

Freedom is what you discover, and not what is given: A discussion on African need for introspective self-rediscovery

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One of America's former President Lincoln said, 'Give me liberty or death'. This has become one of the cornerstones of American political and civil liberty ever since. Freedom has been the basis for which some of the world-renowned faiths were born even though some subverted the freedom they espoused over the years. Democracy, as a contemporary political model, has become popular because of its tenet on freedom. What makes freedom an ideal concept for society is that freedom is the engine of human capacity and potential. Where people are not free, certainly, there has been observed pervasion of underdevelopment, poverty, and sometimes high crime among such societies. What has inspired this writing is that after a period of observation and studies across varied social contexts, I have realised that freedom is what you discover, and not what you're given. This article discusses what this implies for social and national development across the world.

What is freedom?

The Oxford Dictionary defines freedom as 'the condition of being free; independence; frankness; outspoken; exemption from defect or duty'. Taking the first meaning, it would be interesting if we can understand the word 'free'. The same Dictionary explains free as 'not a slave, not in the power of another or others; etc'. We find that when Lincoln inspired Americans to insist on freedom, he simply meant a pursuit of an American state that is self-determinant, and its citizens aren't under unnecessary control in the course of state formation. America at that time has many slaves and many of the people have come from diverse European backgrounds. The pursuit of better political development to sustain democracy is essential as integrated states could work only under circumstance that fits into the condition of self-expression culture-wise, politically, and religiously. To achieve this goal democracy became the political system that has been found to provide the platform for the self-expression of a people not under tyranny or autocracy nor colonised.

Democracy itself has derived from the Greco-Roman (Athenian) *Demos* has its own weakness at that time for not being wholly democratic (Blackwell 2003). The exclusion of a section of gender based upon wrong socio-cultural perceptions couldn't have been total democracy. Today the evolution of democracy has reached its ideal stage where even the right of children is essential in policy debates and political formation. Democracy and sovereignty have apparent differences when it comes to issues of freedom. People can be a sovereign collective in a state, but within the state, there may not be freedom. During the medieval period, Germanic and Franco-Gallic states attained their sovereignty from the Papal Empire but it didn't translate automatically into individual and intra-state freedom or liberty. The eventual freedom at that time had to be achieved at a severe cost by violent revolutions across Europe. Despite Europeans' own experience and their taste of freedom, that wasn't replicated in their territorial expansion and colonization. It is unfortunate the quest for more wealth and resources to feed the

European world resulted in adverse democratic policies that circumscribed the freedom of other people elsewhere. The next section looks at the context of circumscribed freedom through colonization and its consequences for post-modern states in sub-Saharan Africa and their *given* freedom. The focus therefore is on discovered freedom which is tantamount to a condition of self-rediscovery or self-realisation.

A *given* freedom to sub-Saharan African states

After the Second World War, many African colonies realized the essence of freedom to be independent from European control. The ensuing liberation protests and wars against European colonialists, as many literatures agree, were to secure African states' freedom for the purpose of self-determination and development. Some of these demands became inevitable as Africa and other non-Western states in Asia were left out of the blueprint of the Marshall Plan for Europe's reconstruction to create a market for the American economy.

Colonization has created in Africa non-indigenous patterns of social development that have been segregationally, highly elitist, and parasitic. Colonization came on two wings which have been economic and religious. Both have their greater long-term devastating effect compared to the short-term visible ones such as banking education which only prepares the local citizens to serve European economic and religious expansionism. Available evidence shows that European economic expansionism wouldn't have been excessively undermining in Africa should Africans have had their freedom by not being under Europeans' absolute control by gun power. We can also infer that some harm wasn't inevitable, but the repair would've been easier without total political control. This has been observed by Wangari Maathai (2009) that:

Such was the legacy of colonialism in the newly independent states of Africa: it left the African people chained to new forms of oppression. Throughout the first half of the twentieth Century, many colonial administrations had deliberately kept local Africans undereducated and prevented them access to the professional classes in order to avoid unnecessary competition and to ensure that the new managers of the state could not lead their own. This helped maintain Africans' dependency.

The second aspect pertains to what can be described as religious imperialism. This, in particular, has had the gravest impact due to the psychological and spiritual effects of proselytisation as innocuous insidious violence that hinders doctrinal influences that have inhibited "actual somatic and mental realisations...below...potential realisation" (Galtung 1969).

There are two types of proselytization: voluntary and imposed. Many Westerners are voluntarily converting to Asian faiths without any form of calculated social pressure. However, tactical proselytization, which capitalizes on people's helpless economic conditions such as conversion for food and secondhand clothing, is harmful to a person's self-realization potential.

