Reflections on Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance*

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In this article, I analyse Thabo Mbeki’s call for an African Renaissance, and argue that, as a general response to the crisis in Africa, the African Renaissance should be debated within a broader intellectual tradition of renewal. I argue that Mbeki’s call is timely because he calls for the liberalisation of African states and their economies; the institution of values that must replace corruption and incompetence; as well as seeking the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and encouraging an Africa-centred engagement that will promote trade and sustainable development. I further argue that the African Renaissance is an imperative because it demands a post-nationalist agenda that takes the African region seriously, calls for the revitalisation of Africa’s cultural ideals, and promotes a new political culture. In the final section of the article, I argue that the Renaissance is an imperative because of the precarious socio-economic situation in Africa.

South African President Thabo Mbeki has made the African Renaissance a key component of his governing ideology. In this article, I review Mbeki’s call for an African Renaissance and the various reactions to his proposals and I argue that the renaissance imperative, as outlined by Mbeki, is crucial for reconfiguring the human condition in Africa. I reflect as an African who now lives and works in academia in an American university. This article is part of a larger project that analyses responses to the African crisis. It reflects my sympathies and appreciation of the call for a renewal of values and individual and social practices that shape public life. In analysing and endorsing Mbeki’s call for a Renaissance, I do not imply that this is the only approach to solving Africa’s problems. While I believe the time has come for a Renaissance, I do not seek in this article to turn Mbeki into a political messiah. I only concur with his call for a Renaissance in Africa.

Genesis of the African Renaissance Idea

Reflections on Mbeki’s call for an African Renaissance often highlight his ‘I am an African’ speech of 8 May 1996 to the Constitutional Assembly of South Africa. In that speech, he hinted at what the renaissance project symbolised. He told the representatives of the people that he was starting from the beginning, and that beginning was the affirmation ‘I am an African’, a view that not only signalled future policy, but that also recognised the common bonds between South Africa and the rest of Africa. Although Mbeki did not refer specifically to the African Renaissance in this speech, he did, however, make the emotional, ideological, and political connections necessary for his call for a Renaissance. Since that call, many have wrestled with the idea, seeking to understand its meaning and scope. While

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Mbeki has conceptualised and provided a programmatic vision for the idea of ‘African Renaissance’, the concept first emerged when Nelson Mandela proclaimed its inception, in his address to the Organisation of African Unity in Tunis in 1944. Mbeki has since promoted the idea of a Renaissance as a new social imperative, making it a critical component of change and a sine qua non of recovery in Africa. Locating this call for a Renaissance in the activist politics of the new millennium, Priscilla Jana argues:

The African Renaissance vision is an all-embracing concept that draws its inspiration from the rich and diverse history and cultures of Africa. It acknowledges Africa as the cradle of humanity, whilst providing a framework for the modern Africa to re-emerge as a significant partner in the New World order. This framework touches all areas of human endeavor; political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and cultural.

In recent years, the idea of a Renaissance has sparked a cultural and political debate in South Africa. The idea has gained importance because the ruling African National Congress government has embraced it, intending to promote it and to make it part of Mbeki’s vision for Africa. Mbeki first used the idea of a renaissance in his inaugural address as Chancellor of the University of Transkei on Umtata in 18 May 1995, when he stated that the university was also charged with the responsibility of ‘safeguarding an accelerated as well as sustainable social, economic and cultural renaissance’.

Two years later, in April 1997, in an address to the Corporate Council on Africa in Chantilly, Virginia, Mbeki spoke specifically of the African Renaissance. He referred to the miracle of change in South Africa, and to his sense of hope at the possible resolution of the conflicts in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaïre). Mbeki challenged outside perceptions of Africa that see it as nothing more than a strife-torn continent, arguing, ‘Those who have eyes to see, let them see. The African Renaissance is upon us. As we peer through the looking glass darkly, this may not be obvious. But it is upon us’. He also pointed out that Africans were now establishing genuine and stable democracies because the one-party regime worked poorly. He described the desire for all people to govern as part of an African tradition because people were moving to replace the regimes that had failed to govern properly.

Mbeki argued that this generation has been a victim of tyranny and such tyranny should not be allowed to continue. He referred to ‘new thinking’ that resists the view that Africans can continue to live on charity. Africa has worked for the emancipation of women and for liberation from oppression, underdevelopment, and the historical dependence that has marked the history of Africa. He lamented the enormous ‘brain drain’ from Africa, and he expressed the hope that as rebirth takes place, Africans who have gone into the diaspora will return to contribute to the development of the continent. In order for this to happen, he proposed that the world community invest in Africa to ensure economic reforms. In turn, this would create a favourable climate for sustained growth in which the African business sector would play a crucial role rather than have outside companies control the exploitation of the resources of the continent. It is now clear that although Mbeki’s diagnosis of the

3 T. Mbeki, Africa the Time has Come: Selected Speeches (Johannesburg, Mafuba, 1998), p. 38.
4 The speech in which he calls for the African Renaissance is entitled ‘Africa’s Time Has Come’, in Mbeki, Africa the Time has Come, pp. 200–204. My summary is taken from the online version of the South African government site http://www.gov.za/speeches/index.html, 19/14/97. I have not taken time to study the relationship, but in preparation for the first democratic elections, the ANC commissioned a recording by several South African musicians on the theme of time, entitled, Sekonjalo, ‘Now is the time’.
5 M. Mbeki, ‘The African Renaissance: Myth or Reality?’, address to the SAIIA, Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg, 21 October 1997. Mbeki also referred to the Cape Town Olympic bid, asking that other African countries support that bid to make the new century Africa’s century. However, we know today that in early voting the African delegates on the Olympic committee did not support Africa’s bid.
African crisis in the Virginia speech was correct, his predictions about developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo have not been borne out, and genuine democratic transitions have proved more difficult to achieve. The failure of Mbeki and the South African government to reject the questionable elections in Zimbabwe has also raised questions about commitment to democratic rule in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the general thrust of his Virginia speech spelled out the possibilities for African states to thrive.

On 28 September 1997, the ANC organised a conference in Johannesburg on the idea of the African Renaissance, and in 1999 supporters launched the African Renaissance Institute. The South African Renaissance chapter was launched shortly after the conference. This chapter is responsible for spearheading the ideas and concepts generated by Mbeki’s idea of an African Renaissance. Subsequently, the ANC developed the concept and made it part of its ideology and one of their key goals for the new millennium.6

What is the African Renaissance?

The question now is, what are the key components of the African Renaissance? Eddy Maloka suggests that the discourses on the African Renaissance can be grouped according to globalist, Pan-Africanist, and culturalist perspectives.7 Another, highly critical, study by Ineke van Kessel questions whether Mbeki’s renaissance is modernisation, neo-traditionalism or Africanisation.8 She argues that Mbeki draws his vision and inspiration from a mythological reading of Africa’s past from which he seeks to discover Africa’s soul immortalised in the creativity of Africans, in the art and architecture of ancient Africa. Van Kessel also criticises Mbeki’s pan-Africanism, questioning the notion that ‘the people’ ruled in Africa, pointing out that Africans have practised slavery, and that rulers such as Shaka Zulu were certainly not democrats. She also raises critical questions about Mbeki’s Renaissance vision’s neo-traditional focus and Africanisation, which supporters increasingly invoke to refer to a new kind of black nationalism. While Van Kessel’s concerns may be legitimate, it is important that scholars and policymakers in Africa not be too quick to dismiss Mbeki’s initiative.

