

Africa is like a drunkard with a hangover. In trying to rid himself of such a condition he takes another glass of beer, followed by another until he ends up being stony drunk. The continent resembles a dog, which returns to its own vomit, a sow that is washed but returns to her wallow in the mud. Independence from colonial bondage is empty in Africa as most states are still under the same colonial set up. Africa suffers from economic apartheid. Political independence was won but economic freedom still remains a pipe dream.

The biggest problem that the continent still faces is that of trying to assimilate the former colonialists' way of life. We remain drunk and mired in colonialism so long as our own leaders after being washed of colonisation return to wallow once more in the imperialistic mud.

Flag independence, where the economy remains in the hands of the former colonisers is the result of such flirtations with such devils. The Africans in leadership positions, as well as a myriad of others, have totally failed to rid themselves of the white man in them. We live in self-denial of what we are, rejecting our Africaness and uniqueness and rebutting what we are capable of doing, preferring to be white in the process.

We blacks, we lack confidence in our own progress. We fear to venture into the unknown. We wait for others to think for us. We have over the years borrowed unsuitable development policies, which have always been a disaster to the general black populace. We have remained enslaved in the white man's colonial mentality as if Uhuru never came our way.

Biko helps us to understand why in this 21st century, many years after attaining independence, we have remained as if the whole continent is still under the yoke of colonialism. It is by looking back at the colonial set up and what it stood for and defended or safeguarded that we can at least free ourselves from this colonial hangover.

First and foremost, according to Biko, apartheid (in our case neo-colonialism propagated by foreign companies, NGOs, Western countries . . . ) both petty and grand - is obviously evil. Nothing can justify the arrogant assumption that a clique of foreigners has the right to decide on the lives of the majority.

The fact that apartheid has been tied up with white supremacy, capitalist exploitation and deliberate oppression makes the problem much more complex. Material want is bad enough, but coupled with spiritual poverty it kills. And this latter effect is probably the one that creates mountains of obstacles in the normal course of emancipation of the black people.

The white man strongly believes he has a Godly ordained right to rule other races. With such a baseless mentality, of a predestined superiority over the black man, the white man falsely justifies his supremacy by quoting the Holy Bible and the black man meekly accepts this unjustified and false assertion.

The black man believing in these white lies ends up reducing himself to a mere passenger in the economic bus being driven by the white capitalists. Can this inferior mentality get us out of this colonial mess we find ourselves in?

Biko also asks if this spiritual poverty in the African is a conviction of his own accord of his inabilities. Does he (black man) lack in his genetic make-up that rare quality that makes a man willing to die for the realisation of his aspirations?

Or is he simply a defeated person? (No to nationalisation of mines, engaging the Western investors can uplift Africa from its poverty, NGOs can help in the democratisation of the continent, mushrooming of Western donor funded political parties in Africa, let's embrace security sector reforms because they are necessary for political development and so goes the list of policies and strategies which clearly show that the black man is a defeated person who is empty of his own thoughts.)

The African's spiritual poverty has much to do with what renowned Zimbabwean writer, Dambudzo Marechera, wrote in "House of Hunger" when he looked at a young black man who after living in a white community for many years, ended up resenting his blackness. He could no longer stand the colour of his skin to the extent that he would take a bath several times a day in an attempt to rid himself of his blackness.

He would scrub and scrub to do away with his dark skin colour. When this failed, the young man slashed his wrists as to bleed the blackness out of him. Of course, he ended up in a mental asylum.

Biko notes that the logic behind white domination is to prepare the black man for the subservient role in this country (in our case Africa). To a large extent the evil-doers (white colonialists with the help of their mother countries) have succeeded in producing at the output end of their (colonial) machine a kind of black who is man only in form.

This, according to Biko, is the extent to which the process of dehumanisation has advanced. Many blacks in our midst suffer from this inferiority complex which was inherited from years of brutal white colonialism. Such assimilators are a great danger not only to themselves or their communities but to the entire African race comprising the living, the dead and the yet to be born. This retards Africa's development as well as weakening its standing in the international system.