In Africa, Europeans often make assumptions and rely on untested anecdotal information, leading to prejudice against other belief systems due to their limited knowledge about Africa and the southern world. The African indigenous belief system, its cosmology, and some values are known to hold accurate perceptions about the universe. Preserving such ideas could contribute to preventing environmental

degradation and the impending global warming tragedy. Not only that, but Africans would have advanced in improving their circumstances through an effective merging of contextual experiences and lessons from encounters with Europeans. The manner of disregard for essentiality and recognition of what Africans have over centuries built as their relative truth resulted in African systems suppression through unfair misjudgment and misguided imposition of imported 'truth'.

The issue of the previous European world position on arrogating 'absolute truth' to doctrines deduced from Judeo-Christian Scriptures did not only create the entrenched enmity between the Western world and the Arabic world, but in Africa, it was a complete subjugation and imposition of Eurocentric template of faith. The ensuing 'syncretism' an incongruous practice of two-belief systems or concepts, or total abdication of African belief occurring on African soil has posed psychological, development and identity crisis. This type of crisis is nevertheless caused by violence or system disruption (Galtung 1969; Capra 2003). Today, in spite of apparent discrepancies in some of these 'absolute truth' literatures, emerging scientific evidence by modern hi-tech disprove some of the claims in some of the imposed 'truth' literatures. The Protestants 'absolutism' position has been more offensive to African systems and very confrontational using its colonial clout to wreak 'spiritual victory' over the helpless armless African.

After all, as Klaus Nürnberg (1999) puts it, "...truth is not the same as a set of doctrines which one has to accept, whether they make sense or not. Truth cannot be imposed; it has to establish its validity in human consciousness". The imposition and suppression of African consciousness have in-depth implications among today's Africans, and politicians are disillusioned with their 'destiny' borrowing Barak Obama's parlance. For such an eminent person with African descent cautioning that 'Africa should take control of their destiny' shows a sense of lostness not just disillusionment. Dwelling on Obama's polite rebuke brings home the hope that something can be done. Much of Obama's words redirect Africa to be introspective on its potentials, heritage and history. The challenge now is for Africa to rediscover its lost freedom in terms of history and value systems. In the same vein Maathai (2009) laments that,

For five centuries, the outside world has been telling Africans who they are. In much the same way as happened with the Aborigines in Australia, the native peoples of North America, and the indigenous peoples of Amazonia, Africans were told that their societies were backward, their religious traditions sinful, their agricultural practices primitive, their systems of governance irrelevant, and their cultural norms barbaric.

The connotation deduced from Maathai's cry is that Africa is still in the shackles of external forces without any sense of owning herself. But the point we all need to understand is that freedom if it is an offer is bogus, but the reality is that freedom should be discovered. I mean functional freedom isn't something somebody dishes out. Functional freedom is determined by existential control that enables questions such as: who we are? Why we're here? Where are we coming from? Where are we going? etc. Apart from that any dished-out 'freedom' leads to just a refraction of the *status quo*, paternalism, and appendicitis relationship that impoverishes the bottom level and enriches the upper lords.

The issue then regards why Africans are stagnant and so helpless in terms of improving the African circumstances. The best explanation can be that disillusioned people hardly come to that realization,

because disillusionment works with distorted perceptions. Until the distorted perception is corrected (not easily) there cannot be a way out apart from many potential Africans daydreaming for 'salvation' from the West or elsewhere remain shall remain passive in their own world. For Maathai, it can be explained as a mistaken perception of one's reality, a loss of identity and history. The current state Africans find themselves can thus be described as an accepted freedom or acceptance of offered freedom. It is meaningless and carries no weight of being free. We shall continue to deliberate on finding discovered freedom later.

But let's take for instance, the myth which was one of the assumptions Europeans years ago used to discriminate against African dark (sepian) colour as empty savage people, in spite of the hospitality some of them enjoyed in Africa to promote their trade and expansionism. According to Jürgen Fischer (1957 quoted in Bediako, Gillian 1999),

'In early Christian thinking, biblical connotations linked *oriens* with sunrise, light, divine mercy, justice and salvation, and *occidens* with...sunset, darkness, evil. Both were submitted to the will of God, and both would be saved, although *occidens* would be passive in the process as the darkness was dispelled and the heathen turned to the light, the source of their salvation. These traditions were reinforced in Christian consciousness...It was this insensitivity to people and religions outside Christendom that prevailed and influenced the later contact with other peoples and later concepts of mission strategy' (Bediako 1999).

