many instances and inequalities, various types of inequalities, including political inequalities, remain very high in the African continent. In addition, it may very well be a statistical artefact that Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the main measure of economic performance, appears good in the African continent. The growth in GDP is not linked to the well-being of the lives of the people. Moreover, in comparing the African continent with other sub-regions, for instance Asia and Latin America in particular, the numbers for economic development or economic growth are mediocre and pedestrian in Africa. In considering Africa's two big economies, namely Nigeria and South Africa, there remain many socio-economic challenges in the two big economies in Africa, let alone other economies, the reality that contradicts the 'Africa rising' narrative.

Among the fundamental constraints to Africa's development is the lack of appropriate policies. The lack of appropriate policies is also associated with poor reforms, as Gumede (2011) explainsⁱ. Thandika Mkandawire, in the context of Africa as a whole, has argued that there is indeed a challenge of policies, especially social policiesⁱⁱ. Samir Aminⁱⁱⁱ, on the other hand, has been explaining what kind of a development model could work better for Africa (and the world at large) – indeed there have been various attempts to coming up with 'home-grown' development approaches. Adebayo Adedeji, for instance, has discussed the various strategies and plans that Africa crafted, which have unfortunately been compromised by what he has termed the Development Merchant System^{iv} – 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. Adekeye Adebajo attributes, convincingly, the challenges confronting Africa to the ‘curse of Berlin’ and the ‘bondage of boundaries’^v. Claude Ake, among others, demonstrated the constraints imposed by the development approach that Africa followed^{vi}. Indeed, the debate about what has limited development in Africa continues: the most recent appraisal by Thandika Mkandawire of various perspectives that have claimed to identify the ‘African problem’ is a case in point^{vii}.

The paper is structured in the following manner: The next section briefly discusses what could be characterized as the African development challenge. I then briefly problematize the ‘Africa rising’ narrative. That is followed by brief conceptual reflections, theoretically unpacking the African development challenge. The rest of the paper, before concluding, makes proposals about the kind of African (traditional and political) leadership that can ensure the further development of the African continent.

The African development challenge

As hinted above, the central concern for the further development of the African continent has to do with a socio-economic development approach pursued so far, largely because the approaches for advancing development that have been employed in Africa have largely been borrowed elsewhere (Gumede, 2011)^{viii}. The dominant approach is the neo-liberal economic agenda or dogma which is mainly based on market fundamentalism which has been prone to crises, the recent case being the ongoing global economic recession. Therefore, Africa needs its own socio-economic development approach, informed by a new vision for the African economy. I have described the new approach, or philosophical framework, for socio-economic development in Africa as an African Economic Renaissance^{ix} (see Gumede, 2013).

Arguably, it would be important to look back, perhaps through the works of Walter Rodney, Cheikh Anta Diop, Samir Amin and TinyambeZeleza, among others, to study how socially and economically Africa was organised before colonization or colonialism. Adebajo (2010: 3)^x put it interestingly that “in order to understand contemporary events and for a better future one must inevitably understand the past”. The early African economy was characterized or has been described as communalism, not communism. According to Rodney (1973), communalism refers to a way of life and or philosophy and or approach where produce is done in common and shared equally^{xi} – Amin (1997)^{xii} characterized such an economy as pre-mercantilist. AyiKweiArmah, ChinweizuIbekwe and Valentine Mudimbe, among others, have made a case against borrowing foreign notions such as communism or Marxism. This said, Samir Amin has consistently presented a strong argument for socialism as an answer to the challenges that the world faces.

It is probably necessary to indicate that when I argue about ‘going back’ I am not suggesting that we should go back in order to replicate exactly what was done many centuries back because of contextual nuances as the reality of globalization must be factored in. Indeed, there is a need for thinking innovatively than trying to copy what other countries do. Many countries in the African continent are increasingly copying or trying to copy the Chinese social and economic development model. Arguably, replicating the Chinese model would not work well for the African continent for many reasons, chief among them the reality that the contexts are different.

There are many social problems in the African continent. Some of these are of course common all over the world. However, Africa has many civil wars that are avoidable. There is a big problem of peace and a large problem of conflict in the African continent. It is hard to

develop society in such conditions. Some scholars have written about this, modelling the role of conflict to economic development. One cannot possibly develop society effectively while there is conflict. Education is also a challenge despite large investments into educational sectors in the African continent. The outcomes remain a challenge in terms of skills development, level and quality of education. Take South Africa, for instance. There is a large number of graduates that are unemployed.