Other perspectives on the idea of the African Renaissance locate its long history in a cultural paradigm that emphasises the importance of African culture in terms of Africa’s place in the world. Pieter Boele van Hensbroek uses this cultural paradigm in tracing the intellectual history of the African Renaissance. Writing in Quest, he argues that it is Edward Wilmot Blyden who leads the ‘culture paradigm intellectuals’, based on Blyden’s emphasis of a distinct conception of ‘the African personality’.9 Blyden describes the African personality as ‘spiritual, social, communal, consensus-minded, full of emotion, rhythm, and of sensitivity’.10 Van Hensbroek argues that Blyden grounded his agenda in ‘an essentialist

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7 Ibid. See also P. Vale and S. Maseko, ‘South Africa and the African Renaissance’, International Affairs, 74, 2 (1998), pp. 271–287.
8 I. van Kessel ‘In Search of an African Renaissance’, p. 43.
9 Edward Wilmot Blyden was born on the Danish Island of St Thomas and emigrated to Liberia in 1851 after he was denied permission to enter the United States and study theology. The term ‘African personality’ has several meanings in the works of Blyden. Generally, it is presented in racial terms in an attempt to critique and reverse western racism. It refers to ‘the sum of values of African civilization, the body of qualities which make up the distinctiveness of the people of Africa’. Quoted in V. Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 133.
idea of cultures and the belief that they are part of cultures and culture is an important component of being authentic. Culturalists stress a distinctive mode of being, and in Africa culturalists highlight the distinctiveness of African culture as opposed to western culture. This approach, which also posits a long history of culture, includes everyone in the culture as a participant, and, finally, blurs boundaries. ‘Instead of the complicat[ions] … where linguistic, ethnic, national and historical boundaries rarely overlap, one tends to create a picture of coinciding boundaries of a continent, a race, a culture, a colour, a personality, a history, a philosophy, a political orientation, and religious orientation’. While this approach may foster a sense of belonging and may advance the important goal of capturing and preserving elements of ‘African-ness’ – even if that is constructed – pushing such an agenda at the expense of local and regional variations may, in the end, miss particularities that may be useful in affirming identity.

I should point out, however, that while enthusiasts of an African cultural paradigm err on the side of unanimity, particularists might run the risk of ignoring the commonality that the constructed Africa shares in its experience of marginalisation in a world that has articulated universal principles yet has subjected Africa to a less-than-equal status. Discussions about a renaissance in Africa that would seriously consider cultural elements ought to stress the broad themes that African states face today and should articulate, in an insightful manner, local and specific ideas that offer an agenda for renewal. A balanced approach that emphasises local ideas, as well as universal principles, is necessary because an essentialist perspective of Africa will not work. Such a perspective might reject the common themes and issues shared by African communities, which scholars turn to when making broad generalisations about the nature of African societies. Hence, in the remarks that follow, I assume a balanced approach because it provides a good basis for meaningful discourse of the African Renaissance. For the sake of simplicity, I will first sketch the key components of Mbeki’s African Renaissance and some of the issues raised by critics of Mbeki’s call for rebirth, as I argue that Mbeki’s ideas about the need for a renaissance are imperative for the survival of the continent.

The Politics of African Identity

First, it follows from the preceding section that the African Renaissance in its present incarnation has its source in Africa’s identity politics. This focus on identity politics is necessary to recover a distorted view of Africa that Mbeki evokes in his ‘I am an African’ speech. In this sense, the idea of the African Renaissance is part of a long struggle to articulate and actualise an African identity and consciousness. I do not assume unanimity of identity and consciousness. Identity issues and modes of consciousness vary, but we can identify a general sense in which African countries have experienced the beginning of the modern state that calls for a critical appraisal of that experience in the search for a new awareness of who they are and what lies ahead. It is critical that we note that despite attempts to see Mbeki’s call for an African Renaissance as the recovery of a black identity, Mbeki is not primarily concerned with the issue of blackness. One must add, however, that if there is going to be a Renaissance, Africans must at some point face the issue of

11 Blyden published several works during his lifetime. Here is a partial list of his publications: Liberia’s Offering (New York, 1862); Liberia’s Past, Present, and Future (Washington, 1869); The Negro in Ancient History (Washington, 1869); Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1967); Africa and Africans (London, 1903).
blackness. Nevertheless, Mbeki’s emphasis is on Africa and attempts by his critics and supporters to define what it means to be an African as ‘black’ miss the point.

Van Kessel calls our attention to the temptation to misappropriate the renaissance for black élites, who would want to use it to promote ‘exclusivist black nationalism’. It is crucial for all concerned about a new Africa to check this move and to ensure that all Africans understand the idea of Africa in an emerging dispensation as broadly as Mbeki hopes this idea of Africa should be understood. While he stands in a long tradition of Africans who have articulated different versions of this kind of identity politics, such as négritude, black consciousness, black power, and ‘black is beautiful’, Mbeki speaks specifically of the idea of an Africa wherein a number of cultures converge.

I owe my being to the Khoi and the San … I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land … In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East … I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led … My mind and my knowledge of myself is formed by the victories that are the jewels of our African crown … earned from Isandhlwana, as Ethiopians and as the Ashanti of Ghana, as the Berbers of the desert … I am the grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St Helena and the Bahamas … I come from those who were transported from India and China … Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African.13

It ought to be obvious to observers of recent developments in South Africa that this was no simple amalgamation of ethnic groups by a leader whose government and society was pursuing reconciliation as a reasonable probe of the past and responsible path into the future in the aftermath of apartheid. In his speech, Mbeki pointed out some of the atrocities imposed on Africans. Yet he maintained and advocated a multicultural vision of Africa because in many ways both the victims and the perpetrators have suffered from the ideology that has tried to eliminate other cultures and their contribution to humanity. Thus, Africa is a construction of colonial domination and the post-colonial fiasco of statism and dictatorial leadership which has shaped, battered, and inhibited the peoples of Africa, who must now attempt to reclaim their distorted identities. Africans cannot subject such a project of reclamation to pre-colonial ethnic divisions or the whims of modernity and its racist projects. In this regard, the African Renaissance signals a new day in Africa by calling for a renewal of the identity of Africans. To interpret the call for a renaissance as a clamour for Black Nationalism limits the vision that Mbeki articulates. Furthermore, I also believe that interpreters do a disservice to the broad vision that aims at recovering the lost identities of all Africans when they subsume such a vision under Mbeki’s presidential ambitions and power politics. This misses the historic opportunity that the idea of the Renaissance offers, to rethink what Mudimbe calls ‘the idea of Africa’ in a post-nationalist world.

It is apparent that by calling for a recovery of an African identity, Mbeki joins Cheikh Anta Diop, who also called for the renewal of Africa. But, because Diop argued that African writers and cultural élites had abandoned African languages and could not be genuine messengers of an African Renaissance, Mbeki departs from Diop’s formulation.14 Mbeki joins his fellow South African Isaka Seme, who, in a speech at Columbia University in April 1906, focused on the idea of African regeneration. What is different about Mbeki’s call is that he emphasises political and economic renewal in the post-colonial state, while Seme called for a regeneration of Africa during colonial rule. Seme, in his speech, used the

agricultural and religious metaphor of ‘regeneration’ to articulate the need for a new
beginning in Africa.