I brought this factor into this discussion to elucidate the woefulness of religious and cultural assumptions that have been used to perpetuate divisions and discriminations and judgementalism even until today to coerce people to dislike who they are. Those who thought the East was 'divine' and home of God and the West dark and 'evil' have been proven wrong by geography that the earth is spherical and time is equally shared around the globe. Just as 'truth' is equally scattered in the universe and not centralised in the mid-Oriens nor hierarchically positioned in the land of *Europa*. Today, millions in Africa are waiting for a 'rapture' to a free banquet in a geographically indescribable world, forgetting that sweating is a cardinal principle to overcome poverty and beggary, and heaven is what you make on earth and not thereafter. Whilst the same bringers of *truth* are creating new worlds costing billions of dollars in space and ignoring dying children in the southern world caused by disillusionment, still many young Africans are chanting for miracles, failing to realise that it takes simple calculus and common sense modeling to fix food shortfall challenges and buy brand new shoes. After all, faith is 'not a leap into nothingness'.

Faith isn't irrational as even some religious African scholars think and have become mechanical book banks without any meaningful contribution to lifting our sinking African people. African citizens and leaders need to wake up and make use of our brain capabilities instead of being held captive by Africa's own mistake believing all that came from centuries ago Europeans and the overwhelming losses and disempowering consequences for many Africans. It has been the same 'devilish' and 'dark' continent that has contributed much to the enrichment of the Western World. Africans should come to know they hold the better end of the earth. What is lacking is bold steps to functional freedom on their own continent.

A freedom to re-discover in sub-Saharan Africa

If freedom is the opportunity for unrestricted access to choices and decisions, in a political sense democracy; and in a transcendental sense intrinsic evolutionary knowing, then the imposition of truth can have serious negative effects upon target recipients. According to Núrnbeger (1999) "Truth....derives its validity from ultimate sources far beyond the influence of any localised perceptual field. It respects neither personality nor opinion and doesn't vary with any condition of test subject or environment." The implication deduced from the statement is that giving the neutrality of truth (if it exists as non-relational) cannot be owned and exported as a sole proprietary brand. Therefore, the personalities and opinions that branded Africans as empty containers that require filling with a brand of truth have been a travesty of African freedom. But whilst Africans cannot continue to lament some of these grave mistakes and abrogation of relative hospitality, Africans cannot ignore the critical need to re-discover authentic Africa as freedom and an African new beginning. This is confirmed by the relative improvement in well-being in many Asian states without or with less minimal systems disruptions.

Writing this article coincided with the 70th birthday of African Music icon Caiphas Semenya a true Africanist. In an interview on SABC TV – 2 (22nd August 2009) Semenya mentioned whilst in self-exile in the US, some of the South Africans had begun music careers. Whilst in the US he noticed that European and Southern American musicians who enter the US don't imitate the Americans, but they maintain their cultural ways and even try to sell their cultural genres (brand) to Americans. Semenya, after having observed that positive behavior made him reconsider his African identity as essential and relevant for his music career. This indeed is an African who is making a self-discovery of freedom even outside the continent where he could have been simply swallowed by dominant cultures. This is an African who has come to believe in hard work to reach where he is now. Today, together with his wife Leta Mbulu and Hugh Masekela (a colleague), and most likely others these proud African icons are embarking on a project that will preserve African heritage for today and tomorrow. As argued in some earlier articles, some of these Africa-conscious stars are shining because they thought about creating a difference by being African and not imitating the Western belief and way of things entirely. There is potential economic benefit in being unique and not being photo-copied or copy-cat European in dark skin.

Many Africans today are not taught the history of pre-colonial events on the continent. The same people are as well ignorant about what Europe used to be before its modern days, let alone any idea about Asia. Maathai among other scholars has mentioned an economically vibrant Africa before the deceitful subjugation by imperialist forces: "...Centuries before the arrival of Europeans had sophisticated civilizations, substantial governance structures, and cultural artifacts to rival any in the Europe of that time" (Maathai 2009). What needs to be done is reinventing our public communication apparatus to highlight such histories and introduce such studies even at the elementary level of African schools. Some of the current South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) TV documentaries on closing the African history gap are very inspiring. What is the essence of such an effort?

The essence of exposing Africans to their valuable forgotten past, and what that holds for critical development is the freedom such information engenders. Certainly, historical facts have a strong

empowering effect as they raise the sense of knowing and a desire to correct and advance. Africans are sitting because many don't know any foundation to build on. People are unaware of the fact that there is a glaring information gap that disconnects today and yesterday. This gap induces a sense of *immobility* and *stagnation* and eventual disillusionment and demoralization, crime and corruption. Of course, let's agree with Maathai and others that Africans have waited too long for 'heaven'. The longing is too strong to make Africans look to Mother Earth as a home now. In my understanding, I think Africans need doctrines of humanization and not messianism. Yes, in the Christian New Testament when Paul was faced with strong Thessalonians messianism he made an effort to orientate them to reconsider living on earth and not haste to heaven. The problem is the over-commercialization of the heaven business. Better let's consider closer Mars, but considering the huge Christian population in Africa, Christian ministerial training should be humanized to ease the tension of apocalyptic expectations in Africa. It isn't like that outside sub-Saharan Africa, as outside their people's freedom and identities are intact and the people haven't had their spiritual *datum* radically dislocated.

