Introduction

Traces of Pan Africanism and African Nationalism in Africa Today

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Reviewing these debates, I have been puzzled by their use of sweeping undefined terms such as African Values versus Western Values. It has seemed to me that it is assumed that there is agreement on their meaning when it becomes clear that there is no such universal acceptance of the content of such labels. It seems to me that attached to such a distinction there is a sentiment or spiritual mystique reminiscent of Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor's concept of negritude developed by Francophone West African thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s.

The assertion that there were great African philosophers and the developed capabilities of African people is borne out by written records and archeological discoveries. That does not of itself make African people unique. But it is a justifiable source of pride for people who are defined by the others as a homogeneous group of uncivilised others.

It seems that there is a belief among some African people that the diverse peoples of Africa are indeed a homogenous people with a unique set of African values. The key value is apparently human solidarity between people as against the divisive practices of white domination within western society (i.e. 'white society') and in relation to colonised peoples. But it is evident in modern times that there are clear divisions between individual people and peoples within various regions of Africa and between regions.

Belief in Pan-Africanism postulates that there could not have been wars between Africans before colonial subjugation by the western powers with their divisive value system. Hence the concept

of Pan-Africanism as a means to create unity in the face of an external oppressor: a phenomenon that Frantz Fanon sees as a passing essential identity. And so, the question must be asked: is it possible to attain and maintain the idea of a special African solidarity on the basis of being African?

Origins

Reading the history of the Pan-African movement it becomes clear that different proponents of a call to African Unity had different reasons for that call at different times. It is also necessary to distinguish between concepts such as African Nationalism in the different countries or even regions and Pan-Africanism relating to the whole continent. Then there are terms such as Africanist or 'blackist' which are used as qualifiers of African Nationalism in the sense that they insist on African being synonymous with black in its various shades of skin colour, excluding people of part-African descent or those who are not black, even if they have lived in Africa for generations. On the other hand, people of African descent who have been in the diaspora for generations are held to be African. Of course, people and groups of people are free to define themselves as they wish but that is different from saying that they are by birth all the same.

In outline, the history of Pan-Africanism as a movement is one of people of African descent in the diaspora seeking an identity in the face of oppression and imposed social and economic inequality as Africans. If they could have their own (home) country, they could regain their stature and independence as a people. The Pan-Africanist movement believed that if the peoples of Africa could be united they would be able to regain their independence.

Marcus Garvey a successful businessman and journalist in the Caribbean believed that if Africans in the diaspora could return to Africa and set up businesses they could redeem Africa from the colonisers and redeem themselves as Africans. W.E.B. du Bois, an African American and a Marxist, was sure that modern racism and the subjugation of black people was a direct result of capitalist labour relations, the quest for markets and raw materials and opportunities for enrichment by the owners of finance capital – the com-

bination of industrial and banking capital. For du Bois, simply creating Garvian businesses would change the faces of the exploiters from 'white' to 'black.' For Garvey, there was a kind of unifying mystique in blackness, while for du Bois, black unity was a means to an equitable society.

In South Africa in the period after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, a similar argument was raised by Black South Africans, which was given formal expression in the years from 1910 to 1912. The various tribes had been conquered, one by one, by the British during the 19th century. If they could come together, as they did in the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), they would be united and strong and regain their independence. The summons to the founding conference issued by the founding secretary of the SANNC, ka Isake Seme, made this point that by maintaining their divisions and conflicts between the various African social formations, they had been unable to resist the might of the British imperialist power.

Ultimately the call for 'unity in action' led to many diverse elements, despite sometimes pulling in opposite directions, bringing formal 'apartheid racism by law' to an end. But there were many divisions inside South Africa itself. Think of the collaboration of various 'homeland' leaders with the apartheid regime, for instance.

The Pan-Africanist assumption was and still is that a shared history and shared appearance as African would make unity a straightforward process. It is like saying that European wars should not have happened because the various people were fair skinned/white. But wars did happen: Danes against Swedes; the Thirty Years War and two World Wars, for example. Maybe there are factors other than skin colour that lead to differences between peoples, countries and leaders. Offhand, I can think of the search for markets, raw materials and power to strengthen one group, one class, one faction, or one group of nations with similar class interests against other groups.

One may add that before colonisation there were wars of expansion and conquest among African people.