There are also challenges that relate to institutions and political systems in the African continent. Moreover, there is always some kind of external influence or interference as the works of Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Adedeji, among others, have shown with regard to economic development in Africa. Libya is generally used as a recent case of this issue where the African continent was not given an opportunity, sufficient opportunity, to resolve the crisis or the challenge in Libya. Instead, external role-players came in and worsened the crisis. There is a bigger problem now in the Sahel region all the way down to Nigeria and other parts of that world. Some people argue that the reason Boko Haram seems so prominent now can be linked to what has happened in Libya, for instance a complete breakdown of society and the ease with which arms flows across the Sahel region coupled with problems in Mali and other areas.

The problem of external influence is a critical issue linked to weak leadership infused with challenges of corruption and so forth. There are political and institutional weaknesses in the African continent that suggest that we need effective leadership. I have been arguing that the African continent needs thought leadership that is capable of being critical and conscious – I have argued for thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness. The late colleague argued that “the common denominator that runs through these three

imperatives [i.e. thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness] is a moral consciousness that we belong despite our differences” (Achieng’2014: 127)^{xiii}. Interesting, Samuel Oloruntoba (2015: 18)^{xiv}, another colleague, argues that “Africa needs a third liberation, the context of which must include freedom from the hegemony of imported knowledge, freedom from subservience to logic of global capitalism, freedom from the slavery of fake values and cultures, and freedom from the visionless and kleptocratic political elites”.

More fundamentally, as indicated earlier, the African continent remains at the periphery, to use IssaShivji’s formulation^{xv}, largely because of the global power distribution. The manner in which economic power, social power, political power and otherwise are distributed keeps the African continent at the bottom. As indicated earlier, Adebayo Adedeji has characterized the mechanism that keeps Africa at the bottom as the *Development Merchant System*. So, the manner in which power is distributed globally is a big challenge. The notion of the *colonial matrices of power* that decolonial scholars have advanced speaks to a structure which ensures that the global south broadly remains at the bottom and the West remains at the top.

Therefore, for Africa to achieve the third liberation that Oloruntoba (2015)^{xvi} has argued for and for the African leadership to be morally conscious, thought leadership as well as thought liberation and critical consciousness are critical in order that, at the very least, the African leadership, especially the African political leadership, is able to confront obtaining global power relations and change the status quo.

Problematizing the ‘Africa rising’ narrative

The recent economic development narrative, implying that the continent of Africa is both open for business and is no longer the ‘Hopeless Continent’^{xvii}, could be viewed as both a positive and an interesting development. However, this paper contends that a nuanced form

of African leadership is needed to interrogate through empirical research, whether this development is truly a new horizon for the continent or another imposed narrative concerning the continent's socioeconomic trajectory. As Achille Mbembé (2001:3)^{xviii} would put it, “narrative about Africa is always pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people...Africa is the mediation that enables the West to accede to its own subconscious and give a public account of its subjectivity.” Therefore, we must interrogate narratives such as the ‘Africa rising’ narrative, which is essentially a narrative of the West and its allies.

This section of the paper explores the narrative referred to in the preceding paragraph in order to (1) ascertain why and what this economic growth represents and (2) understanding whether it will assist ordinary African citizens' goals and aspirations. If this growth model or narrative is nothing more than an exercise in maximizing profits (neo-liberal economic thought) over human development, this paper cautions African governments and States against glorifying and adopting this narrative. This caution is born out of the experiences of not only the continent's previous dealings with neo-liberal thought, in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), as an example, but the economic problems now encountered by Western States and economies. As argued elsewhere, “it is important to state that the failure of the neo-liberal economic thought is not limited to the continent in its manifestation. Statistics from the World Bank and other development agencies show that poverty and inequality is equally rife in the so-called developed world such as the United States of America and Europe.” (Gumede, 2014:11)^{xix}.