The black man, due to many years of white oppression, has been reduced to a mere empty bucket which needs to be filled with colonial knowledge as to free him from his savage and uncivilised past. Biko observes that the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the "inevitable position".

The black man has accepted a position of servitude under white power or rule. It is not surprising at all, to hear some blacks amongst us, ignorantly but wholeheartedly saying life was better under Ian Smith's evil UDI or living under the diabolical apartheid system was healthier or existence under wicked colonial rule was superior.

That colonial mentality or way of thinking made Biko to conclude that in his heart, the black man yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame himself for not having been "educated" enough to warrant such luxury. Education for the African becomes a passport for him to enjoy white privileges.

It ceases to be a tool to develop the continent but rather a visa or permit to be closer to the coloniser. Many a black man has abused his education as to get closer to the white capitalists, who of course own the means of production in many an African country. Education on the African continent has totally failed to develop a proud being; instead it has produced half men who are aliens to their own people.

Biko notes that celebrated achievements by whites in the field of science - which he (black man) understands hazily - serve to make him rather convinced of the futility of resistance and to throw away any hopes that change may ever come.

The black man fears his future, he dreads venturing in to the unknown as to come up with his own discoveries. The black man's world has already been named for him by the white man, all he has to do is to comply with the laws as dictated by the colonialists. No wonder, some amongst us always secretly consult the white world. These Africans are too lazy to think for themselves even on crucial issues or matters that concern and can determine the future of the continent.

Biko has no kind words for such Africans. He says, all in all the black man has become a shell,

a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. Many, in our midst, fear to upset the white world lest the goose that lays the golden egg will fly away elsewhere.

Isn't it one of the reasons why other SADC countries did not send their troops to the DRC to assist the late Laurent Kabila? Ever wondered why Charles Taylor is now standing trial at The Hague? What was the motive or reason behind South Africa and Nigeria's endorsement of UN Resolution 1973, giving NATO the greenlight to invade Libya? Why would a Zimbabwean indigenous NGO lie about human rights abuses at Chiadzwa diamond mine? Some Africans are complete empty and useless shells who are doing the West's bidding.

Biko attributes such backward and defeatist thinking in black people to the strategy used by the white world of destroying completely the structures that had been built up in the African Society. The colonialists were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grip and emptying the African's brain of all form and content; they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the "dark continent". Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition.

A group of Zimbabwean youths conferred hero status on a foreigner who deserved nothing - other than a four metre long card - labelled imperialist in bold capital letters. Such youths have an inaccurate, diseased and flawed knowledge of their history.

Biko notes that the African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school. So negative is the image presented to him that he tends to find solace only in close identification with the white society. Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have found comfort by being close to the white man. Many unfounded - grossly fabricated and over exaggerated stories of rape, torture and other forms of abuse have been presented to the British audience by these very cunning Zimbabwean job seekers.

Biko, believes that, for Africans to regain their pride and to lift up their heads high in arrogance an approach envisaged in bringing about 'black consciousness' has to be directed to the past, to seek to rewrite the history of the black man and to produce in it the heroes who form the core of the African background.

Heroism comes out of a selfless dedication to the struggles of a whole people for self-determination. It is not about donating a few thousand dollars to a financially struggling youth group as to be hero-worshipped and showered with unnecessary praises for such false generosity.

Biko argues that a people without a positive history are like a vehicle without an engine. Their emotions cannot be easily controlled in a recognisable direction. They always live in the shadow of a more successful society. Black consciousness is therefore necessary if the African is to free himself from the neo-colonial yoke.

Attempts to silence and freeze Julius Malema at minus-two degrees Celsius of neo-liberalism and colonialism have hit a brick wall as the young radical keeps on boiling at a hundred degrees Celsius of revolutionary black anger. This is what we call black consciousness.

Sekou Toure clearly sums it up when he says in order to achieve real action you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be a popular element of that energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and happiness of Africa. Are you committed to Africa's cause? If not, start now!

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