

The Future of Pan Africanism

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CEO's Speech for the Centre of African Studies University of Edinburgh

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*“Just as strength lies in a unified policy and
action for progress and development, so the
strength of the imperialists lies in our
disunity”*

Greetings thinkers, intellects and scholars. I greet you with humility and reverence in the name of our beloved ancestors and liberators. It's an absolute pleasure to spend this time with you and share my thoughts, some of which you may agree with, find totally alien, or wish to challenge. However please bear with me as I try to build a vision and road map of a Pan Africanism which is fit for the 21st Century.

The number three represents a natural order and cycle of both the existing and non-material aspects of life. Whether we talk about the principle of life, death, and resurrection, or the sun, moon and stars, or justice, freedom and equality, I want you to begin thinking in threes.

When the missionaries, anthropologists and explorers first came to Africa, their mandate was to Christianise, civilise, and commercialise – three Cs. And there's no question that we're in a unique time in history, a time where our future will be the degree in which we can harness and shape this global awakening and resistance into a program of sustainable change. It's a time in which we should all be working towards the ultimate aim of total liberation of the African continent and her people.

I assert that we are in the third and final stage of that liberation struggle. In the 1800s, we had the abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slavery, in the 20th century we had independence, beginning with Ghana in 1957. The third stage is one of struggle against the subtle and structural symptoms of a European disease called racism and capitalism which Kwame Nkrumah called neo-colonialism.

This third stage is one of pain, sacrifice, and war; and the spirit of Pan Africanism is being revived as a tool to fight this war all across the globe. Also, Pan Africanism is the only ideology I know that speaks centrally and explicitly on the importance of unity for Africans and by Africans. It is the single principle in which the force of our strength cannot be ignored.

To reference Kwame Nkrumah again:

“Just as strength lies in a unified policy and action for progress and development, so the strength of the imperialists lies in our disunity”

So, the three questions are:

- What does the landscape currently look like and how far have we come?
- What is the battle plan (from here)?
- What is my/our role in this war?

So before we answer those questions let's first take a step back. Let us picture a global landscape without the ancestors like Marcus Garvey, Jomo Kenyatta and Thomas Sankara. Let's go back even further to the plantations of the Caribbean, to people like Paul Bogle, Sam Sharpe or Toussaint L'Overture. Imagine they, with the convictions we feel today, ignored what was deep in their soul. I imagine the same convictions then as we feel now, of creating a free and equal world, where the rights of Africans are

upheld as every other human being on God's earth. What if they walked away from that, or were paralysed through apathy and fear? You and I could not talk of freedom. We may well have still been in chains, in the mines or fields somewhere, digging to feed the greed of Europe. That's the picture without a Pan African agenda. It is because of their blood shed that we stand independently, and it is the road they carved for us that we must continue to lay stone upon for the next generation to experience true freedom. We must realise that the future of Pan Africanism is in our hands. Or, as Ras Makonnen would put it, it is the Pan Africanism "within" that burns inside everyone here today that is the future.

So how do we build? Well, this is what I teach at our workshops for The Centre:

It is a model, framework or pillars in which we can begin constructing the guiding principles to forge a Pan African world order:

There are again 3 'Cs':

1. Consciousness;
2. Community; and
3. Corporate institutions.

Let's take each one in isolation:

The first issue is one of consciousness, because everything is and emanates from the super, sub and primary conscious mind. In simple terms is, and there has always been, a war going on for your mind.

Another Kwame Nkrumah quote encapsulates the premise behind winning this battle:

“Revolutions are brought about by men who think as men of action, and act as men of thought”.

This is the statement that motivated us to build The Centre. It is our attempt to develop what he called the “intellectual vanguard”. He believed in the power of an awakened class of intellectuals to lead revolution. How else does one acquire the wisdom, knowledge and understanding but by the personal study and development of self in order to repair, restore and heal? In other words we must decolonise our minds and free ourselves from self-hatred to become African nationalists. That is not to condemn traditional and western institutional studies or education. However, it should be seen as a means to an economic end that forms part of your consciousness, not be the entire basis of your consciousness. Remember, it was a European education system, and hegemony that erased our racial identity, along with our racial pride and dignity. We must believe that we have the social capital, social currency and equity in being unequivocally African.

When I say African or black nationalism it perhaps conjures up imagery of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and they seem to have become dirty words. So for clarification, I am not talking about some divisive pseudo division of nationalism that is hostile and oppressive towards white people. It is not reverse racism to make ourselves feel good. What I am actually referring to is practising, in our real lives, this statement made by Marcus Garvey:

“The black skin is not a badge of shame, but a glorious symbol of national greatness”.

“Not because I was born in Africa but because Africa was born in me”

– another famous Kwame Nkrumah quote:

Moving onto the second ‘c’ – the second ‘c’ is ‘community’, and is about working to achieve community cohesion. Strong community cohesion is built on strong family

structures. I have children, and it's the number one responsibility I have as an adult man. Yet almost half of black children in Britain are being raised by single parents, 48% of black Caribbean and 36% of black African families are one parent households.

Strong family units foster psychologically balanced and healthy children. That is why we focus so much on relationship education at The Centre, because the children born out of those choices and culture are more likely to face economic, social and emotional disadvantage.

While it is great that we all march for justice and are part of social movements, the first job is to be man and woman of a stable and loving home. It is out of that foundation we serve the wider, non-familial community. What takes places on a local scale can then be replicated on a national scale, and an international scale.

In those community based actions and agendas, I include campaigns for gender equality and supporting women's rights. I further include penalties and policy reforms for absent parents, restrictions to the consumption of an explicit hyper-normalised media culture, compulsory psychotherapy and relationship education, especially when our children begin secondary school. I also advocate rights of passage programs for black boys in particular. All run by the community.