It is therefore critical for African governments through a nuanced type of African political leadership to explore and research whether the current argument or narrative of ‘Africa rising’^{xx} will not only paint the continent in a positive light, but will bring about tangible

socioeconomic development and freedom. This argument for fierce interrogation and research into what and how this new narrative will assist or deter the continent's socioeconomic development and trajectory is informed by lessons of the past decades. As argued in the Inaugural Professorial Lecture, "Many countries in Africa faced severe economic difficulties in the 1980s as a result of the fall in demand for commodities. The resultant effects were that these countries resorted into borrowing from both private and government institutions in the global north. Inability to service the debt so incurred resulted in the debt crisis that still afflict some of the countries in Africa today." (Gumede, 2014:10)^{xxi}.

It is for reasons such as the ones covered above, amongst others, that this paper calls for present day African governments and citizens to critically engage with any new or developing narrative looking to explain Africa's socioeconomic development. Adebayo Olukoshi (1998)^{xxii}, among others, demonstrated that many of the problems such as those associated with SAP of the 1990s were a result of poor analysis of Africa's economies and undue pressures to conform to a certain narrative (i.e. the neo-liberal economic model) of how to operate the economy.

It is therefore important for a new form of African political leadership whether in scholarship, civil society and in government to constructively interrogate what this new narrative means in their different fields of work or existence. This interrogation can take many different forms and guises, but central to such analysis must be an eagerness to challenge established norms and theories in order to bring new thinking to subjects such as Economics and Finance. This latter point is critical to this paper's argument, as now even the established former neo-liberal economists have been questioning what used to be preached as fact. As Joseph Stiglitz, the leading proponent of the converted neoliberals indicates that "after the crisis broke,

policymakers relying on the models floundered. In the wake of the crisis, macroeconomists from various ideological backgrounds are now re-examining some of the discipline's dogmas, questioning what were thought to be infallible certainties, and stressing the importance of new knowledge" (Stiglitz et al, 2013:6)^{xxiii}. It cannot be stressed how important this admission is by individuals like Stiglitz who played a crucial role in the application of SAP and promoting orthodox economics, hence I am calling for a new type of political leadership narrative to start to be explored and allowed to challenge established economic orthodoxies.

In looking to challenge established norms or thinking and operation concerning not only the neo-liberal economic thought, but misunderstood African histories of development, an argument is also made that a new robust African agenda should be sealed. Such an agenda could be symbolically named a 22nd century agenda for Africa's development in which African intellectuals and the citizenry would be actively engaged with ideas concerned with reimagining the world economy anew.

The challenge of the suggested 22nd century agenda for Africa's development was spoken of by numerous thinkers such as Steve Biko, Kwame Nkrumah and many others but is best articulated by Toyin Falola when he argues that,

"Scholarship in Africa has been conditioned to respond to a reality and epistemology created for it by outsiders, a confrontation with imperialism, the power of capitalism, and the knowledge that others have constructed for Africa. The African intellectual does not write in a vacuum, but in a world saturated with others' statements, usually negative about its members and their continent. Even when this intelligentsia seeks the means to intrude itself into the modern world, modernity has been defined for it and presented to it in a fragmented manner." Falola (2004: 17)^{xxiv}

I have tried to briefly problematize the ‘Africa rising’ narrative, in the context of exploring whether the continent is experiencing the second coming of a new form of neo-liberal economic idea. If this is the case, I argue that the continent will need to stand ready and poised with a new and nuanced thinking African political leadership and approach. This political leadership must, for instance, be able to ascertain how best to utilise the continents natural resources and also rigorously transform the socioeconomic conditions through effective governmental policies and structures.

Brief conceptual reflections

There is no doubt that the various unpleasant experiences of slave trade, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism have combined to condition the mind of Africans to feel inferior and seemingly incapable of creative endeavour – this is not to say that such experiences must be the primary preoccupation and constrain the ability to determine destiny. As Karl Polanyi (1944)^{xxv} argues, experiences of slavery dehumanise and disempower the victims, even to succeeding generations. Frantz Fanon (1961)^{xxvi} has more to say about this^{xxvii}. As many have 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 wellbeing of Africans wherever they are^{xxviii}.

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 order, satisfaction with mediocrity, gullibility to vague political promises and leaders fanning the ember of nationalism, ethnicity and xenophobia, dependency on the West, or East (lately), for

development assistance, uncritical acceptance of exogenously scripted development strategies and general acquiescence-cum-susceptibility to neo-imperial designs.