The idea of renewal also occupied the minds of other writers as they reflected on the
struggle for African identity in South Africa. South Africans rejected racist politics, which
denigrated Africans. In his discussion of urbanisation in South Africa, Len Bloom rejected
South Africa’s segregationist policies, which emphasised ethnicity. Drawing from a study
by H. Powdermaker, he embraced an interdisciplinary perspective on rebirth and renewal
in place of apartheid’s separate development: ‘Today is the African Renaissance, and with
development or archaeology, history, sociology, anthropology and economics in African
university institutions, Africans are rejecting the arrogant colonial myth that Africa had “no
civilisation” and slumbered during historical time’.\textsuperscript{15} The recovery of African civilisation
forms part of an ongoing identity politics in which Africans have engaged for a long time.
Mbeki’s current call for a Renaissance continues in the tradition that rejects the myth that
Africa has no civilisation. Such a denial must be constructed on what African intellectuals
have tried to do throughout their history to reclaim African identity whether in the
Pan-Africanist movement, the Garvey movements, the Négritude movement, Black Power,
or the Civil Rights movement.\textsuperscript{16}

I must emphasise that I do not claim that these movements did not contribute to the idea
of a Renaissance. Abiola Irele pointed out several years ago that the Négritude movement
was a Renaissance because its call for an appreciation of the African world ‘which western
influence had obscured appears to be in fact the most essential and most significant element
in the literature of négritude as the principal channel of the African renaissance’.\textsuperscript{17} In my
view, Mbeki’s call remains distinct because he does not ground it on race or ethnicity, but
on values that would establish political, and economic freedoms as Africans seek to build
a society that is free from pain and abuse.

Mbeki’s call is crucial because Africa stands at a critical juncture. A Renaissance that
is multicultural and multidisciplinary in scope could prove indispensably instrumental in
helping different African countries and their leaders to establish exactly that new kind of
society that Africans have yearned to establish over the years. Such a society would emerge
out of the rubble of the present post-colonial state shaped by colonial domination and
post-colonial arbitrary rule. As a problematic creation of modernity, racist ideas and inept
policies have shaped Africa’s fate. A new beginning, which takes African ideas seriously,
must not be grounded on race or ethnicity. Africans must conceive it in diversity; to do so
Africans have to come to terms with their own diverse cultures, which remain important
assets, because they will need them to reconstruct the future. The recognition of Africa’s
multicultural reality does not bury specific cultural norms and regional specificity; rather,
it offers an opportunity to share in different cultural principles that may offer fresh
perspectives on solving the continent’s problems.

\textbf{Beyond Nationalism?}

Second, the African Renaissance is a post-nationalist ideology that echoes previous projects
and calls for the renewal of the entire African continent, not just of single nations. What
is different about Mbeki’s vision is that he is resolute and has used the institutions of the
African National Congress (ANC) to articulate it. He has persuaded the ANC government

\textsuperscript{16} Vale and Maseko, ‘South Africa and the African Renaissance’, p. 278 rightly point out that Mbeki links
reconstruction in Africa with African identity.
to support that vision through legislation, which has permitted the creation of an institutional framework. Early reactions to the idea of the African Renaissance raised concerns about the role of Mbeki and the South African government, with some wondering if this was Pax Pretoriana, a peace forged in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa.\(^\text{18}\) Others have questioned whether Mbeki’s renaissance may only be post-apartheid nationalism writ large, which aims at promoting a new nationalist and mercantile foreign policy, with South Africa playing the lead role as a regional industrial giant.\(^\text{19}\) However, I believe that this is not the case, as Mbeki has also called for the development of trade relations between African countries.

There is a sense in which this call resembles early African nationalist aspirations. James Coleman described nationalism as the awakening of African political consciousness by African élites. Coleman described this nationalism as a cultural Renaissance that had a special touch because it was linked to African cultural values, which received fresh appreciation in the literary products of the time.\(^\text{20}\) Soon after, Richard Sklar argued that national integration, which sought to overcome sub-regional loyalties, was part of a project of ‘the African Renaissance’.\(^\text{21}\) Mbeki’s call clearly addresses the needs of the entire African community, and as such goes beyond earlier nationalisms.

In this sense, the African Renaissance resembles other ‘all Africa’ plans that have been proposed to deal with the problems of African politics, such as the Lagos Plan of 1980, the Abuja Treaty of 1991, the declarations that came out of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa in 1991, and the New Partnership for African Development. The precedent for such reflection in Africa points to a desire to engage in post-nationalist politics. A Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) consultation in March of 1996 called for an African Renaissance in the new millennium.\(^\text{22}\) In this respect, Mbeki goes even further in arguing that although a renaissance arises spontaneously, ‘without an integrated program of action to build upon those minimum factors, the dream of the Renaissance shall forever be deferred or remain a romantic idealistic concept’.\(^\text{23}\) He calls for a programme of action that embraces the entire continent, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which clearly signals a post-nationalist path that highlights instead a pan-Africanist view of renewal. African leaders have pledged through NEPAD to fight to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.\(^\text{24}\) NEPAD follows earlier proposals such as the New African Initiative (NAI), the former Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP), initially championed by Thabo Mbeki, Algeria’s Abdelazziz Bouteflika, and Nigeria’s Olusegun Obansanjo. NEPAD has also drawn from the OMEGA Plan for Africa championed by the Senegalese President Wade, and incorporates ideas from Compact for

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\(^{19}\) Vale and Maseko, ‘South Africa and The African Renaissance’, p. 274, point out that this was the vision of Jan Smuts.


\(^{22}\) I am indebted to Maseka for the list of continent-wide plans of action.


Economic Recovery spelt out by the United Nation’s Economic Commission. African leaders now argue that Africa is at a historic juncture, and they ‘declare that we will no longer allow ourselves to be conditioned by circumstance. We will determine our own destiny and call on the rest of the world to complement our efforts’.

NEPAD depends on the institution of democratic governments on the continent. We are still to see genuine democratic transitions and regimes on the continent but the call of these leaders for a new partnership strengthens the economic arguments Mbeki has made in his call for the African Renaissance.

In the NEPAD protocols, as with previous documents, the leaders attribute the crisis in Africa to various circumstances and understate the role that political élites in Africa have played in creating such crisis: ‘The impoverishment of the African continent was accentuated primarily by the legacy of colonialism, the Cold War, the workings of the international economic system and the inadequacies of and shortcomings in the policies pursued by many countries in the post-independence era’. Describing the role played by African leaders as inadequate and as shortcomings is an understatement because the record demonstrates instead a deliberate and systematic abuse of economic resources through a regime of corruption and exploitation. In other parts of the document, the leaders recognise the dismal record of African political élites when they argue that there is now new thinking about democracy on the continent: ‘Democracy and state legitimacy have been redefined to include accountable government, a culture of human rights and popular participation as central elements’. One cannot miss the implication here. The leaders admit that in order for NEPAD to work, good governance must take centre stage. We must add that good governance is not merely a political theory, but is indeed a praxis that must transform vision into the effective management of economic resources. The ability and willingness to manage economic resources in a responsible and accountable manner is crucial because it creates a climate of confidence, trust, and dependability to reassure members of the political community that they can depend on their leaders to protect and invest in the resources of the state appropriately. Whether NEPAD wins wide acceptance in Africa, remains to be seen. However, the idea of a partnership is appealing because without such a partnership on the continent and the participation of the international community, the African Renaissance will fail.

