

### **1. What does Africa Month mean to you?**

In Chapter 20 of Chinua Achebe's magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika opined that colonialism "put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart". Africa Month is a timely reminder of the things that held us together, that hold us together, and that can still hold us together in the future. If you spend too much time on social media nowadays, you might be forgiven for forgetting that the things that bind us together are, in fact, more than those that divide us. Africa Month serves – at least in part – as a reminder of this. We have a beautiful shared continental heritage, something I came face to face with when I travelled to Ghana, Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, and so on. The beauty of Africa, warts and all, is positively uplifting. There is still more work to be done, because that knife that Achebe spoke about is still there, in the heart of what it means to be African, but the foundations for huge shifts are already there. Africa has the world's youngest population (70% of the people in 'sub-Saharan' Africa, for instance, are under the age of 30). This is the basis for thinking and believing that the 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to Africa, as timing and opportunities align. But the demographic dividend, timing, and opportunity are not the whole story. One also needs an awareness of things that have held us together, and Africa Month helps with that. I wish we had more conversations about this.

### **2. How can we promote knowledge from Africa?**

There is no single answer about how to promote African knowledge. There are many viable approaches. One of the ways, I suspect, is by having more structured generative conversations

about the things that hold us together. If, for instance, you scan histories of the mid-1980s in South Africa, and then fast-forward to crime and court reporting today, the trope of so-called 'black-on-black' violence is amplified and constant. Yet you never hear much about black-on-black deliberation and black-on-black thought, dialogue, and conversation. Why not? Why must black-on-black violence be more salient than its opposite, black-on-black deliberation? So, there is much need for a vocation of talking together about ourselves, and making this a staple of how we live together. I don't think that we have done enough to understand, at scale, how we hurt each other and also help each other on a day-to-day basis. It is not OK to be the wilful tools of others' agendas, and it does not help to just complain either. Analyses of how harmful capitalist and colonial modernity has been to Africa must not be for its own sake – it must also be accompanied by actual work that we do for ourselves. That work must happen in our communities, leveraging the archive – both the historical and the daily archive – that we have. That, I think, is where we must always start – with the people. Knowledge is all around us, and we are the rightful experts. In 2015, one South African university brought a rock-star French theorist, probably paying him large sums of money in the process, to lecture South Africans about inequality. This is absurd. South Africa should be producing theorists of inequality by the dozens to teach the world about this phenomenon and what to do about it – because here we live with inequality and are surrounded by it. Because global knowledge flows ought to be pluri-directional, I am OK with the European theorists coming to talk about whatever they think they are experts in, but in the same vein you must also see Africans doing the same. It cannot just be the same old paradigm of monocular knowledge that privilege Eurocentric positions, aetiologies, and starting points.

In 2019, I supervised a master's student whose dissertation on service delivery protests in informal settlements contemplated whether violence was a form of communication. When it came to the theory chapter, we searched in vain for an organic, viable theory on violence from South Africa. We could not find any, despite the readily available local archive of violence and harm

spanning more than 300 years. The student ended up settling for Slavoj Žižek (a Slovenian who philosophises about violence in the Eastern European context of the collapsing Soviet Union), Michel Foucault (a Frenchman who thinks about violence in the context of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European prisons and clinics, etc.), and Antonio Gramsci (an Italian Marxist who reflects on violence in the context of Mussolini's fascist Italy) – all of which are fine, but seem odd to use as starting points for thinking about violence in the Thembelihle informal settlement! While the student received a distinction for his study, there is a disservice that the theoretical frameworks and the experts do not come from Africa where the important phenomena have been taking place at scale for the longest time. This, I believe, is what must shift.

My own work, where I have set up the emerging field of Apartheid Studies – which treats the notion of 'apartheid' as a paradigm, theoretical framework, and methodology – is one small example of attempts to propose viable theoretical frameworks from the Global South (the same way theorists in South America leveraged their histories to come up with the decolonisation and decoloniality family of theories, and theorists from the Indian subcontinent set up postcoloniality and subalternity [albeit influenced by Gramsci], and so on). Much can be done, much still needs to be done, and Africans are getting there. Once again, Africa Month helps us refresh settings!