

## Abstract

### **Lest We Forget: Africa Day and Freedom Dreams**

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Lest we forget; on 25 May 1963, Kwame Nkrumah told 32 heads of state gathered in Addis Ababa during the inaugural ceremony of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU):

***Without necessarily sacrificing our sovereignties, big or small, we can here and now forge a political union based on defence, foreign affairs and diplomacy and a common citizenship, an African currency, an African monetary zone and an African Central Bank. We must unite in order to achieve the full liberation of our continent ... Only on a continental basis shall we be able to plan the proper utilisation of all our resources for the full development of our continent.***

At Berlin in 1884/5, Africa was dis-membered. At Addis in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah was calling for Africa's re-membering. His vision of re-membering entailed a balance between state sovereignty and the sovereignty of the people. We now know that some greedy African leaders, in cohorts with Western detractors of a united Africa, shot down this vision. They chose full-blown state sovereignty over the sovereignty of the people. Yet, sixty years on, the vision of a united Africa and the sovereignty of the people lives on.

Lest we forget; in 2002 the OAU mutated into the AU. The professed vision was that of 'an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and assuming a dynamic role in global affairs'.

Sixty years on, is Africa united and integrated today? When will the sovereignty of the people take root? Is Africa peaceful, prosperous, and fully

liberated? When will the dream of a common citizenship and a common monetary zone come to life? Are Africa's resources properly utilised and benefiting its citizens? Is the continent fully developed? Are we, for real, living in a post-racial and post-colonial Africa and world?

While we acknowledge the giant steps made towards the reimagination and remaking of Africa since the attainment of political independence, a lot still needs to be done. The hard realities of our time – poverty, disease, racism, xenophobia, corruption, unemployment, violence, *et cetera*, are a constant reminder that coloniality is not over, but all over. This is where the resurgent and insurgent decolonisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century becomes an important antidote to fulfil dreams of independence and to complete the incomplete decolonisation project of the 20th century. The chase and search for utopic dreams of the future is not easy, yet it must be pursued.

### *The African idea of Africa*

Lest we forget; the OAU and AU were conceived as both institutions and epistemic iterations for the promotion of the African idea of Africa. Africa Month and Africa Day are all about the changing African idea of Africa. There is, therefore, need to disrupt the external, colonial, and foreign idea of Africa. To promote and appreciate knowledge in and from Africa is the only, and probably best, way to engender the African idea of Africa. Ndlovu-Gatsheni tells us that there is no shortage of ideas about the African idea of Africa, and genealogies of this include intellectual traditions or movements or philosophies such as Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, African personality, African socialism, African humanism, black consciousness, Pan-Africanism, African renaissance, black feminism, to the resurgent and insurgent decoloniality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Drawing from and building on these traditions is the only and best way to promote and appreciate knowledge in and from Africa, and to centre Africa as a place of knowing.

The President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, once remarked, "Africa's story has been written by others; we need to own our problems and solutions and write our own story." This resonates with the bold declaration by former Haitian Ambassador and diplomat to the United States, Jean Casimir as he writes in his book, *The Haitians: A Decolonial History*:

***My position of strength comes from observing the outside world through Haitian eyes. When I do the opposite, I place myself in a position of inferiority by accepting the definition put in place by the gaze of another.***

Similarly, our strength as Africans comes from observing the outside world through African eyes and lenses. We need to know where we start telling our stories, for a story that begins in the wrong place will never arrive at the right conclusions. It is the theory of 'from here to there, and there to here', as propounded by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his tour de force, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*.

*'Seek ye first the knowledge kingdom': Turning over a new leaf*

One big proposition for arriving at Africa's freedom dreams. If current challenges for Africa and the world are a sign of an exhausted political project, it means that if we change its knowledge base, the rest will automatically change. That Nkrumah's 'seek ye first the political kingdom and the rest will follow' did not come to fruition, is an invitation to the alternative – 'seek ye first the knowledge kingdom and the rest will be added'. Changing the knowledge project, shifting its geography and biography, and 'seeking ye first the knowledge kingdom', demands that we not only promote and appreciate knowledge in and from Africa, but that we privilege and centre it. We now know that knowledge frames reality and not the other way round. After all, Walter Mignolo persuasively argues that "all living organisms need to know in order to live and need to live in order to know, for without knowing, there is no living, and without living there is no knowing".

Lest we forget; Africa Month and Africa Day are moments for reigniting Africa's freedom dreams. #ONEAFRICATOGETHERFOREVER.