Reinterpreting African Humanism

Third, the African Renaissance includes a revival of humanistic and cultural ideals. William Makgoba describes the Renaissance as a humanistic engagement that reflects African ideas such as ubuntu, which stress community identity and the use of consensus to resolve conflicts. The concept ‘ubuntu’ means ‘humanity’ or ‘humanness’. These concepts are important because people share a common humanity. As a philosophy, it upholds individuality and community together. It also promotes the exercise of individual responsibility for the good of the person and the rest of the members of the community. Central to the concept is the idea that relations and transactions that take place among people should be undertaken humanely, in light of values that people share in a given community. The South African government recognises this and has stated clearly that principles of ubuntu should be employed in relations between people.

27 NEPAD, p. 4.
28 NEPAD, p. 10.
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The principle of caring for each other’s wellbeing ... and a spirit of mutual support ... Each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual’s humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal wellbeing.\(^{29}\)

The literature on *ubuntu* is extensive and often tends to project a mainly communitarian ethos.\(^{30}\) While Africans need to nurture a strong sense of community, it would be a mistake during this emphasis on a Renaissance to focus exclusively on community at the expense of individuality. Dirk J. Louw has argued that *ubuntu* thought cannot ignore individuality, particularity, and historicity.\(^{31}\) What this calls for is a careful reading of the relationship between individuals and others in society without suffocating the individual in the society. Wim van Binsbergen has argued that *ubuntu* can also be read as utopian and prophetic thought.\(^{32}\) Drawing from the work of Mogobe Ramose who has argued that globalisation is largely a market-oriented economic project,

in which the value, dignity, personal safety, even survival of the human person no longer constitute central concerns. This process is reinforced by the North Atlantic’s region’s drive for political and cultural hegemony. African societies have suffered greatly in the process, but their lasting value orientation in terms of *ubuntu* holds up an alternative in the sense that it advocates a renewed concern for the human person.\(^{33}\)

This assessment of Western marginalisation of Africa, which has negated *ubuntu* values, is correct. However, one must add that post-colonial regimes have also negated *ubuntu* in profoundly disturbing ways, and Mbeki’s call for a Renaissance offers an opportunity to resurrect those values and nurture them in the hopes of changing the present circumstances. Van Binsbergen believes that the utopianism of *ubuntu* ‘creates a moral community’, which is open to all regardless of birthright, a view consistent with Mbeki’s ‘I am an African’ speech. The aim of the moral community is to share ‘a concern for the present and future of a particular local or regional society, seeking to add to the latter’s resources, redressing its ills, and searching its conceptual and spiritual repertoire for inspiration, blueprints, models, encouragement in the process’.\(^{34}\) He has pointed out that this might be evident in South Africa, but absent in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. He is convinced that *ubuntu* and globalisation should not be seen as opposites, but rather as processes that can work together. South Africans already live their lives in a globalised context, and the reconciliation project of post-apartheid South Africa reflects this reality.

I am in agreement with Van Binsbergen that Africans who articulate philosophies that call for the retrieval of Africanity, are already embedded in a global culture. Furthermore, the claim that *ubuntu* means a return to some pristine village life and values is an illusion. I also agree with him that the revival of *ubuntu* as a philosophical ideal that should drive social agendas has great promise. *Ubuntu* offers an ancestral model that appeals to people; *ubuntu* offers ways of resolving ‘insurmountable contradictions’, and the reconciliation process in South Africa is a good example.\(^{35}\)

\(^{29}\) See http://www.gov.za/whitepaper/index.html

\(^{30}\) The journal *Quest*, XV, 1–2 (2001) has a bibliography of works on the African Renaissance and the concept ‘*ubuntu*’, pp. 145–153.

\(^{31}\) See D. J. Louw, ‘Ubuntu and the Challenges of Multiculturalism in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Quest*, XV, 1–2 (2001), pp. 15–36. Louw argues that the concept ‘not only describes human being as “being-with-others”’, but also prescribes how we should relate to others, i.e. what “being-with-others” should be all about’, p. 15.


\(^{34}\) Van Binsbergen ‘Ubuntu and Globalisation of Southern African Thought and Society’, p. 60.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 73–74.
Had Van Binsbergen stopped there, his analysis would be incomplete. He has added that the problem with using ubuntu as the *deus ex machina*, lies in the fact that ubuntu can erase other possibilities in the region, become a pacifier where genuine conflicts exist, and may serve those who have moved into privileged positions after the collapse of colonialism in Zimbabwe and South Africa. These people may claim that they speak for the entire community and might be tempted to wonder why some dare question their ideas. In light of the high crime rate in South Africa, there should be a new analysis of class and gender to deal with urban problems in South Africa today rather than depending on the idea of ubuntu alone. Van Binsbergen has argued that the discourse of ubuntu revolves around textual violence, but scholars must realise that ‘the concept of ubuntu is historically determined to constitute a bone of contention, to remind us of past violence and to lead us into new violence, until we realise that above all ubuntu is the invitation to confront this determination and, together, rise above such violence. Only then can our work, on or about ubuntu, benefit the poor and powerless people of southern Africa …’.36

While I agree with Van Binsbergen, his conclusion slips away from the historical concreteness of the deployment of ubuntu as a conceptual tool that must be deployed to redress the current nightmare in sub-Saharan Africa and effect a Renaissance. In this sense, the idea of ubuntu has to reflect directly in leadership and management styles that can produce results. Political dictatorship, corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks and poor economic policies are not merely a carry-over from colonial, western ideas which the magic of ubuntu must now do away with; but rather social praxis which has found a home in Africa, and Africa needs a rebirth that will kill these practices and institute new ones.

In addition, the humanistic aspect of the Renaissance provides an opportunity to launch an ethical engagement that seeks to avoid war by tapping into African moral values to deal with conflict.37 South African involvement in conflict resolution in the south-central region was the basis for the hope in dealing with socio-political issues of today and underpins this search for peace. The desire to recover African cultures rejects the psychology of nothingness imposed by the historical projects of domination, which Rosey Pool argues Mbeki spelled out in his Virginia speech. The belief that Africans have a rich cultural heritage must be employed in rebuilding Africa. The rejection of the negative psychology imposed by colonialism began with the appreciation of African arts and literature, firstly when Africans began studying in Europe, especially in England, but for several decades now, by Africans living on the continent as well.38 The African Festival of Arts and Culture of Lagos in 1976 was a programme of recovery and a celebration of African cultures.

Such a cultural revival cannot take place in a vacuum, however. Africans must institute a cultural revival that appreciates the problems of the 21st century. African leaders must play a central role by opening a free space that will empower their people to meet not only their basic needs, but also strive to gather a surplus for the future. This must be done so that the cultural revival will not be undercut by day-to-day problems. Négritude and other ideologies were problematic because their advocates used them to appeal to Africans to embrace their cultures, but these advocates did not usher in the political leadership necessary to empower Africans to face challenges posed by the totalities of modernity.

There is no doubt that a cultural revival is crucial in recovering African identities distorted by colonialism and brutalised by the post-colonial regimes. Different aspects of the arts must be employed to recreate African cultural identities for a new day. David

36 Ibid., p. 82.
Coplan has consistently argued that such cultural retrieval must not always be seen as a preference for ‘traditional’ over other forms of art because such a bifurcation does not work in South Africa where a genuine musical culture has indeed been a mixture of genres.  

‘Traditional for black South Africans means the Afro-industrial popular music of African urban labor migrants and dispossessed peasants’.

