

## **“I Can’t Breathe,” Says Africa**



Ever since I saw the video of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on the 25<sup>th</sup> May, killed by a police man who knelt on his neck for NINE MINUTES, while he was calling for his dead mother and for mercy, I have been upset and angry, as have been most people across the world and amongst different races. I ‘ve been watching the riots in the USA and all over the world and wondering whether this will pass by as just another of these events, or whether change really is on the horizon.

We know this systemic racism started four centuries ago and, through endless and varied legal and political processes, was designed to benefit one section of a society. All other systems are subservient to this system and all other people are subservient to a race, a large number of whom are fighting to keep the privilege they feel is rightfully theirs.

I also see the knee on George Floyd’s neck as also being symbolic of how neoliberalism, and the associated neo colonialism, are putting their knee on the neck of Africa. I hear Africa saying, ‘I can’t breathe.’ There are many avenues by which those in power are

putting their knee on the neck of our continent, but let's just focus on what's happening in agriculture.

For me the powers influencing our agricultural future have created a narrative, which is so simple and powerful, and which is told repeatedly, until its ingrained in our DNA. We are told that our seeds are old and have little capacity to give us food and they have to be hybridized and genetically modified to be of use; we are told that what we need is more calories and we need to focus on seeds of few crops; we are told that we are not using our land effectively and it should be given to those who can do a better job of it; we are told that our knowledge about farming is backward and we need to modernize with knowledge from the West; we are told that unless we focus on few staple crops and produce for the market, we'll remain shackled to subsistence living; and we are told that we need to pump our soil with artificial fertilizers and pesticides if we want to produce enough food. For all this, we are told, we need business to invest billions of dollars, and without these saviors from the North, we cannot feed ourselves. Our world is defined simply by producing more, not in having healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, produced without harming the environment.

A cohort of actors including philanthrocapitalists, Aid Agencies, governments, academic institutions and embassies are working to make this narrative a reality. They talk about transforming African agriculture but what they are doing is creating a market for themselves cleverly couched in a nice sounding language.

The knee on George Floyd's neck is the same knee that is on our neck. It is the same knee that justified colonialism on Africa. It is the same knee that sees Africa not for what it has, but for what it's lacking. Those who are putting their knee on our neck look at us as stupid, uncivilized, barbaric, clueless and disease ridden, to be controlled and directed by the all-knowing and powerful human race.

We cannot breathe in Africa as policy spaces in the continent are crowded by outside actors and their cohorts, the bell boys. They create a powerful narrative, they design our policies to suit their needs, they influence our legislations, they formulate our education

system so that the products of the system serve their purpose, and they denigrate our culture so that we lose ours and become subservient to their cultures.

They do not have to put their own knees physically on us because their culture and ideas are already inherited. The knee on our necks is now our brothers' and sisters' knee. The knee on our neck is of different shades of color but it comes from the same source, from those who think that the world belongs to them. It comes from a deep-level disdain and contempt for our very existence.

I think the only way to remove this knee and breath is to recognize the knee, understand its ways of working and organize to defend ourselves. Otherwise, we'll find it difficult to even think of breathing.

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