Fundamentally, it will be from strong family structures that we rebuild, and it will be through education and development programs, through encouraging entrepreneurship, mentoring and group economics that we tackle some of the hurdles faced in the diaspora of Britain right now. Challenges like having three times the unemployment rate of our white counterparts (15% – black as opposed to 5% – white). By raising children that appreciate the value of an educational opportunity, and by instilling a solid educational foundation we offer our children the skills to move past “self exclusion” from the middle and upper classes of this country, as Africans.

We do ourselves a massive disservice by neglecting one fundamental and universal truth – that the fruits of our lives stem from the tree of the family home, the roots of which run deep into a culture whether that culture is negative or affirming to who we are as human beings.

In the last of the three 'c's we'll look at today, we look to our corporate institutions.

When we do this, we need to divide it into two parts:

1. Corporate institutions based here, in the UK, or other host nations; and
2. African corporate institutions.

In the African continent, it is arguably an issue of form, in the UK, an issue of reform.

Starting with the UK, if we look at the landscape and ask ourselves which, if any, of the institutions we have, are racist?

1. Police and law enforcement

The unlawful and disproportionate deaths of black people by police or in police custody shook me deeply when someone I knew personally (Leon Briggs) died in the care of the Luton and Bedfordshire police force. We also have Mark Duggan, Sean Rigg, Smiley Culture to name others. And that is without even touching on what is happening in North America. Not only is it the deaths, it is the lies and cover ups, the smear campaigns and familiar racist (but often inaccurate) narrative of the hyper-aggressive black boy that reinforce the implicit bias and aggressions we experience in wider society.

2. The health system

We pay our taxes into this system (as well as the one above), so we have a vested interest to ensure the provision of adequate services and protection from misdiagnoses

and racial profiling. Depending on which research you believe, black people are 9-17% more times likely to be diagnosed with and treated for mental illness.

3. Prisons

Black people are said to be 10% of the prison population in the UK, whilst only making up 3% of the population. This is disproportionate on the numbers alone and suggests something deeper is happening within the criminal justice system.

4. Education

When it comes to learning about black history and discourse the experiences of what is happening at SOAS as we speak comes to mind. They are campaigning to decolonise their curriculum. Professors censoring students from writing about authors like Walter Rodney and Steve Biko. There is the recent 'Why is my professor white?' campaign and the row over King Leopold's statue in Oxford.

The point here is that our institutions are clearly failing us, and badly, and we have a lot of work to do on the human rights and equality front to dismantle some of these structures.

Organisations like Black Activists Rising Against Cuts have developed a comprehensive policy and strategy document for the eradication of racism in Britain by 2025. Also, Professor Andrews is launching the first Black Studies Degree program in Europe. This is incredible work, and testament to the graft and labour that has Pan Africanism at its core.

Finally, we must also look at corporate institutions on the African continent. We cannot forget our responsibility to our mother, who also happens to be the mother of all humanity.

Having visited several times, the issue here is one of sovereignty, structure and economic development. I say sovereignty because a lot of the constitutions arising from independence came with oppressive restrictions or conditions (for instance, the 14 states that are still paying colonial tax to the French treasury, making up 40% of the French national reserves). This must end. I could also give the example of Jamaica and the IMF to emphasise this point – the right honourable Norman Manley spoke very openly of the financial bondage that the IMF imposed on farming and agricultural development in Jamaica between 1959 – 1962. It merely demonstrates that true freedom and sovereignty cannot exist when another still owns your commodities and land.

Logically, we must ask how a developing nation can lift itself from poverty and develop an infrastructure for trade on a level playing field with the rest of the world, except through ownership of its resources and means of production?

Yes, there are a number of problems and obstacles we could tease out from a question like this, but the point is that we must challenge the institutions in place to overcome the barriers which stand in the way of progress and development.

There are structural problems with roads, machinery, factories and schools, and yes. This raises the issue of foreign capital and foreign direct investment, which must surely offer the right conditions and interests for the citizens of that nation. Those nations must say no to development contracts where there is no minimum quota for local workers being recruited from the community, as an example.

Further questions arise from this – is there a genuine fit for purpose education system across all (rural) of Africa, in which access to training and skills can adequately produce labour from outside the major cities?

Reports are that 6 or 10 African nations have the highest GDP growth in the world, but who's benefitting from that growth? Where is the equity really going? Who owns and controls the diamond mining fields of South Africa? Who controls the oil and mineral wealth of Nigeria? Why can't our nations nationalise their industries to control and own the land and soil under their feet?

Economic development is high on the agenda of the African Union. In fact they've just finished their 28th conference in Addis. Now, for all its flaws, the AU is the only globally formed and recognised political union with a Pan African mindset and agenda. It is easy and comfortable to be cynical, but until we have another, we must back Agenda 2063. This is their strategic framework to transform the continent over 50 years, and speaks of aspirations for a peaceful, secure and prosperous Africa.

I am encouraged by the political will of the 54 nations who have signed up. We can see that in the plans for a single African passport, creating free movement of people and social mobility throughout Africa. It is our premier institution right now, and there is a (albeit a sometimes stuttering) plan to create economic unity via the African Central Bank, the African Investment Bank and African Monetary Fund. Let us back those plans.

It's may take a while, but the undoing of the partition and state boundaries originating from the infamous 'scramble for Africa' are being softened in favour of devolution and an African super state. Let's renew the idea that while European politics is about power, African politics should be about people. This was the dream of people like Sekou Toure and Patrice Lumumba, and to a small degree that dream is beginning to actualise.