

ADDRESS

African Intellectuals and the African Crisis: In Honour of Professor Ben Makhosezwe Magubane

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I have chosen to address you on the topic *African Intellectuals and The African Crisis*. This topic constitutes the core of the intellectual concerns of Ben Magubane. I stand before you, today, to pay tribute to this illustrious African warrior: *Nkomose*¹! I also pay tribute to Mrs Magubane and their children, without whose support and encouragement Ben's achievements would have been undoubtedly less, and his anguish more weighty and complex.

We must all take note that it is to the great credit of the leaders of The Africa Institute that they decided to honour this great warrior in this manner; and I must say that I am greatly honoured and touched to be chosen to be the person asked to deliver this lecture. To me, this is a labour of love. To say so does not mean that this task is easy and pleasurable in a non-challenging manner. I am reminded of Marx's remark regarding a musical composition: giving birth to a musical composition, putting it together, and perfecting it, 'is damned serious work', as Marx put it.

I have known Ben Magubane for some decades now. from the 1960s, actually, counting the period of acquaintance when we could engage in discussions of what the poet Herbert Dhlomo called the immensities of life', such as we are to discuss in this lecture.

The 1960s and 1970s, particularly the 60s, were memorable periods in the life of politically sensitive and active adults, or of youth that were entering into adulthood. Our consciousness was awakened and stamped by the Cuban Revolution, by the Independence of Africa, and the qualitatively new struggle for the Liberation of Africa.

It was awakened and stamped by the struggle of the African-Americans for freedom and liberty in the land of the Statue of Liberty; it was awakened and stamped by Vietnam, by Fidel, by Che, by Nkrumah, Toure, Senghor, by the 'Congo Crisis' and Lumumba; it was awakened and stamped by Mnandi Azikiwe, Albert Luthuli, and by Mandela and the Rivonia Trialists; it was awakened and stamped by Sobukwe, Ben Bella and Fanon; it was awakened and stamped by Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, and Angela Davis; it was awakened and stamped, further, by Muhammad Ali, by Otis

Redding, The Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, The Temptations, and by Ray Charles; our consciousness was awakened and stamped by WEB DuBois, by Marcus Garvey, by Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse Tung, and by Karl Marx.

One can, of course, make the list longer. What is important to know is that we formed a community which stretched from one corner of the world to another. This community sought to change the world not only in practice, but in thought, too. We believed very strongly that the changing of the world, in practice, must go hand in hand with the changing of the world of thought. In fact, we took it as a challenge that correct thought must aid people in changing the world in practice. – And this challenge, to change the world not only in practice, but also in thought, this challenge is with us, still. I must stress that it is more compelling than ever to us Africans. This is an unending battle. Ben was a warrior in this battle; we were, as a community, warriors in a common battle.

As warriors in that unending battle, what do we have to offer today? Intellectuals are duty-bound to retreat from physical battle, now and then, and ask themselves this question: What do we have to offer today? What new insights do we have to offer on tactics and strategies in this unending battle?

Indeed, President Mbeki, in a remarkable speech in Parliament, on 29 May 1998, which he delivered while he was still Deputy President, stressed that ‘the subjective factor’ is a leading element in the list of priorities of what needs to happen to bring about ‘reconciliation and nation building’ in South Africa. Having discussed briefly the policies formulated by the German government in uniting the former East Germany and the former West Germany into one country, he said:

To respond to all of this, in conceptual terms we have to deal with two interrelated elements. The first of these is that we must accept that it will take time to create the material base for nation building and reconciliation. The second and related element is that we must therefore agree that it is the subjective factor, accompanied by tangible process in the creation of the new material base, which must take the lead in sustaining the hope and conviction among the people that the project of reconciliation and nation building will succeed.

Africa is in the midst of a severe crisis. The most apparent and disturbing manifestation of this crisis in our continent is the failure of development. In this lecture I want to argue that the leading element in this crisis, in all African countries, is precisely the ‘subjective factor’ among the African people, particularly the ‘subjective factor’ among the elites and governing strata of African societies.

