



## **Africa in the 21st Century and the Quasquicentennial of the Scramble of Africa: An International Symposium Inspiration**

“There is something absurd in the sudden Scramble for colonies”, Lord Derby, English Colonial Secretary, 28 December, 1884

“We must lose no chance of winning a share in the magnificent African cake” (King Leopold II of Belgium, 1877)

“Whoever knows the history of a country can read its future.” (DT Niane, Malian Writer and Historian)

“The most important problem for the countries of Africa arises out of our aspirations for unity” (Modibo Keita, Former President, Mali)

“The glory which awaits Africa cannot come about until Africa is united. If we fail to unite, then a great nation will go to sleep forever.” (Kwame Nkrumah)

### **Background**

125 years ago nearly 1000 self-identifying communities of unexplored diversity, complexity and variation, were arbitrarily carved up with the explicit objective of regulating and stabilising European imperial interests and formalising colonial control. This implicitly negated sovereignty and autonomy of Africa and its peoples. A cynical act endorsed abroad had the power of destroying relationships of trust that were the result of a long evolutionary history. By its adoption, the General Act of the Berlin Conference of 1885 segregated all the peoples of Africa (except Ethiopia and Liberia to a large extent), divided them and established the various mechanisms for their subjugation and exploitation. The Scramble of Africa that this act

unleashed resulted in colonisation of Africa and would later see 53 post-colonial states emerge from the mid 20th Century. In 2010, more than one third of the existing states will celebrate their jubilee anniversaries.

The legacy from the Berlin conference still lives on. The post-colonial states inherited the formula of divide and rule. Today, Africa still lives with the challenge of communities within states that should not be, and conversely, those that should have within states that were split apart. The states that emerged did not transcend this dilemma.

In 2010, Cameroon, Togo, Madagascar, DR-Congo, Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria and Mauritania, will all celebrate their Jubilee anniversary. None of them are yet free from the burden inherited from the scramble for Africa.

Fifty years after they formally became politically independent virtually none of these countries have overcome this burden.

From the divide and rule formula from the scramble for Africa, many states have suffered civil wars, conflicts, military rule, limited economic development, and made Africa open to interference by outside powers. However, there have been some star performers, strong democracies, good governments and impressive economic developers. Until the global recession starting in 2008, most of the continent grew at about 6% annually; many were on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); most countries were democracies and a growing number subscribed to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

### **The Shadow over the Jubilee Anniversary: The Scramble for Africa**

The borders drawn 125 years ago remain artificial and many states have not transformed into nations being held together precariously and threatened with possible conflict at one time or another. The key prize for the European Scramble for Africa was the Congo Basin. The real fight amongst the Portuguese, the French and King Leopold of Belgium was over who takes control of the Congo River, the DR- Congo and Congo-Brazzaville. Actually the Germans used the title: "Kongo Conference" instead of what is popularly known today as the Berlin Conference at the time. Frantz Fanon used to say: 'Africa is like a revolver, the Congo Basin is the trigger. Whoever controls the Congo controls Africa.' Sad to say, the fight for the control of the Congo is still on. From the outset Congo's independence was messy. The first leader Patrice Lumumba was murdered by those powers that had big stakes to plunder Congo's wealth which continues today. Others use Congo's riches, whilst the people of the Congo are left with the curse of war. Today, the problems fester on. Congo provides a vivid example that the plan concocted 125 years still lives on with no clear way out of the crises yet.

No other place in Africa exemplifies the playing out of the tragic drama of the scramble for Africa as Sudan's independence in 1956. The moment of celebration was also the moment of rebellion against what the British put together as Sudan. The Arabised North Sudan was celebrating freedom from Anglo-Egyptian control. The wishes of the people in South Sudan for a federation went unanswered and an armed struggle started shortly after independence; which went on for more than three decades broken into two periods. There will be a referendum in 2011 that could see South Sudan becoming a separate state.

Though Sudan became independent before Ghana, the African de-colonisation has been recognized to have begun with Ghana's black star shining over its red, yellow and green flag flying high and the British Union Jack flag coming down on March 6, 1957. Ghana declared that freedom for Ghana is incomplete without all of Africa becoming united and free. Kwame Nkrumah understood the more important challenge is not only to get Ghana independent but also to overcome the legacy of the Scramble for Africa by uniting all of Africa. The death of Apartheid in South Africa in 1994 heralded the end of the independence struggles (bar Spanish Sahara, but the desire for a united Africa still remains a dream.