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 (see for instance, Mpofu, 2013)^{xxix}. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:388)^{xxx} 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 Oloruntoba (2015:20)^{xxxi} argues that “unless Africa secures knowledge and economic autonomies from the hegemony of Euro-American controlled global capitalist order, the continent and its over one billion people will continue to occupy a peripheral position in the global scheme of things.”

The dominant approach has been the neo-liberal economic doctrine in which socio-economic development is defined by the West and in western terms. By following this paradigm, African leaders have failed to grasp the salience of ideological dominance, historical trajectories of the political economies of the dependent and micro-states that make up the continent and the reality of power relations that continue to define the way in which the West relates with the African continent. It is in this context that, over and above the moral consciousness that a former colleague has advanced, thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness are paramount.

Again, as various scholars have argued, the historical processes of state formation in Africa are different from that of the West, especially those of Europe. Differences 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 (Robinson, 2004^{xxxii}, Ake, 1981^{xxxiii}).

Differences also manifest in the ability of the state to mobilise 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 the transnational capitalist class.

In addition to other African centered epistemologies, the decolonial epistemic theory offers a useful interrogation of the condition Africans find themselves in, the causative elements in form of structures and institutions, human agency and importantly, the continuity of colonial legacies and the inherent contradictions in this system that obscure any possibility for transformation and development in its current form. Scholars of decolonial epistemic perspective have located the 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. These ‘foursome’ have been elaborated to explain the deliberate global imperial design of the West to keep Africa as a perpetual appendage through imposition of a self-styled notion of what is considered the ‘standard’ of behaviour, value, governance, knowledge, civilisation, institutions, nay, of being.

The decolonial epistemic perspective finds currency in Susan Strange’s idea of the internationalisation of production networks as an inevitable outcome of global capitalism, in which corporations seek outlets for cheap labours, higher returns on investments, freer regime of trade, investment and capital (Strange, 1994)^{xxxiv}. In tandem with Robinson’s idea of transnational capitalist class (TCC), 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 neo-imperial control of the supposedly independent states (Robinson, 2004)^{xxxv}.

Robinson (2004)^{xxxvi} highlights the intricate relationship that exists between the state and the global capitalist class in an age of globalisation. Under this construct, the state exists as a mere instrument of enforcement of neo-liberal reforms, policies and programmes, if necessary by violence. In this process, the interests of the members of the political class are secured through co-optation into the transnational capital class, kick-backs from multinational corporations and support for anti-people policies. Given the highly lucrative nature of what one can term political entrepreneurship that politics has come to assume, the political leaders seem hamstrung in pursuing a robust transformation agenda in Africa. 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^{xxxvii}, reconceptualised and made practical.

African Leadership

In short, different scholars state that leadership has to do with innate or acquired skills needed to manage, coordinate, facilitate and direct positive change. Also distilled in literature, leadership is viewed as a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. In my view, leadership also connotes responsibilities coupled with privileges. It would seem that our leaders think more about the privileges of being in high office. For instance, if you are the president, what responsibilities accompany that role? It seems obvious that a leader has to pursue improvements in well-being and or the advancement of the human condition. Moreover, a leader has to be the main focus or primary focus through which people can advance themselves or can be advanced.

Regarding African leadership, what is required is leadership that is centred on Afrocentric histories and African philosophies noting that historically there are multiple histories and philosophies in the African continent. There are different manners of knowledge and knowledge production. Moreover, Pan-Africanist orientations need to be taken into account while embarking on the further renewal of the African continent and the critical issue of unity. We ought not to describe African leadership without talking about African-centred approaches. African-centred approaches are primarily Afrocentric. Afrocentricity, effectively similar to Africanity and Africology, privileges the African experience, as MolefiKete Asante and Ama Mazama have explained. MolefiKete Asante (2007: 16-17)^{xxxviii} indicates that Ama Mazama 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”.

Leadership has to have respect for different cultures, while taking into account that cultures evolve and may change over time. A leader ought to contend with the reality that there are different cultures that could make work as a leader difficult. Thought leadership, as indicated earlier, is described as a leadership that is based on progressive ideologies and progressive beliefs and progressive orientations that have a significant and pragmatic impact appeal. In simple terms, thought leadership is a progressive leadership approach which is largely about, or mainly about, better understanding the challenges at hand. This has to be the starting point in order to recommend or suggest possible solutions for the problem. One has to better understand the phenomenon that one is dealing with.