We African intellectuals are wrong in blaming individual African leaders of State for failing to move Africa forward, when we ourselves have not done our pre-requisite duty, namely, to formulate, debate, and publicise, a compelling, Africa-centred, development paradigm, which these leaders can use to move the continent forward. This is the fundamental cause of the failure of develop-

ment in Africa, therefore of the crisis in Africa. African leaders have been deciding on policy options within an inappropriate development paradigm.

The development paradigm used by African leaders, from independence up to our time, is a paradigm which was developed outside Africa, to develop other civilisations and countries, and was in most cases brought to bear on African development policies by foreign experts and Big Powers.

Intellectuals of each country, of each civilisation, must conceptualise and formulate an appropriate development paradigm, adapting the insights and ideas of thinkers of other civilisations and countries to the specific material conditions, cultural heritage and needs, of their own civilisation and country. Lenin recognised this fact even in the case of Marxism: 'We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an independent elaboration of Marx's theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for the theory provides only general guiding principles, which, in particular, are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia'.² The same logic and principle applies to all paradigms, including the capitalist development paradigm.

No civilisation can rescue itself, and move itself forward, using a development paradigm conceived, formulated, and developed by another civilisation, or by intellectuals of another civilisation. The West conceived, formulated, and developed its own paradigm, the capitalist development paradigm. The former Soviet Union had its own paradigm, the Stalinist-Marxist development paradigm, which was overthrown, along with the Soviet Union, in 1990.

These development paradigms were conceived and formulated by intellectuals. Of course, intellectuals did not conceive and formulate these paradigms out of nothing. The outlines of these paradigms were suggested by pre-existing concrete reality and tendencies already observable in embryo at varying stages of maturation.

My argument in this paper is that both the Western Capitalist Development Paradigm, and the Stalinist-Marxist Development Paradigm, are inappropriate for the urgent development needs of Africa. The fundamental reason for the inappropriateness of both paradigms is the failure of both models and guidelines to assign large space, and a major role, for rural people in the decision-making processes aimed at the construction of the new Africa.

The starting-point of the Western capitalist development path, which began in England, was the transformation of the rural economy, and of rural social relations; this led, ultimately, to the elimination of natural economy and of the traditional European peasantry; market relations emerged as a dominant factor in the countryside, linked to industry and manufacture in urban areas. In Rosa

Luxemburg's words, 'In England, the new mode of production was introduced by a revolution in agriculture'.³

The important point, then, is that a pre-requisite for the rise of capitalism in the West was, first, the uprooting of traditional rural economic relations, particularly the destruction of communal land relationships, within which European peasants had lived their lives hitherto. This economic, social-cultural revolution in the countryside laid the foundation for the subsequent economic, social-cultural revolution in the society as a whole.

This large-scale dispossession, or 'expropriation', of the European peasantry constituted what Marx called the basis or foundation of the emergence of the capitalist economy as a new world economic system.

In Africa, this starting-point in the capitalist development of the West, this crucial starting-point in the creation of modern Western society, has not occurred even in a single country. The capitalism which came to Africa with European colonialism was not a capitalism which came to transform African society root, stock, and branch, beginning in the African countryside, and laying the foundation for subsequent capitalist development in society as a whole: the capitalism which European colonialism brought to Africa was too identified with the bodies of Whites, and therefore was confined to the specific areas of white settlements.

In Africa, there has been no socio-economic revolution in the countryside which has transformed rural African society into capitalist farming areas. Communal land tenure, in general, still prevails, except in White-dominated rural Africa. The rural African economy has not been transformed into a mainly commodity-producing economy, which is the road leading to the successful rise of capitalism. There has been no transformation of rural African land tenure systems to facilitate the emergence of a fully-fledged capitalist economy. Capitalism in Africa has been European capitalism implanted on those areas which were settled by Europeans or by other non-Africans.

In the Western capitalist paradigm, the peasantry hardly appears; it has no weight or power as a possible determinant of the direction society may take; in this paradigm, the peasantry belongs more to history, than to the present or future.

