

# **Myths and Realities in African Knowledge Production**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

The first part of the paper reinforces Codesria's mission, that of developing social science research in Africa. The paper is based on the premise that the mission is anchored on four words viz, research, knowledge, development and Africa. The writer's paper centres on two of these, namely research and knowledge. It is submitted that Codesria, assisted by the collective experience of the people's of Africa in particular and the world in general perceives the existence of several barriers to knowledge production.

The first is the deliberate invention of a myth (if not a mythology) by a particular interest group in society with the specific purpose of derailing the process of knowledge gathering towards the attainment of a goal other than the truth. The most notorious of these myths is the myth of racism. The myth that there are different races of mankind. It is argued that the myth of racism is not only resilient, but also has the propensity to replicate and mutate itself into equally virulent strains, sub-species and varieties such as tribal antagonism and xenophobia. It is contended that the myth of racism is a major obstacle to knowledge production. It is my view that if this myth is not eradicated from the body politic of Africa, we might as well forget about the dream of a viable African Union becoming a reality. Racists cannot form an African Union. Neither can racists pursue a vibrant, purposeful Pan-Africanism.

Secondly, it is asserted that there are risks involved in an honest and objective search for the truth and in the publication of knowledge based on the truths so established. When intellectuals seriously commit themselves to the pursuit of knowledge they often stumble upon facts which expose the falsity of the ideological base upon which the privileged position of the ruling class is founded. When this happens the ruling class does whatever it takes to stifle the thought processes of these intellectuals and ban their publications. It is contended that academics have dealt with these struggles successfully, however, the triumphs of the liberating struggles of the peoples of Africa against colonialism must not give us a false sense of security and complacency. It is submitted that the triumphs of these struggles merely brings Africa to the starting point of the development of an ideology with which the people of Africa can identify. (An ideological basis for the building of African unity). That should be the mortar with which African unity is constructed. The moulding of this mortar should take into account the harsh experiences of the collective past history of the peoples of Africa, the general instability of the many regimes of independent Africa and the urgent needs and long term aspirations of the peoples of Africa.

Thirdly, it is argued that foreign religious dogma has been used in some instances for the specific purpose of insulting the integrity of the peoples of Africa, undermining their self-respect, and setting them up against one another to facilitate their subjugation and exploitation. It is argued therefore that religion has been used as a barrier to knowledge.

Fourthly, language is identified as a vehicle, tool as well as a barrier to knowledge production and dissemination (ie a double edged sword). The role of language in the conquest of Africa by foreign powers, the mental enslavement of the peoples of Africa, the bearing these factors have on the viability of the emerging African Union and the prospect of such a Union championing the birth of an African Renaissance is looked at. It is my view that now that the States of Africa have rid themselves of the yoke of colonialism, there is an urgent need for an African Union. This unity must not be the union of elites, it must be a unity that goes right down to the roots of our societies. It is argued that it is the collective efforts of our people at the grass-roots level that will construct a viable African Union and inspire an African Renaissance. As long as language stands as a barrier preventing the dissemination of ideas to our peoples at the grass-root level, we are unlikely to register sufficient progress. Our research must seek a formula for the annihilation of the barriers of language.

The conclusion, reinforces my support of an African Union, Nevertheless, checks and balances must be put in place to prevent such a union developing into a Union of knaves, which its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity nearly became. It is my view that member states should take advantage of the initiative of Codesria and grow it into a *Pan African Research Council*. It is contended that the Union should be seen to be mediating relations between its member states and the outside world on matters which could reflect negatively on the independence and the integrity of the Union.

The conclusion acknowledges the importance of knowledge that has been placed at the disposal of modern man by researchers such as those who man the flagship of Codesria and many others operating at other parts of the world. In particular, man's knowledge has been immensely enriched by the establishment of certain truths of science: For example, on the basis of evidence provided by the latest research thus far, it is now fairly established that **Africa is the cradle of mankind**. This alone should be sufficient motivation for Africans to take the lead in the field of social science research.