Culture

Neither African Nationalism nor Pan-Africanism has achieved the unity they so desire as a lasting phenomenon. I have to disagree

with African Nationalists and Pan-Africanists who say that there is a single African culture that is shaped by the one original African language from which the present four to six main languages are derived.

I believe there are numerous cultures and that culture is more complex than language alone. Culture is shaped by the way people in society make their living and I cannot accept the assertion by Prof. Kwesi Prah in a lecture I recently attended, that there is one European culture expressed through their related languages. For instance, he said in a gross overstatement that grand opera is Italian and all Italians love grand opera. And there is one English culture because all people in England speak the same language! Anyone who has lived there knows that there are many dialects of English and many different cultures and subcultures. There is one Chinese culture expressed through their language, he said. But we know that in China there are large regional differences in the spoken language, even if most can read the pictographic writing and so can communicate with each other. More simply, one might ask if fisher folk have the same culture as farmers? And do they share this culture with all the people in all the industrial cities of China? There may be similar rites transmitted over generations but in broader terms we know that these groups of people react differently in interpersonal and group relationships.

Professor Prah also stated in that lecture that, despite South Africa having put an end to the last bastion of colonialism in Africa with the defeat of apartheid and despite its exceptionally rich mixture of cultures, languages, religions and people of diverse origins, Africans cannot take their rightful place in world society until they recover their African identity. Their African identity cannot be regained until they regain their African language. He does concede that in Africa there are about 4 to 6 languages with many dialects, but then asserts that there is one essential African culture that is expressed through their language. (Note the play between singular and plural, here.) Prah rejects the idea that there are numerous African cultures. This position, defended in many of these contributions, is reminiscent of Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor's concept of *negritude* developed by Francophone West African thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s.

Tradition and Traditional

In South Africa, we have a situation where African traditional leaders are in conflict with our institutions of democratic government established by our constitution. By insisting on their so-called traditional powers they assert that they should have supremacy over the Tribal Trust Territories and their people. There is a Bill before parliament which would give them powers over local courts and families and especially over women that modern women reject outright. Indeed, such powers would conflict directly with the democratic rights of all people regardless of race gender, religious belief, etc. A fundamental question to be asked is, to what traditional rights do traditional leaders refer, if these 'traditional rights' are closely bound up with cultural attitudes? Are we speaking of their rights in pre-colonial days, when there was a strong measure of democratic control by members of the group who could simply walk away from their leader or replace him (and occasionally her)? Or are we talking about the so called traditional authoritarian rights of traditional leaders incorporated through Lugardian indirect rule into colonial administrative structures, or those encouraged in the apartheid regime's ethnic homelands?

Let us consider some elements of African culture: clitoridectomy is not universal in Africa; paternalistic attitudes to women, while widespread, are opposed to democratic development, especially in relation to powers of elected bodies and the rights of women, but in modern industrial societies are rejected by many people, both female and male. Such comments by critics are rejected as deriving from a colonialist view on such issues and not to the essence of Africanism! By inference, that concept is always defined in a way that rejects criticism.

Human Rights

In issues of human rights there are deep divisions across Africa. Some few years ago, shortly after the new South Africa was born, President Mandela demanded on grounds of human rights that Nigeria's President should stop the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 others who were leaders of the Ogoni people who demanded

that Shell Petroleum should be prohibited from despoiling the Niger Delta through oil spills. People have a right to protest. (The Nigerian Government had given considerable financial assistance to the ANC during the liberation struggle. But, dependent as they were on oil revenues they charged Saro-Wiwa and others with offences that enabled them to be sentenced to death.) The Nigerian President was at a meeting with President Mandela and gave his word that the Saro-Wiwa group would not be executed. They were executed; the very next morning, the 10th November 1995, and Nelson Mandela was angry that he had been so directly misled.

The point of this story is that, at that time, even to speak of human rights in Africa meant not even being heard. Since then we have the African Charter on Human and People's rights, the Rights of Children and Against Abuse and the Robben Island Treaty against Torture and other agreements. We now have a dialogue on these topics and, even though we as a country are often in breach of aspects of these charters (e.g. torture by the SAPS), we try to promote these ideas.