The reason the capitalist paradigm, as a conceptual tool, has negligible space for the peasantry is rooted in real world events themselves: the starting point of the development of capitalism in Western Europe was the destruction of the traditional peasantry. The essence of this process was the violent end put to communal property, land dispossession, and displacement of peasants.

The effect of this holocaust was trauma of the deepest kind, not only on the peasantry, but on the rest of society members, and a vacuum in the culture and spiritual life of modern civilisation. The devaluation of the past, of history, which has been diagnosed as a serious malady in Western civilisation, is the

result of the vacuum caused by the failure to absorb and integrate (Hegel's *Aufhebung*) peasant culture and tradition in modern Western culture.

The paradigm of Classical Marxism, as formulated by Marx and Engels, was also in agreement with the capitalist paradigm with regard to the negligible weight and role of the peasantry as fertiliser and influence in the creation of the new society. In the famous *Manifesto*, they wrote: 'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life'.⁴

Marx and Engels identified the key actors in the great historical drama of the new age to be the bourgeoisie and the working class. Of course, they were merely reflecting and noting the truth of what the emergence of European capitalism had done to the peasantry. To their credit, however, we must say that the most moving, unforgettable pages in their works are about the destruction of the peasantry by rising capitalism.

As Marxism moved to the East, it encountered the gigantic, awesome presence of the traditional peasantry, in Russia, as well as in China. We can say that the biggest problem encountered by the Bolsheviks, as leaders of the Russian Revolution, was the problem of the traditional peasantry. Furthermore, the root cause of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution to Stalinism, and of the degeneration of the paradigm of Classical Marxism to the Stalinist-Marxist paradigm, was the failure of the Party leadership to incorporate creatively the weight and role of the traditional peasantry in the construction of the new society!

The peasantry was the overwhelming majority of society, and, by and large, they lived their lives within the revived traditional commune, the basis of which was communal land.⁵ Ironically, from a different starting point, with a different aim, Stalin initiated the same process of destruction of the peasantry, as happened in Western Europe! Stalin decided to destroy the traditional peasant community, the peasant commune; he decided on a policy to expropriate peasant communal land. The consequence was chaos and irrationality, and Weber's 'iron cage'. The failure to deal adequately with the peasantry, and the problem of agriculture, consequent upon that failure, remained the basis of the weakness of the Soviet economy until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Thus, the fundamental reason for the inappropriateness of both the Western Capitalist Development Paradigm, and the Stalinist-Marxist Development Paradigm for contemporary African development needs, is the failure of both paradigms to assign rural people, or the peasantry, significant space, and a major role in the decision-making processes in the construction of the new Africa. The social class foundation of African social structure requires a different developmental path altogether. Briefly, here, in my view, is what is called for in Africa.

The first priority for Africa is the initiating of an Agricultural Revolution. In our eagerness to modernise or develop, or industrialise the African economy, we forget that the Industrial Revolution in the West was preceded by an Agricultural Revolution. Let us be clear about the fact that the creation of an industrial society in Africa requires, as a pre-requisite, the initiation of an Agricultural Revolution.

I must emphasise that this is not just another item on the agenda of what needs to be done, or another item on the agenda of what shall be done: this is a top priority project, which shall have the most far-reaching consequences for economic, cultural, political, and social development in the entire continent, and in every country.

Since the winning of independence from colonial status, beginning with Ghana in 1957, African leaders have adopted a development strategy which has neglected agriculture and rural development, in favour of industrial projects. The focus on agriculture has been the misplaced one of developing the production of cash crops for export, instead of focusing, first, upon developing the capacity for food production for domestic needs. The terrible result has been the food crisis in most parts of Africa.

Domestic food production for domestic needs has declined in most African countries; these countries find themselves dependent upon food imports; and food prices have risen steeply, making it extremely difficult for ordinary African people to afford food. The consequence is that traditional African diet systems have been disrupted, and gross imbalances and insufficiencies in food intake have occurred. This has had terrible results in the health of the masses of African people.

The immune system of African bodies, which was built up over centuries upon centuries, has been disrupted or adversely affected, in most cases, opening channels for the infection of these bodies by a host of new and terrible diseases, of which Aids is only one example. We are talking here about a dire threat to the lives of tens and hundreds of millions of human beings.