Africa is not without historical achievements to resist the continuation of the scramble for Africa today. Two distinct successful examples of resistance were achieved by Haiti, from the African world outside the continent, and Ethiopia inside Africa. In different ways, both held the African resistance, liberation and independence imagination for a long time; Haiti by becoming the first black independent Republic since 1791. Napoleon's 60,000 armed forces could not stand up to the power and force of Toussaint L'Ouverture and his gallant comrades. Unfortunately Haiti's independence took the form of a neo-colonial settlement where France demanded indemnity to the tune of 22 billion dollars that Haiti kept paying until recently helping to keep it the most impoverished state in the Americas. It has taken nearly 109 years to pay off this indemnity turning Haiti from a rich sugar cane producer to an impoverished and vulnerable state. Haiti ended up attracting all forms of humiliation to a point now it has been literally exhausted having been turned into a real charity basket. One wonders how much her history of resistance has to do with this attempt to degrade this nation into a historical non-entity.

Ethiopia in Africa is the other inspiring country that held the independence imagination for over 500 years. Ethiopia was a kingdom and not a republic like Haiti, but it remained un-enslaved, un-degraded and un-colonized fighting all the powers that came to subvert its independence. In recognition of these, the Ethiopian flag has served as the flag of independence for 15 African states and the Organisation of African Unity or now the African Union. Like Nkrumah in 1963 Emperor Haile Selassie said, "Our liberty is meaningless unless all Africans are free." Nevertheless, like Haiti, Ethiopia too remains an exhausted African nation for the price it paid for

holding high the independence, resistance and liberation imagination of the entire African world. In 1991 Ethiopia became split into vernacular and ethnic enclaves and Eritrea also was split from Ethiopia. Africa can draw positive lessons from Ethiopia's history of independence. It can draw lessons of what to avoid also from what has happened to Ethiopia since 1991 when the country degraded into vernacular and ethnic boundaries. From this ethnic and vernacular turn and division, Africa can learn what not to do. What Africa needs is to expand its human possibilities by attaining African level citizenship by expanding identities to a common African humanity. This is the priority. This is what it means to go beyond the history of the scramble for Africa. This is the way for Africa to claim the 21st century.

On October 1, 2010 the most populous state in Africa, Nigeria celebrates its jubilee anniversary. Approximately one in five Africans is a Nigerian. So Nigeria can be used as a template to judge the performance, capabilities and potentials of the entire continent. Nigeria is also important not only because it has one of the most powerful economies in the continent, but also because it has the largest market. Is Nigeria out of the woods or is there a scenario of chaos within the country that would affect the entire continent owing to being unable to overcome the legacy inherited 125 years ago? Unfortunately, Nigeria has not been able to achieve a significant proportion of its vast potential. It has had an unfortunate history of military dictatorships and serious civil unrests (including a civil war) as many other African countries. Its enormous natural resources- particularly petroleum and gas- have often not been employed for the development of the country but have instead been siphoned to foreign bank accounts by unscrupulous politicians and public servants. There has been a depletion of its public services in areas such as health, power generation, education and social welfare and development. All these drawbacks have combined to make Nigeria the so-called "sleeping giant" of the continent.

The most powerful achievement of the end of the 20th century for Africa was the coming of South Africa to the common Africa home. South Africa became free in 1994 from racial domination. Its re-birth combined its liberation with the lofty ambition for an African renaissance and African century. South Africa is a potential leader in Africa given the huge size of its economy relative to other African states, and the access it has to many international policy forums that other African states do not. It is not clear how other African states see South Africa, as it is still not clear how much Africa is a priority in South Africa's policy??. Some countries see her as a source of foreign investment, development strategies and a fighter for African causes; whilst others resent the glory this so called late comer is enjoying, neo-coloniser and some question her Africanness.

The issue of whether South Africa can give African leadership by prioritizing Africa over states like Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICS) and other states outside Africa remains an open question. As South Africa tries to go for the BRICS, paradoxically it has lost ground to China, India and Brazil and others to step in parts of Africa where South Africa is still yet to make

enduring collaborations.

### **Who would speak for Africa?**

As the various regions of the world- Europe and the USA, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe- line up behind major powers on global issues, it is also necessary to reflect upon which voice or regional leader should speak for Africa. It is clear that the United States leads the rest of West and acts as its leading voice. Britain always has accepted US leadership as a matter of its national policy priority. They call it a special relationship. In Latin America, Brazil and Argentina are jockeying to be the leading voices of the region but increasingly Brazil is rapidly establishing itself as the leading voice. China is contending with Japan for leadership in Asia. But can the same trend be said to be taking place in Africa? The picture is far from clear. The major states of Africa- South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Libya, Senegal, Kenya and Nigeria- do need to be clear of their roles in order to articulate a unifying vision that speaks for the entire continent so that when Africans participate in global forums there is a unity of voice and action. Participants of the symposium are encouraged to provide engaging analyses of the question of African leadership in Africa. How would Africans deal with the world with united action and voice and respond to the world so that they forestall being victims of division, manipulation and seduction by external aid to undermine Africa's overall interest in today's international affairs distinguished by organized hypocrisy. Are Africans ready to be led by other Africans and not the former colonial powers or the new emerging powers? This is an important matter related to whether Africa lives under the shadow of the old and new scramble of Africa and is ready to close this ugly chapter of its history. Who in Africa would speak for Africa remains an open question?