Furthermore in the African context, the changes in governance systems in the African continent over the past five hundred years or so, has resulted in African leadership approaches being neglected or marginalised in the debates about leadership. We know that,

for instance, before colonialism there were particular leadership approaches and most of them involved women at the centre of those leadership approaches. Women had a strong influence on decisions that were taken but that is largely ignored given what has happened. In addition, the colonial experience and development of the post-colonial state have impacted on systems of leadership in African societies, many times in negative ways. So, we cannot discount the historical experience of colonialism and how that has impacted on leadership or various approaches to leadership in the African continent.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, the manner in which the post-colonial state has evolved has had its own negative implications, even in the post-independence era that the experience in itself has had implications or affected or affects the leadership approaches, the way they were understood. I also make a point that changes in African leadership approaches led to the attrition of the power base of traditional leaders in many instances. The example of AmaKhosi indicates that it has been affected by changes in leadership approaches over time. There has been an impact on their role or the kind of the powerbase that they had. This may very well be a positive thing but it is a point that we need to acknowledge. It may very well be that also it is a negative thing. There have also been shifts in power relations within societies particularly when looking at gender and age categories. There has been a changing role of women, as indicated earlier, including the youth. This has resulted in to new forms of leadership and these are just contextual issues that we may need to take into account.

Briefly looking at the history of leadership in the African continent, there have indeed been effective leaders as MolefiKete Asante (2015) discusses. The African continent has had robust thought leaders before colonialism and after colonialism, or even during colonialism. Some could be classified as great pre-colonial or early African thinkers or leaders. The post-colonial era too in Africa has had powerful nationalist thought leaders. Africa has had great

leadership and various parts of the African continent have been able to resist various imperial advances. There is a lot of inspiration that many people draw from the 1896 Adwa Victory in Ethiopia, the 1510 Khoi victory in what is now known as the Western Cape and the 1879 ImpiYaseSandlwana victory and many others.

Successful defence requires certain leadership qualities and skills, particularly when defending against very well armed settlers or colonialists. Moreover, there were also advanced knowledge production institutions in the African continent. The two that are normally highlighted are:Walata and Timbuktu in what we now know today as Mali. Prior to colonialism, there were very advanced knowledge production institutions in the African continent. This is the history that is not normally privileged. This proves that Africa has had great thought leaders which, of course, give comfort or motivation that such leaders can arise again. It also gives hope that Africa can indeed reclaim its lost glory and recover its stolen legacy. It is important to acknowledge though, as Tondi (2005:301)^{xxxix} puts it, that “European imperialists employed various strategies that were all intended to depersonalize and empty [us]...” We must also reclaim our tempered or damaged souls, as Ama Mazama would put it.

Political leadership

It is important to point out that this paper is not discussing African political leadership, as a concept that operates as a ‘top down approach’. Rather it contends that the notion of African political leadership is one that ultimately shepherds citizens’ socioeconomic interests, through governmental structures and nuanced socioeconomic and political policies/laws. This complex and challenging responsibility, has not always been executed to the level required by the African political leadership. As argued elsewhere, “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 peripheralization of our continent and our people.” (Gumede 2014:12)^{xl}.

It is for this reason that this paper argues for a new breed of African political leadership to be formed and encouraged to come to the fore. While this paper acknowledges past and present African political leaders like Shanadakete, Africanus Horton, Kwameh Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, NnamdiAzikiwe, Amilcar Cabral, Natotsibeni, Thabo Mbeki and many others, there is a need for a new generation of African political leadership especially in the context of 22nd century African agenda. The proposed new agenda, arguably, cannot flourish or fully come to the fore under the current paradigm of thinking and operation.

Yet, for this exploration and requisite actions to happen a nuanced form of African political leadership is required and it is for this and other reasons this paper argues that a new conversation about the future of African political leadership is needed. This paper has referred to the need for the continent to lay claim to the 22nd century, not out of error but rather a realization that the 21st century is slowly drawing to a close (eighty eight years away). Therefore the current and subsequent African political leadership needs to start planning for the next century, not just to lay the firm foundation for capturing it but to ensure that the 22nd century is definitely an African century.