The well-known economist, Samir Amin, has stated the development problem of Africa thus: 'The ultimate reason for the failure of "development", more striking in this region than in any other, is that Africa has not begun its agricultural revolution, without which any development is unimaginable'.⁶

The issue of the African Agricultural Revolution, and accompanying rural development, should be priority number one for all Africans and African governments. The other crucial policy imperative for African economic and social development, directly linked to the Agricultural Revolution, is that development planning in Africa should be from the countryside to the cities. This is not to say that urban areas should be neglected. All I am saying is that at least fifty percent of investment funds should be earmarked for rural development. The major source of the crisis in African cities is the failure of development in the countryside. The greatest anomaly in Africa is the total discontinuity between

the African village, the basic cell of African society, on one hand, and the African City, the new Western education, the modern African State and modern African politics, on the other hand.

To move Africa forward, we must restructure the relationship between the African village, on one hand, and the modern African city, the modern school curriculum, modern social life, above all the modern African State and modern African politics, on the other hand. We must aim at designing and producing a synthesis of the precious gifts of the African villages, on one hand, and the gifts of the modern city and of other civilisations in our midst, on the other hand.

The crisis of poverty in rural areas is forcing millions of Africans to move to towns and cities. These cities and towns do not have the appropriate infrastructure of housing, schools, hospitals, and employment, to absorb these millions of people. Terrible squatter-shacks emerge, as well as crime, diseases, and all sorts of social pathologies. Modern businesses flee the inner cities, to suburbs. The tax-base of municipal councils and city governments suffers. A fiscal crisis of government emerges, which results in very much diminished funding for social services and maintenance of roads, schools, clinics, police services, etc.

Therefore, the first cure for the sick African economy is the elimination of the underdevelopment of the masses of African people in rural and semi-rural areas. The current African economic crisis arises out of our failure as Africans to start with first things first, the failure to start with rural development and concentrated steps to initiate the African Agricultural Revolution.

African cities and towns are, in general, collapsing, and virtually all public institutions are under severe economic strain, because the African countryside has brought its crisis to the African city. The breakdown of the African family, the breakdown of African moral codes, the collapsing public health and education institutions, and of law and order: *all* these terrible crises issue out of our wrong developmental policy.

The improper functioning of the sector of our economy consisting of rural African communities is now the Achilles Heel of the South African Economy, and is the Achilles Heel of every African economy. Sixty to seventy or eighty percent, of the total national population, located in this sector of society, is not contributing wealth, goods, skills, knowledge-as-capital, to the national economy. This large rural-based population is not a vibrant powerful market for the goods and services of the other sectors of the national economy. This sector has a huge debit relation to the rest of the national economy. It does not contribute economic power and skills and wealth to the rest of the national economy. It largely contributes problems.

A crippling weakness of the current established economics in our country is the invisibility in it of the masses of African people. This economics does not recognise the masses of African people as the massive engine of our economy. Fashionable discussion of our economic crisis give the impression that the driving engine of the economy is foreign investment; and that this missing for-

eign investment is the root cause of our economic crisis. This is wrong. The focus should be on the masses of African people, the overwhelming majority of the population of society.

A fundamental cause of the sickness of our economy is the low buying power and low consumer demand of the masses of African people, the majority of our society, most of whom are in rural and semi-rural areas. In fact, the basic flaw in our economy, the heritage of white supremacy of over a century, is that the masses of Africans are not properly and securely integrated within the commodity sector of the economy.

We need to develop a new economics, in this country, which is going to be a reflection of the economic experiences of the largest bulk of the population, the African population. The current economic paradigm, existing in the minds of consultants and educated specialists trained on the basis of the western industrial experience, is based on the economic experiences of the white population in our country, and, by extension, of western industrial society.