Gandhi's effort to overthrow colonial rule was similarly based on the need to reinvent the Indian vision of self-consciousness to authentic freedom. Gandhi had remarked that

...centuries of foreign rule, Indians had become deeply divided, caste-ridden, conformist, fragmented, selfish, contentious, cowardly, demoralized, and lacking in a social conscience and civic virtues. Unless the country was revitalized and "reborn", it could neither win nor sustain its independence (Parekh 1997).

African people's wrestling today is not against overt colonization but against internal struggles over identity and stable statehood; disillusioned young people and a bamboozle populace with little or no confidence in rampant corrupt political leadership. No wonder that the Ghanaian expectation of Obama's short visit evinced the entrenched messianic cultism. Many Ghanaians including the leadership were confronted with a surprise package from Obama who said again, 'The future of Africa is up to Africans' no two ways to that: self-effort and accountability. Thank *Odomankoma Nyame* that Obama refused the temptation to play *Nkulunkulun* on the African soil unlike the parading sycophant self-made parasite prophets promising non-existing blessings only taking what the poor has for God's sake. *Onyankopon* won't do that to helpless people. As Kofi Abokyi commented on TV Africa (13th July 2009), Obama only reiterated what Nkrumah and other Africanist leaders have already set as the foundation for African development. He simply pointed out the lingering problem of neglecting Africa's own God-given prophets from the African soil: the malady of dependency. Obama's euphemisms whilst in the historic Cape Coast Castle couldn't prick the entrenched messianic sentiments in Ghanaians. Have other African states taken a cue at all in Obama's Ghana visit statements? So which way should Africa take now?

The key to actually re-discovering Africa's freedom lies with African traditional chiefs. For far too long most African traditional leadership has been relegated to ceremonial institutions. This is an anomaly that has been part and parcel of 'regime' designs to cause African disillusionment. Many religious Africans lavish other dead Semitic kings and chiefs whose relevance for the African context is simply nullified. If it has relevance, then Africans should have used the lessons from those contexts to remedy

the stagnation malady arresting the continent from meaningful progress. People without freedom and self-confidence always seek to attach themselves to self-made groups or individuals to draw consolation to compensate for their inadequacies. Some describe the situation as an African 'frustration'. This unconscious slavery is what our traditional chiefs should seek to correct by taking advantage of the political climate in some places in Africa that favours rekindling African consciousness.

Let our honourable Traditional Leaders wake up! There may be other modernist misperceptions about African traditional systems. Yes, we have to admit the entire demoralization of African societies has also affected many of the chiefs emerging from the confused system. But for a new beginning that would wield the spirit of all Africans into a single family and take charge of the continent's destiny in hand, requires these custodians of African ubuntu symbolism, to lead in unleashing African authentic freedom. African chiefs hold the key to many oral traditions and valuable secrets and facts yet unrecorded but also being systematically extracted away. Africa cannot achieve meaningful re-discovery and freedom without these categories of societal leaders being recognized and reorganized to contribute their invaluable and critical role. I recently met a young Japanese volunteer in Ghana who approached me and responded to my greeting in strict Nippon tradition. She commanded such awe from me. This is the work of active traditional leadership still alive in hi-tech advanced states like Japan.

Having said enough for now, I will round off with the concluding remark that Africa by opening her alms to only take without protecting her freedom has succumbed to her functional freedom. The article argues the essence of re-discovered freedom as key to African long-awaited development. It has shown that if freedom is tantamount to truth dwells within people's consciousness and it requires self-effort of unpackaging history as the basis for empowerment and capacitating of African people. This cannot be done by people from other continents for Africans and cites the role of traditional chiefs as critical to re-inventing Africa and remodeling Africa after what our own forgotten political prophets have set as development benchmarks for the continent.

The need to do away with excessive messianism is indispensable to efforts to self-realisation as some of the imported belief systems have their own untested assumptions and pitfalls. In the long run, Africa, as the pieces of evidence show, has a history, beliefs, and value systems that have enormous significance for the world today. This is what African leaders, scholars, and the majority of post-modern African society should begin to pursue if sub-Saharan Africa has any viable future to recover from centuries of violence and confusion from proselytisation, effects of imperialist pursuits, and self-abnegation with an overwhelming desire for exotic things. As Bob-Manuel accurately puts it, "[s]o if Africa has to put the 'falling apart together', her original values must be revisited" (Bob-Manuel, 2000).

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