Coplan describes the South African music that is performed on *Exodumo*, SABC television. The performers use local music, wear local clothing, and are very popular. He likens this to Thabo Mbeki’s notion of a ‘Third Way’ that would ‘constrict a more locally relevant pathway to stability and prosperity, that is, to competitive economic modernism’, which is part of the Renaissance project. It calls for a revival of Africa’s past glory, encourages leaders to reign not rule, engages marginalised people in projects from which they may not benefit, and ‘the promotion and empowerment of distinctly “African” modes of managing modernity and globalisation against the backdrop, with admitted exceptions and contrary positive indications, of over thirty years of regional failure, conflict, and decline’. Coplan wonders what glory should be revived, stating that it is difficult but can be imagined:

> the point being made is that precolonial African state builders created highly organised polities within the historical circumstances and technological resources of the time and place, leaving a legacy in which their descendants might justifiably take some pride. But what is actually to be saved from that independent era? The answer is forms of social relatedness, their moral and spiritual foundations, and their associated cultural practices … African contributions to the knowledge base of improved human futures are well worth valorisation and serious study.

Njabula Ndebele argues that for Africans ‘the return to mythical roots ceases to be a compelling factor of mobilisation in the face of the sheer weight of existing socio-cultural realities that demand to be addressed on their own terms … the call for black roots has less effect than the provision of water and sanitation, electricity, telephones, houses, clinics, transport, schools and jobs’.

**Democracy and Development**

Fourth, Mbeki’s call for a Renaissance is distinct from previous calls because it seeks to promote a new political culture that would offer a new opportunity for African states to change the social conditions of the country. The agenda spelled out in the idea of a renaissance involves cultural exchange, liberation of African women from patriarchy, empowerment for young people to achieve their potential, the institution of, and dedication to, democratic values, and sustainable economic development. Observers point out that Mbeki offers the continent a wish list for development. More than offering a wish list, the call for a Renaissance requires commitment to some of the main tenets of liberal democracy, the neo-liberal approach to politics and economic management promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in response to the crisis in Africa. In his Virginia speech and in his opening address at the conference organised on the
African Renaissance, Mbeki argued that Africans today need a system of people power and rule by the people. In another speech at the United Nations University in 1998, he spelled out clearly and broadly some of the key tenets of the Renaissance as it relates to a liberal democratic ethos. The main themes of the Renaissance include a list of ideas that have been part of the political and economic discourse in Africa in the wake of the collapse of regimes of domination such as good governance; economic policies that promote privatisation and encourage private sector investment. African states have also been urged to reduce state ownership, promote responsibility in building economic systems to meet the needs of the time; initiate regional economic cooperation to enhance markets; and introduce social policies that would deliver goods such as good education, good healthcare, good houses, clean water, and improved sanitation.47

It is thus clear that Mbeki links democratisation and the practice of democratic ideals to the economic revitalisation of the continent. Taylor and Williams, in their insightful discussion, point out that Mbeki links his idea of renaissance to ‘global power structures that its proponents can claim with credibility that the values it represents have become self-evident’.48 They think such a move would make governments accountable ‘not to their own electorates but to faceless speculators and creditors in the world’s financial centers’.49 Taylor and Williams highlight what indeed could prove a disturbing outcome for many African governments who seek to achieve the vision outlined in the Renaissance project. However, before concluding that this will indeed shift accountability of African leaders from the electorate to international capitalist speculators and creditors, we must recall that poor economic management within the continent also shares the responsibility for the collapse of African economies. African managers have already abandoned their accountability to their electorates by presiding over undemocratic systems, by practising corruption, and by cultivating a climate of violence and greed.

Like the World Bank and the IMF, Mbeki calls for the limited role of the state in the economy. Critics of the World Bank argue that one cannot take the African state out of the economies of the region. One has to grant credence to that argument. Because of the important role that states play, scholars seeking a mediating position have discussed ways of applying the notion of corporatism – a concept that establishes a limited role for the state with the understanding that the combined efforts of the state and other elements of society could maintain economic and social order, in Africa.50 Defining corporatist theory, Peter J. Williamson argues that, ‘the state is concerned to directly regulate and influence the behavior of individual actions in the economy such that their behavior is compatible with the goals of the economic and social order’.51 Williamson further adds that it is important that in doing so, the state is not subject to a challenge from popular or special interest groups. The point here being that corporatism continues to give the state a significant role in the economies of Africa.

African states must encourage the development of an entrepreneurial spirit among the people. It is necessary for the state to have such a limited role, if its past record is anything to go on. In the past, state control has hindered the development of a responsible economic and social order, which makes it difficult to think of corporatism as a viable option. As

48 Taylor and Williams, 2001, p. 268.
49 Ibid.
Eboe Hutchful has argued, the reality remains that, ‘[i]n Africa, patriarchy, gerontocracy, clientelism, and patrimonialism, as well, possibly, as corporatism and other forms, constitute particular structures of domination, existing in a variety of forms of articulation with each other’. The state has not performed well in Africa and has carried on practices that have disrupted the economy. For that reason, an African Renaissance must reject systems of governance that are corrupt and inefficient, as well as the managers of those systems, who seek to enrich themselves. Pointing out that both locals and outsiders practise corruption, Mbeki affirms: ‘I am certain that none of us present here will dispute the fact that the cancer of self-enrichment by corrupt means constitutes one of the factors which accounts for the underdevelopment and violent conflicts from which we seek to escape’. The African Renaissance must generate a cultural and political revival that enables Africans and their leaders to seek to provide a better life for all people. To do this, the Renaissance must address the question of sustainable development, which according to Mbeki includes a long list of things ranging from resource development and the emancipation of women, to fair international trade practices.

Mbeki argues that the benefits of globalisation will take time, but in the meantime Africa must form part of the global economy by attracting ‘significant volumes of capital’. He is critical of the fact that the surpluses generated in developed countries from the movement of capital around the world are not available to African countries that need such resources most. Mbeki’s project calls for serious engagement in building a ‘new world’ characterised by democratic ideals, peace, stability, sustainable development and ‘equality among the nations and a just and democratic system of international governance’. Rhetoric alone is not new, and hence it will take a concerted effort from all African communities to turn the victories of liberation into a genuine renaissance. In this respect, Mbeki’s views on the African Renaissance resemble those of Leonard Barnes. In his book, African Renaissance, Barnes argued that Africans have a tendency to blame neo-colonialism and racism for the problems of the continent, instead of focusing on improving their own performance. Barnes suggested that African leaders wanted to turn the crisis in Africa into a public relations issue:

What the new African states have demonstrated is a high degree of political instability and administrative incompetence; a reckless squandering of economic resources combined with an absolutely king-size capacity for corruption and graft of all sorts in all social strata including the highest (indeed especially in the highest); a perverse tendency to break up useful political and economic associations [into] ever less viable smithereens; and finally a morbid relish for meeting their difficulties with violence and savagery.

I think that his claim that African social organisations have been a hindrance to the kinds of contributions that Africa makes to world civilisation is overstated because the problems do not lie with the social organisations in the different villages, but rather with state control and management of the economy. However, his point about bureaucratic corruption remains relevant. Barnes pointed out that: ‘culturally speaking, Africa is not nearly so far behind the West as the West is behind its own best possibilities’. Barnes argued that Africa’s future would depend on new talent trained to lead Africa into the future.