### **The Double Moment and Its Impact on Africa's Future**

So after 125 years of the Berlin Conference, and 50 years after more than a third of Africa celebrates the jubilee anniversary, the past lives on in the present, threatening Africa's future. We believe it is important to take this double moment of an infamous European Scramble for Africa and the jubilee celebrations of more than a third of Africa to pause, ask and reflect: which way is Africa going? Is there a link between 125 after Berlin and 50 years of the Jubilee anniversary in 2010? If so what is this link? Is it positive or negative? If negative how shall Africa overcome?

How does Africa's past speak to its present? How does the past's interaction with the present

shape and frame the future? There is a need to look back, to understand today and in order to look ahead in the future.

### **The Key Trends in Africa**

The old Scramble for Africa: is it over or does it still continue in different guises with different actors and players?

The post-colonial states: are they robust or fragile? How can they overcome the arbitrary carving up and splitting of ethnicities and vernacular communities? Is it by degrading to vernacular and ethnic states or by upgrading to the unity, resistance, independence and liberation imagination as Africans? Which identity should take priority or first place- the African, sub-ethnic or vernacular?

There is talk of the new scramble for Africa and in fact research is being undertaken on how and why rising powers such as China and India are re-carving Africa at least by searching to exploit Africa's rich resources. How credible is this assertion?

The old European powers and the US are believed to be continuing in concerted efforts to control Africa's natural resources.

How will Africans navigate from a past that lives on in the present, threatening Africa's future to forge a 21st African Century? Can Africa claim the 21st century? Are Africans ready to be led by fellow Africans to construct Africa's capability to deal with a world and respond without sacrificing Africa's values and interests? Who in Africa should lead Africa, by displaying the ability to command legitimacy from all?

There are a number of processes for integration: the Africa Union, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), NEPAD, and the Pan-African Congresses- in different ways they all keep alive the Pan-African imagination.

## **Some Themes for Writing Papers**

The following sub-themes form the major preoccupations of the conference:

The Clash of Tradition and Modernity in Africa

Pan-Africanism for the 21st Century

The political economy of African Integration

The Scramble for Africa and the Post-Colonial Nation-building Processes

The Dilemma in Sudan and the Congo Basin

The Challenges of building accountable institutions

Governance, Democracy and Development in Africa

Community centred services vs. state level policies for services

The ethics of public service and the struggle against corruption

Energy exporters African states are Energy poor: why?

Energy importing developed countries are energy rich - Why?

The Imperative of African Integration

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The New Scramble for Africa: China, India, Russia and Brazil

Pivotal States: South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Libya

North Africa and the rest of Africa

Lusophone, Francophone, Anglophone Africa vs. Africa-phone Africa?

The United States of Africa or the Africa Nation

The Pan-African Congresses and Pan-Africanism

Towards the 8th Pan-African Congress and Peoples Pan-Africanism

Japan, Europe and USA and Africa



Who in Africa can and should lead Africa? Can Africans agree to be led by Africans?

How can the barriers that prevent African engagement with other Africans be removed?

### **Concluding Remark**

Whether the scramble for Africa lives on or not, still to this day in substantive terms African engagement with other Africans is mostly secondary to their respective engagement with others outside Africa. There is more disengagement with one another than the much needed engagement that should be driving African history forward.

There is a need to acknowledge all the positive data to counter effectively either the continuation of the old or the new scramble for Africa. Africa must claim the 21st century as the African century. The lessons of the past, the challenges of the present, and the opportunities and possibilities of the future must be combined to bring African unity now. This is the real challenge confronting Africa.

All the positive energies from within Africa must be integrated to make Africa achieve agency for navigating the contours of a difficult world. As Africa had the rawest deal in human history all efforts must be made to make sure all of Africa or united Africa gets a fair, just and new deal.

Before the year 2010 is over, there is a need to make the broadest possible education on both the scramble for Africa, the threat of the new Scramble, the opportunities for making Africa's time this 21st century and gathering and disseminating the value of positive data that can be gleaned from all positive histories in the African world (we must not ignore the negative issues, but learn from them). Such concerted actions and education using technologies and various ways of teach-ins must be spread across the African universe with interest and joy.

### **Date of Conference**

The proposed symposium is meant for participants for all over the world and would take place in Tshwane/Pretoria, South Africa. The symposium would be held in May 25-27, 2011.

Timelines:

Submission of abstracts:

16 January 2011

Notification of accepted abstracts:

29 February 2011

Submission of peer-reviewed papers:

26 March 2011

**Expected Outcomes:**

An empirically sound conference paper for presentation

Consideration for special journal edition for selected papers

Compilation of conference proceedings into a book

### **Conference Participants**

(Invitation to all those who work on Africa inside and outside of Africa)

Dr Lekhotla Mafisa

Abstracts to be send to [lmafisa@ai.gov.za](mailto:lmafisa@ai.gov.za)