The existing industrial and commercial sector of the economy of this country is not the growth engine, or the driving engine of the economy of current South Africa. The growth engine, or the driving engine of the economy are (1) the productive capacity of the masses of African people, and (2) the buying power or purchasing power of the masses of African people. The low buying power, and low consumer demand, and the lack of productive capacity, of the masses of African people is now the heavy drag that is pulling down the performance of the economy of the entire country. The economy of the entire country cannot move forward, without the elimination of the underdevelopment of the masses of African people. The forward movement of the South African economy can only come from the modernisation and industrialisation of the underdeveloped African communities in rural and semi-rural areas.

This is the most difficult part of the challenge before us: in all the Provinces of this country, in the entire country, we need a total revolution in our approach to the fundamental problems which are before us. We simply cannot move the country forward without such a comprehensive revolution in our mindset and approach to our problems.

What then should be done in this country?

Teams of rural/agricultural extension service workers must be trained and sent out to every village, to teach household people, women, men, and youth, how to use their land and resources productively. Rural development, and agriculture, must be restored and given high profile and importance in the schools, and in adult education facilities in the countryside. This policy should be two-pronged.

- a) One wing should aim at helping every household to increase its capacity in food production.

- b) The other wing of the programme should be aimed at helping those households with already developed capacity, or with an inclination, to become commercial farmers, keeping in mind that such people and households shall be a minority in any village.

Developing the almost 80 percent of our population currently in rural and semi-rural areas means, in effect, creating a wider and bigger market for goods and services than currently exist. That is what increasing the buying power of the masses of African people means, in effect: we are creating a bigger and wider market than currently exist in the country. This is important because a major barrier to foreign investments is the smallness of the internal market in our country, largely because of the poverty of the majority of the African population, most of whom live in rural and semi-rural areas.

This has enormous spin-off effects in the entire economy, both nationally and internationally. It is the development of the buying power of the masses of African people, and the creation of a bigger and wider market than currently exist, which then become an attraction for foreign investment.

This will become the basis for the solution of the economic crisis of our country. But this can be basis of the solution for many other crises in our society, as well as the solution of many of the urban problems.

The immediate need for moving this economy forward is not foreign investments, but creating a bigger and wider internal market, and increasing the buying power of the masses of African people. I am proposing that the area where this work is first needed is in rural African communities. It is primarily public policy investments which shall achieve this task. This shall be a task similar to the New Deal public investments which were initiated by President Roosevelt in the 1930s in the US.

It is only when we have created such a wide internal market, encompassing African people in rural and urban areas, and increased the buying or purchasing power of the majority of our people, that foreign investments shall become attracted to the country.

My remark about the special challenge facing the leadership of society springs from consideration of the comprehensive revolutionary needs of the time. We need a leadership, across the broad spectrum of society, which is going to turn us all around, so that we face the masses of African people in the countryside. The first requisite step is a series of educational visits to the African rural areas, by the entire Cabinet and government of the country and of each Province.

To the Countryside! should be the slogan of the entire country.

We need to plan and schedule visits by urban people to the rural areas, to see for themselves the poverty and debilitating underdevelopment of rural people. This is a necessary awakening, a necessary education and moral empowerment of urban people – especially of our legislators, civil servants, and government

leaders; and also of our urban youth, trade unions members, and ordinary urbanites Band of Whites, Indians, and Coloureds living in cities.

Let me remind you that the first generation, or the first two generations, of Africans who became Europeanised, or Westernised, experienced a Cultural Revolution, which caused serious disturbances and conflicts in their emotions, minds, and souls. This cruel revolution (every revolution is cruel) set them in conflict with their past, with their present in their relations with their relatives, and in conflict with the African community which was still part and parcel of African civilisation.

This revolution created new epithets and swear-words, and cruel humour at the expense of that category of the African people now considered 'buffoons'. I, myself, still recall tragic scenes of some of my school-mates, outside Vryheid, who suffered a deep sense of shame, or ran away, or broke into hysterical tears, as they saw their traditionally-clad, un-Westernised parent entering the school-yard. On another occasion, a boy or girl would be bleeding, as another had punched him or her on the nose, as punishment for having called him/her by the non-Western home name! Yes, Africans experienced a very cruel revolution, in the process of forced Westernisation. There is a whole literature, written in African languages, on this cleavage, pain, contradiction, and cruel humour.