54 Ibid., p. 6.
55 Ibid., p. 7.
56 Ibid., p. 8.
58 Ibid., p. 10.
59 Ibid., p. 13.
The best human beings whom Africa produces today are no whit inferior in quality to the best who can be found anywhere else in the world … It is on this moral and intellectual aristocracy and on the African peasantry that my tranquil trust most firmly fastens. When these two social elements learn to work together in close alliance for the balanced development of human and natural resources, Africa will have found its feet indeed. In their merger, in the expanding insight and wisdom of the one combined with the untapped reserves of all human gifts in the other, nestle the planted seeds of the African Renaissance.60

It is difficult to dispute the claim that the élites and the peasants must work together. However, the sad reality of Africa is that the élites have ignored the peasants, and the disjunction between the élites and the masses has created a two-tier society, making it difficult for a majority of the people to participate in progress. It is precisely because of the evolution of this two-tier society – one tier rich, the other poor – that Africans should take seriously Mbeki’s idea of an African Renaissance. The stewardship of élites in Africa has created massive suffering and civil strife.

The Threat of Conflict

When Mbeki first called for a Renaissance, things were beginning to change in the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre) offering some hope that an era of reconstruction and development was dawning in Africa. This new era required people ‘ready and willing to be rebels against tyranny, instability, corruption and backwardness’.61 Reflecting on the journey of South Africa, Mbeki pointed out that there was hope that Nigeria would exchange corruption and abuse of power ‘for a system of governance that successfully addresses the challenges of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society and an equitable system of sharing resources, for a path of economic growth and development which benefits the people and reinforces the independence of Nigeria’.62

He lauded the end of Mobutu’s era, lamenting the conflicts that emerged in the DRC. However, contrary to Mbeki’s upbeat mode and his predictions of the successful conclusion of the conflict, the problems of the region have not yet been resolved. The region has come under the grip of economic and political behaviour that has promoted the self-interest of individuals, not states – a situation that Taylor and Williams describe as ‘a malignant condition offering significant opportunities to those in positions to exploit such situations. Such circumstances generate their own instrumental logic of accumulation and can serve to attract “businessmen”’.63 In the Central African region, Paul Kagame (the US-trained rebel leader who took over Rwanda) and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda joined forces with rebel leader Laurent Kabila to invade the former Zaïre and to topple the regime of the dictator, Mobutu. The coalition they formed was called the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) and included US-trained troops.64 US companies made business deals worth billions of dollars in rebel-controlled territory. When Kabila came to power, mineral wealth led to new conflicts with Rwanda and Uganda. These countries then invaded the eastern part of the country in 1998, claiming that they had entered the country in order to protect their borders from rebel groups who were a threat to their countries. Since then, Rwanda has worked with rebel groups within the Democratic Republic of Congo, such as the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD-Goma), and the Ugandan government has

60 Ibid., p. 15.
62 Ibid., p. 9.
63 Taylor and Williams, 2001, p. 272.
worked with the Congolese Liberation Front (CLF), which is a Mobutuist rebel group. Both Rwanda and Uganda have used their troops in the regions that they occupy to carry out mining activities, to loot Congolese banks, and to seize raw materials. Rwanda and Uganda have set up colonial-type governance in the areas they control. Their military leaders, including relatives of Kagame and Museveni, control all mineral exploitation. Jeremy Weinstein has argued that states in the region have openly advertised the economic reasons for their involvement. Taylor and Williams argue that the manipulation of the conflicts in the region poses a serious threat to Mbeki’s Renaissance agenda.

In Angola, where South Africa was involved during both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, the long civil war was driven largely by the region’s rich diamond and oil deposits. The Angolan war has displaced over 1.5 million Angolans; an estimated 330,000 people have left the country. Oil and diamond revenues estimated at US$5 billion, every year, supported the Angolan war. This revenue has been managed by leaders to prosecute the war and the masses in Angola remain poor. The wealth from oil revenue primarily benefits élites associated with the President – élites who work with the parastatal oil company, SONANGOL. Diamonds provided support for the UNITA war effort. The conflicts of the region as well as the wars in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire have lasted as long as they have, with the unusual brutality that has been demonstrated by each side, not because there were compelling reasons to defend grand ideas, or to extend territory (although some of these things might have played a role in the beginning of the conflict), but because these conflicts have offered business opportunities to politicians and those people who hold power in the region.

I agree that these conflicts pose a threat to the Renaissance agenda and could undermine the idea of Renaissance. Nevertheless, it is the very existence of these intractable conflicts that validates the Renaissance imperative. While the Renaissance implies big ideas such as political and economic liberalisation, it also offers an opportunity for leaders to develop the values that would cultivate the common good.

The Challenge of Renewal

Mbeki has argued that, ‘an enormous challenge faces all of us to do everything we can to contribute to the recovery of African pride, the confidence in ourselves that we can succeed as well as any other in building a humane and prosperous society’. He also added that centuries of the denial and abuse of black humanity has taken its toll on Africa. Africans must use all of their resources, including the arts, to rid themselves of this subservience. Intellectuals have a key role to play in this process to ensure that issues are well articulated; the African Renaissance involves ‘the education organisation, and energisation of new African patriots who, because to them yesterday is a foreign country, who join in struggle to bring about an African Renaissance [in] all its elements’.

68 Ibid., p. 61.
69 Ibid., p. 65.
72 Ibid., p. 10.
While Mbeki calls for a renewal that includes the arts (because they have a direct bearing on humanistic values), the historical African idea of renaissance did not only occupy scholars and artists. Two political activists, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson of the Sierra Leone Creole community, despite their differing political outlooks, have called for a rebirth of African values so that Africa would move forward into the future. Judson Leon argues that Edward Wilmont Blyden wanted the Americo-Liberians to play a leading role in bringing together different cultures into one horizon: ‘The Americo-Liberians would then provide the leadership in an African Renaissance that would help lead the whole continent to independence’. Finally, Richard Gray argued that the missionary whose project in Africa was placed alongside western colonialism, undercut colonial policy through the education of Africans: ‘The African renaissance had already begun. Colonial powers could not turn back the clock; missionary education had become the Achilles’ heel of colonialism’.

Critical responses to the idea of the African Renaissance have pointed out that Mbeki’s emphasis on economic recovery and development indicates his focus on industrialisation. Emmanuel Katongole correctly calls attention to the problematic links that an African Renaissance could have with development because developmentalism has a problematic history in Africa and other regions of the world. He points out that both Mbeki and President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda accept World Bank solutions to the problems of Africa, solutions that call for the imposition of liberal economic principles in Africa. He argues that this imposition from New York, Cape Town, and Kampala, does not consider Africa’s agenda. Katongole rightly suggests that many Africans do not see themselves in the narrative of the African Renaissance and for that reason the theologian must do theology in a way that will reflect the issues and problems of Africa as well as challenge the ‘overpowering and totalising stories as African Renaissance’.