Traces of Pan-Africanism in practice

South Africa is a gateway for trade, ideas and capital, and works through the structures of the African Union and has deployed its probably most effective cabinet Minister in the free era, Dr Dlamini Zuma, as Chair of the AU Commission which is the secretariat to the AU assembly. South Africa also works with the structures of the Southern African Development Council (SADC). This regional organisation includes Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Though offering its former President Mbeki as a mediator South Africa has not been able to stop the excesses of violence and conflicts between African States and within African States such as Ivory Coast; Rwanda, DRC and Zimbabwe. South Africa also provides peace keeping military elements when conflicting parties and countries have agreed peace terms but need time for implementation.

South Africa and the SADC have been unable to stop the political excesses of President Mugabe's ruling party in Zimbabwe. The

SADC also tolerates the absolutist King of Swaziland as the Convener or head of the Security and Democracy Committee of SADC despite his having imprisoned his political and trade union opposition. In part this is a result of the OAU and now the AU policy of not permitting the change of government or the change of boundaries by force of arms. In other words, the arbitrary boundaries imposed by the colonial powers that divided related peoples, shall be maintained.

In addition, South Africa takes the view that internal political disputes can only be settled by the conflicting groups within a country. The imposition of a settlement by outsiders, giving precedence to one or the other group, is a recipe for continued conflict. Historically, the colonial powers used armed force to impose their will to suit their strategic needs and the wishes of finance capital without regard to the developmental needs of the people or their countries. This South Africa declines to do. For this reason, South Africa, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, has led the opposition to military interventions to effect 'regime change'. In the case of Libya, Nato powers deliberately ignored the limits placed on the intervention by the relevant Resolution of the Security Council. The chaos that has ensued is a direct consequence of that intervention.

The SADC had a tribunal to uphold human rights but this was dissolved under pressure from Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Associations of lawyers, and other professionals and parliamentarians have been established across Africa. In terms of development, the African Development Bank has the task of financing infrastructure to encourage the development of intra and inter regional trade. The South Africa state-owned Development Bank of Southern Africa plays a similar role.

The New Economic Policy for African Development, largely driven by President Mbeki, was an integral part of his vision of an African Renaissance. Among the elements of this concept was the establishment of an African Parliament with its seat in Midrand in South Africa. At present, it has no legislative powers and is a consultative body. It has 265 members from 53 countries in Africa, but excluded Morocco over its refusal to give freedom to Western Sahara. (Presumably with the coming into existence of South Sudan there will be another 5 members in due course.)

Because it is not enough simply to talk about policies, practical steps have been taken to enhance unity between African countries. Trade harmonisation requires harmonisation of laws such as laws of contract; on customs and other levies, and multilateral trade agreements. Much was reported during President Mbeki's first term of office but there was less focus on these matters during his second term and since then. This may have been due to South Africa being seen in some countries as the new imperialist neo-colonial power on the continent.

We should not overlook the significance for Pan-African solidarity of President Mbeki successfully persuading certain African presidents not to use their power to make themselves 'Presidents for Life' but to step down after their constitutionally permitted two terms of office.

South Africa also seeks to foster regional African trade and intra African trade as a means of strengthening the continent in its world relations. Successive Presidents have taken numerous business people with them on state visits in Africa to forge closer links. But in so doing, this perpetuates the role of finance capital. I see little choice but to do this while trying to prevent its excesses. South Africa has played a markedly anti colonial and anti-imperialist role but, caught up as we all are in a globalised world economy, even though that means allowing the investors to exploit our people, our mineral and other natural resources, we generally accept the need for foreign investment and trade if this is needed to allow our children to go to school wearing shoes, having eaten breakfast, to graduate and eventually find or create jobs!

Conclusion

To conclude, I suggest that South Africa's continued role in Africa will depend on a number of factors. Foremost is its own success in building democracy within South Africa and achieving economic growth, not only with poverty alleviation but in achieving greater equality between the haves and have-nots, especially since the vast majority of the have-nots are ethnic Africans.

Economic developments - especially in Central and East Africa, with the construction of major transport infrastructure - will in the

long term reduce those regions' dependence on South Africa as the physical gateway for imports and exports. These developments have the potential for democratic political structures to develop, but South Africa as the leading country in the democratisation of Africa must be vigilant.

I also believe that the growth of interregional trade and exchanges in all fields of education, of law and culture will in time develop a mutual tolerance of diversity in culture and social practice, enabling the dream of a closer relationship based on mutual respect and human solidarity to be realised, based on lived reality, making possible greater African and Pan-African unity.

This trend to African solidarity is essential if the expectation - that this is the African century - is to become a reality, with development not for a small elite but for all the peoples of Africa.

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