The first step towards capturing the 22nd century is for the continent to engage in “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 five hundred years or so” (Gumede 2014:24)^{xli}. In addition, there is a need to address certain problems plaguing both the African citizenry and current

African political leadership. The problems referred to largely relate to lack of critical consciousness and or weak thought liberation.

As indicated earlier, in order to capture the 22nd century in a socioeconomic and political manner, the African political leadership and African citizens pursue a process of unlearning, relearning, unthinking and rethinking dominant thought patterns. The processes of unlearning and rethinking involve thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness.

An acknowledgement is made that the African political leadership much like African societies have suffered from learning and thinking incorrectly. Being able to achieve the unlearning and unthinking process concerning our histories and place in history, the continent will be able to more constructively deal with the already highlighted problems of orthodox economic planning and development.

Thought leadership

A point is made that African leadership should be based on African-centred orientations. The new generation of African leaders has to be grounded in African histories and civilization.

The issue of histories is emphasised a lot because the complex African past ought to be better understood. This does not mean that we want to get stuck on the past. In the main, African

leadership requires deliberate immersion in African archives, to grasp African

historiography. The new generation of African leaders must be intellectually oriented through deliberate search for relevant knowledge. Leadership must also be grounded in contemporary

contexts because leaders emerge amongst the citizens and are the product of their times (as

Historians would put it). The quality of leaders is of course a function of the societies from which they emerge.

An ordinary leader has to have the ability to listen, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to look forward, to manage and so forth, to achieve particular goals. A thought leader should be someone who possesses the right kind of knowledge to advance new thinking and inspire others as well enhances what needs to be achieved, positive change and advancing wellbeing. It has to be about improving the human condition. So, although leaders in general have to have the attributes of proper listening skills, effective communication and so forth, thought leadership entails possession of the right kind of knowledge. Such knowledge is sought after, the endeavour may even entail a review of ancient manuscripts in Walata and Timbuktu, reading various African scholarship on Africa before colonialism, African societies and their evolution. At minimum, there should be better understanding of those thought leaders, say Leo Africanus and Ibn Battuta, that have positively shaped narratives about Africa.

Thought leadership connotes a leadership orientation that is underpinned by unconventional ideology and approach. It is unconventional in the sense that one may disagree with the status quo. It may be controversial that you challenge what many think is the right way of doing things. Thought leadership has to be historically nuanced, culturally sensitive and contextually grounded.

Conclusion

Ultimately, leadership has to be about pursuing development. The Bandung Conference perspective of development, as captured in Ndlovu-Gatscheni (2012: 2)^{xlii}, is that “development is a liberatory human aspiration to attain freedom from political, economic, ideological, epistemological and social domination that was installed by colonialism and coloniality”. Claude Ake (1996)^{xliii} goes on to argue that development has to be about involving the people themselves instead of leadership thinking about what development is

and pursuing programmes that they consider to be advancing development. Development must involve the people themselves.

With regards to critical consciousness, another critical component for thought leaders, being critically conscious means that you fully understand the reality that you deal with, and of course taking appropriate action to address the oppressive elements of that reality, as Paulo Freire^{xliv} had put it. Critical consciousness should be linked to decolonising the minds of Africans. Moreover, as many others have argued, there is a need to rethink the languages (which do not originate in Africa) that we use as Africans and whether we could not, out of our own languages, choose one language as a common language for the whole of Africa. NgũgĩwaThiong'o (1993:41)^{xlv} goes a step further as he concludes one of his essays on languages, that "I for one would like to propose Kiswahili as the language for the world".

In conclusion, as the paper argues, knowledge production should be a critical factor in defining paradigms for African thought leadership, aimed at the further renewal of the African continent. For the African continent to move forward, to move forward faster, with the agenda of the African renaissance and the philosophy of pan-Africanism, critical consciousness and mentally liberated thought leaders are crucial – these are equally important for political leadership. Thus there is a need to psycho-socially free leaders, thought leaders, and also leaders that are critically conscious. The citizenry, particularly in the African continent, also needs to be critically conscious as well as mentally liberated in order to hold the leadership accountable. Thought leaders should be aware of their African histories, they must be ready to challenge known paradigms of current thought. They should be open to be shaped and corrected by critically conscious citizenry. Lastly, thought leaders should be key role-players in creating and disseminating knowledge.

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