Meta-narratives like the African Renaissance emerge because Africans continually refuse to deal with the issues that people face daily. Katongole, in the spirit of Foucault, argues that what generally ‘passes as knowledge or the voice of general wellbeing may well be the voice of a narrow range of economic and political interests’. Furthermore, taking a cue from the ‘Zaccheus story’, Katongole reminds theologians and those concerned with

73 Nnamdi, Benjamin Azikiwe became first President of Nigeria in 1963. He was educated in the United States, where he became acquainted with Marcus Garvey and his ‘back to Africa’ movement. He was overthrown in Nigeria’s first military coup in 1966, and later was appointed to serve as the Chancellor of the University of Lagos. He published Liberia in World Affairs, in 1934, and Renascent Africa, in 1937. Wallace-Johnson was born in Wilberforce, Sierra Leone in 1895. He trained at the United Methodist Theological Collegiate School. He had various jobs, including working for the municipality, and completed his military service during World War I. Active in the communist movement, he also became active in the Pan-African movement through his association with George Padmore. Wallace-Johnson was involved in trade unionism in England, and assisted in the formation of the Nigerian Trade Union. He wrote articles for the Negro Worker. He also spent some time in Moscow receiving training in Marxist thought. He helped to organise mass demonstrations and influenced the careers of many politicians including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. Wallace-Johnson and Nnamdi Azikiwe were both instrumental in starting the West African Youth League in 1935, and Wallace-Johnson served as its organising secretary. I am indebted to Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer for this information. See L. Spitzer and L. Denzer, ‘I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League’, The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 6, 3 (1973), pp. 413–452.


77 Ibid., p. 32.

78 Ibid., p. 32.

79 Ibid., p. 33.
the welfare of Africa to come down from their sycamore trees (i.e. tenth floor air-conditioned offices) into the difficult circumstances and tough realities that face people on a daily basis.

The Zaccheus story refers to the New Testament account of how Jesus stopped in the town of Jericho where he was mobbed by people desperate to catch a glimpse of him. One of these was a short man called Zaccheus, a wealthy tax collector whom people suspected of fraud. He climbed up a sycamore tree so that he would see Jesus when he passed by. When Jesus came to the tree, he called Zaccheus to come down and went with him to eat dinner at his house. The public murmured that Jesus was going to dinner at the house of a sinner. On hearing this, Zaccheus confessed his sins and vowed to give half of his wealth to the poor. Katongole uses this story to point out that only a few people are wealthy in Africa while many others are suffering. Theologians in Africa should raise critical voices about this situation, and challenge corrupt leaders about their wealth. Such a theological critique of the social realities of Africa will involve divesting African theology of universalist pretensions and its zombie spirit that does not engage in the real life stories of people. African theology today needs to present a sustained critique of the social conditions of the day and to challenge the liberal economic assumptions that ground calls such as the African Renaissance. African theology can do this in conversation with black theology, which takes socio-economic realities seriously. African theology should be ‘embodied theology’, that is, in order to play this critical role, it must take the concrete physical needs of the African people seriously.

This is an insightful reading of the African Renaissance, an idea that has spread very quickly in Africa. I accept fully the use of the Zaccheus story, which implies that the rich must re-examine their lifestyles and initiate a new stewardship. However, I must point out that, given the reality of the decline in Africa today, I wonder whether the call for the genuine reform of the political economy (even in this era of post-structural adjustment) is an indication that those who have called for an African Renaissance are imposing outside solutions to the problems of Africa! My sympathies lie with a different theological position – that offered by the Bonhoeffer scholar and anti-apartheid theologian, John de Gruchy of South Africa who sees considerable hope in the idea of a Renaissance and calls Mbeki’s proposals: ‘visionary yet expressed in more sober terms than those which characterised the rhetoric of many leaders of African liberation’.80

The realism in the African Renaissance is grounded on the belief that a political will exists in Africa today that can change things if there is enough outside support. Although I question the affirmation that such a political will exists in most of sub-Saharan Africa, De Gruchy is correct in seeing the African Renaissance as a sign of hope. Furthermore, while I believe it is too early to test this sense of realism because it is too soon to come to any conclusions on the matter, De Gruchy is correct in endorsing this hope and he adds: ‘Christians, called to live in hope of god’s transformation of the whole of reality, should respond warmly to Mbeki’s convictions’.81 De Gruchy does not call on the Christian community to support the Renaissance blindly. He suggests that the Christian community has two roles to play: a priestly and a prophetic role. Through the priestly role the Christian community could contribute to ‘the moral, cultural and spiritual transformation of the continent, as well as the healing of its past memories and the reconciliation of communities and nations divided by ethnicities and war’. The prophetic role offers to test ‘the vision of African renaissance, and especially its implementation, against the more radical vision of

81 Ibid., p. 477.
the reign of God with its insistence on justice, compassion and the humanisation of life'.

De Gruchy calls on South African churches to adopt an ecumenical approach, reminding all that ‘if politics is that art of the actual, Christian hope seeks its transformation’.

Scholars may continue to reflect on the merits of an African Renaissance, but the men and women that control action in Africa ought to rethink their economic visions and work for a rebirth that will bring new life into communities filled with despair. Such a Renaissance should include the revitalisation of African communities through the thorough reform of governance, economic practices, and should involve Africa as an active participant in the global market; merely asking the wealthy to do something about poverty in Africa cannot achieve this. Mbeki’s own political stewardship in South Africa has drawn criticism, especially his handling of the HIV/AIDS crisis. However, I am convinced that the idea of a Renaissance should not be judged solely on his praxis. I am convinced that the idea of a Renaissance is crucial and deserves far more attention today than it has received, for several reasons.

(1) African states need renewal because of the precarious socio-political and economic conditions. Such a crisis does not call for a quick fix, but rather an engagement that requires the moral, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic resources of the country. African states face a long and difficult road to change and this must begin with the renewal of African values. There is a long tradition in Africanist discourse that has articulated calls for the regeneration of the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual resources of the continent. In a speech at Columbia University in 1906, when he received the Curtis Medal, Isaka Seme of South Africa made the following remarks:

I have chosen to speak to you on this occasion upon ‘the Regeneration of Africa’. I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion. The regeneration of Africa belongs to this new and powerful period! By this term regeneration I wish to be understood to mean the entrance into a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence. The basic factor, which assures their regeneration resides in the awakened race consciousness. The ancestral greatness, the unimpaired genius, and the recuperative power of the race, its irrepressibility, which assures its permanence, constitute the African’s greatest source of inspiration. The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilisation is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine plate willow-ware and weapons of superior workmanship. The most essential departure of this new civilisation is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic … indeed a regeneration moral and eternal. O Africa! Like some great century plant that shall bloom, in ages hence, we watch thee; in our dream see in they swamps the prospero of our stream; thy door unlocked, where knowledge in her tomb hath lain innumerable years in gloom. Then shalt thou, walking with that morning gleam shine as thy sister lands with equal beam.

Seme presented his views in essentialist terms and this is clearly problematic in light of the wide diversity of the continent. However, I am concerned here with the fact that he articulated the need for a rebirth of Africa. Seme used religious and agricultural metaphors to speak of it as ‘regeneration’ and called for a renewal and rekindling of the creative, relational, and governing spirit of the African people. Africans must do this and usher in a new beginning because their social existence has been disrupted by economic upheavals and the abuse of power. Seme, writing in the early 1900s, decried European colonisation; Mbeki at the end of the century decries the colonial project, the neo-colonial project, and the abuses of the post-colonial project. Thus, they call for a new kind of existence and a

82 Ibid., p. 477.
83 Ibid., p. 480.
Reflections on Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance

new race-consciousness. Speaking at the conference in Cape Town, Mbeki argued that colonisation had affected the psychology of Africans and had made them feel negative towards themselves. Africa needs a regeneration and Renaissance that will revitalise civilisation, its civilisation, and take Africa into a new era as a strong partner with the other nations of the world in global developments. Africa is richly endowed with natural resources. Those who call for a Renaissance underscore the fact that there is a spiritual and humanistic aspect to this need for renewal. In addition to these resources, Africans must draw on their moral resources to revitalise Africa and usher in a new era. The Renaissance project must be seen as a moral project because it calls for a critical appropriation of Africa’s rich heritage, yet invites Africans to face the future with a new sense of self that respects what Africans have as well, out of a deep respect and toleration of each other.

