

PODCAST LACUNAE

As students in the UK, we eagerly sought out and interacted with the “first generation” nationalists when they came on Independence negotiations with the British. It was easy to discern that the emerging Nigerian nation was in deep trouble. A handful of them were of course truly motivated and focused. Others, it was clear, were nationalists only as cynical inheritors of the shoes of the departing imperators. That compelled us to start turning our sights inwards. From an obsession with the primacy of liberating apartheid South Africa and other bastions of settler colonialism, we concluded that we had shift focus to the internal successors to the exiting mandate.

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As far back as I recall - which is all the way back to primary school lessons on something called the Slave Trade - I have never been able to absorb the notion of an African continent defined solely by saline waters. It was both an intuitive and objective reaction. This has affected much of my political thinking and relationship with black presence in the Diaspora, their cultural retentions from Africa and their socio-political struggles, especially in racist enclaves such as the USA. There was also the practical aspect: their potential contribution to the mother continent. As we matured into responsible positions locally, we made efforts to seduce them into returning home and injecting their modern, specialist knowledge into our own nations.

One particular effort was the formation of the Association of African Scholars and Researchers – as a companion movement to the Union of Writers of the African Peoples. That scientific unit was headed by Professor Cheik Anta Diop of Senegal and partnered by the Institute of International Affairs in Lagos (nineteen seventies). I recall traveling through Latin America and the Caribbean, meeting intellectuals and technocrats and exhorting them to “come home”. That effort was backed by both President Leopold Sedar Senghor, and our own then military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo. Perhaps, as an engineer, he was excited by the prospects of a rapid technological transformation for the nation. Politically, we have since parted ways, but I try to credit him with that enthusiastic support!

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