We now need to undergo another cultural revolution, this time going back to our people, to the African people we stayed away from, going back to learn what African civilisation is, from those African people we looked at, and laughed at, with contempt. The entire country needs to undergo another Cultural Revolution, going back to the millions of African people we ignored in rural and semi-rural areas.

The last, but no less important point, concerns the State in Africa. The modern State is an invention of the modern West, similar to an automobile, or to Coca-Cola. The important point to stress here is that the African State has not grown organically out of the social body of African society, but, like Coca-Cola, and automobiles, and capitalism, is an implant from outside Africa. In Africa, India, China, and most of the Third World, peasants, or small-scale food producers, form the overwhelming majority of societies. Therefore, strictly speaking, the class composition, and class foundation, of the State should reflect that class composition of society.

Marxist revolutionaries, even in countries in which peasants were the vast majorities, and the proletariat tiny minorities, gave the leadership role of the new society, and of Communist Parties, to the industrial working class or to the proletariat. This does not fit the needs of Africa, India, China, and the rest of the Third World, where peasants and small-scale food producers still form the overwhelming majority of society.

This has been the Achilles Heel of the programme of Marxist revolutionaries in Russia, China, and all subsequent radical revolutions, up to our time: they

failed to realise that the new radical revolution in Africa, Asia, India, Russia, etc., must have large space for the participation of rural people and rural culture in the State institutions. In all these revolutionary regimes, in Africa, China, and the rest of the Third World, and in Russia during Lenin and Trotsky's rule, and during Stalin's rule, peasants and peasant traditions were not given any space in the leadership committees and chambers of the new revolutionary State.

To have a situation in which a government of an overwhelmingly rural country is in the hands solely of urban people is nothing but a recipe for disaster and enormous policy errors. Nay, it is more than that: it is a gross violation of the principle of democracy, for it lacks proportional representation of the social class composition of society in the organs of the State.

The values, morality, and points of view of peasants and rural, pre-industrial people must become a factor in government policy through the actual, respected, participation of rural people and their rural representatives in all the committees and organs and levels of the modern African State.

It is interesting that Lenin did advance, in 1905-1907, the concept and slogan of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry'. Mao also, in 1940, advanced the concept and policy of 'New Democracy', in which the various oppressed classes of China would exercise rule in the new China.

However, in the case of both Lenin and Mao Tse Tung, when it came to actual practice, the effective participation of the peasantry in the new People's Government was forgotten or nil. For Africa, India, China, and other Third World countries, the problem of the 21st century is the problem of the relationship between the people of the city and the people of the countryside. What we must struggle against with all our might, if we are to avoid disaster, is the heavy urban bias in public policy, which is the case because the African State is almost totally controlled by urban people: this follows from the nature of the State, as an invention: it is an urban invention!

A massive challenge faces us in the spread of modern democracy in Africa, India, China, and the rest of the Third World, i.e., the inclusion of the peasantry and rural people in general, in modern democracy. We must go way beyond spreading the right to vote to rural areas: rural people must be included as equal participants in the committees and chambers and institutions of government.

The failure to go beyond allowing peasants the right to vote, explains why all African governments, since the end of Colonialism, have neglected rural development and agriculture, in favour of industrial or urban projects. Yet the crisis of the African economy, in our time, issues out of the failure of rural development and African agriculture.

This is the challenge before us, if we want to move Africa, and this country, forward.

Notes

1. Zulu clan praise-name.
2. V.I. Lenin. 1964. *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, Moscow. Progress Publishers, pp. 211-212.
3. Rosa Luxemburg. 1970. 'What is Economics?', in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*. New York. Pathfinder Press, p. 241.
4. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. 1969. *Selected Works* [in 3 volumes]. Vol. 1. Moscow. Progress Publishers, p. 112.
5. Teodor Shanin. 1985. *Russia as a Developing Society*. Vol. 1, London. Macmillan, pp. 66-102; Moshe Lewin. 1995. *Russia/USSR/Russia*, New York, New Press, pp. 62-94.
6. Samir Amin. 1990. *Maldevelopment*. London. Zed Press.