(2) Africans who debate the Renaissance (there are several voices within South Africa and the rest of Africa) must look beyond personal differences and consider substantive issues that advocates of a Renaissance raise. Graham Evans correctly argues that the 1999 elections that brought Thabo Mbeki to power were largely dictated by domestic issues: jobs, housing, public utilities, education, health, and crime. However, Mbeki has decided that international relations, especially relations within sub-Saharan Africa ought to become an important focus of ANC administration. There is a debate in South Africa about this move because some want South Africa to strengthen ties with Europe and North America while others endorse an Africa-centred approach that stresses ethics and solidarity with Africa. Mbeki’s call for an African Renaissance is his attempt to define foreign policy, but he still must work with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) who are ANC allies. Evans argues, correctly, that Mbeki intentionally and slowly moved away from the ANC’s strong socialist ethos during a series of in-house discussions in 1993–1994, in the wake of the global dominance of neo-liberal economic policies around the world. ‘This involved recognition, at least in theory, of unipolarity, globalisation, the importance of geoconomics, the general marginalisation of Africa and its decidedly peripheral status in the global economy’. When Mbeki spelled out his agenda, many in diplomatic circles in Pretoria interpreted it as a pragmatic, interest-based policy rather than one based on the ethics of ideology.

However, I must point out that Mbeki’s pragmatism is not devoid of ideology at different levels. First, he has adopted neo-liberal economic policies in line with World Bank and IMF proposals and, in so doing, has angered some members of the SACP and COSATU. This is an ideological move towards a market economy and liberalisation that signals Mbeki’s desire to collaborate with the forces that shape the global economy. I agree with Evans that this is quite a conversion for Mbeki, a leading member of the SACP who was an insider of the radical wing of the struggle for justice in South Africa. Second, Mbeki’s project is ideological in another way. He has focused on developing the South African economy and that of the African continent, emphasising the oneness of the African continent. Critics may argue, as they have done, that there is nothing to it but slogans, and that it is dead because of the developments north of the Limpopo River. However, we

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86 Ibid., p. 623.
87 Ibid., p. 623.
88 Ibid., p. 624.
89 Ibid., p. 624.
90 Ibid., p. 624.
91 Ibid., p. 626.
92 Ibid., p. 626.
must note that many people in South Africa, who are critical of state failure in sub-Saharan Africa, have embraced the idea of an African Renaissance. Evans appropriately argues that the idea of the renaissance is a strategy to counter the negative image of Africa and could be the beginning of a new era in South African foreign policy. If Mbeki succeeds, he is likely to persuade members of COSATU and other critics to accept the Renaissance project because South Africa stands to benefit enormously from any economic recovery in the region and the rest of Africa. Although I believe Evans overstates his case, he is correct in asserting: "It is not, therefore, fanciful to interpret the African Renaissance idea as representing Thabo Mbeki’s grand design to re-invent South Africa as a global trading state with strong regional and continental interests."

Evans overstates his case because, despite the fact that Mbeki wants sustainable development and African participation in the global market, he focuses on Africa and the economic condition of the continent. He argues that, while exacerbated by contributing factors that lie outside of the continent, the problems that beset Africa come from within it. This is an important move because we must emphasise that Africans have the human and natural resources to change the status quo. In this respect, we cannot take lightly the demand for African solutions to Africa’s problems. The search for African solutions will be enhanced if a Renaissance becomes a process of education – education in the human values of Africa. These values should enable people to place human well-being above personal ambition. Africans must not allow outsiders, whom Mbeki says, poison the soul of Africans, to detract them from building a society based on values of honesty and integrity. In this case, a spiritual and socio-cultural renewal that affirms Africa’s values of fairness has to begin with Africans themselves. In this quest for new values, it is necessary to put away from public life ideas that open doors to corruption such as the common belief that people should give presents to public officials because the gift or ‘dash’ is an African value. I do not claim that Africans are the only ones who are engaged in this gift-giving, which is often a cover-up for corruption. However, in the search for new values, only Africans themselves can stamp out this practice.

The idea of Renaissance has a rich intellectual and cultural history and the present desire for a renaissance must be taken seriously. I do not imply that Mbeki’s call for a Renaissance is similar to all discussions of the Renaissance or of Renaissance movements. If there is any commonality here, it is largely the shared sense of renewal and a call for the articulation and implementation of values that would restore and revitalise human communities. It is only in this general sense that I locate Mbeki’s call for a Renaissance in a wider intellectual and cultural history. I do not claim that such calls share similar ideals, because each generation has faced different circumstances and each has drawn upon different ideals to sustain and renew its society. In Europe, the Renaissance referred to cultural changes that affected many areas of life. Starting in Italy and spreading to the rest of Europe, it involved scholarly, artistic, and moral endeavours across many different countries.

The etymological roots of the English word ‘renaissance’ come from the Italian rinascere, which means ‘rebirth’. It emerged in Europe during the fourteenth century during a period in which there was a revival of Greek scholarship, and an increased appreciation of new scientific scholarship and the arts. The early leaders of the Renaissance movements were all humanists, including the Italian poets Alighieri Dante and Francesco Petrarch, the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus and the French scholar François Rabelais. These

94 G. Evans, ‘South Africa’s Foreign Policy after Mandela’, p. 626.
95 Ibid., p. 627.
scholars all believed in the nobility of the improvement of the human condition and surroundings. The Renaissance would later blossom in Italy, where a number of artists flourished, including Donatello, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Elsewhere in Europe, several events such as the Protestant Reformation, and scholars and artists such as Shakespeare, Thomas More, Francis Bacon and Miguel de Cervantes were all associated with this ‘rebirth’. Cornel West, in his famous essay on the genealogy of modern racism, points out that one of the outcomes of this rebirth in the humanities was the return to, and idealisation of, classical Greek models of thought and perspectives on proportionality, which led to the view that idealised classical Greek ideas of beauty were the norm. The result of this move was that physical forms, such as the black body, which did not fit this model, were denigrated. Thus, the Renaissance can be considered to have contributed to modern racism.96

Renaissance from Europe to Harlem

However, it may also be useful to explore what the African Renaissance can learn from the idea of ‘renaissance’ in European history. Anton van Niekerk has explored this question because Africans cannot ignore the outside world to pursue essentialist dreams.97 In developing a new work ethic that could reverse the decline of the state, Africans can draw some inspiration from the European Renaissance that was characterised by several things. First, the Renaissance as an intellectual movement developed over a period of about 150 years.98 We must allow the African Renaissance some time before we begin to measure its achievements. This is an important epoch for Africa because African states can draw on the technological advances that were not available at the time of the European Renaissance. ‘Africans can indeed draw, not only on those, but on the host of other historical achievements of modernity which hold the potential of humanising our life world: advanced agricultural techniques, medical services with the ability to cure and prevent diseases such as malaria and TB, and to significantly curb the AIDS epidemic, swift and safe air travel, and the almost inconceivable potential of the information age that awaits us’.99 Van Niekerk argues that, in using technology, Africa must avoid the costly mistakes Europe made, such as the development of weapons of mass destruction, global pollution, arrogance and racism, which later led to aberrations such as the holocaust and apartheid.100

Second, the European rebirth took place in small centres.101 Rebirth in Africa then must begin from what Marcus Ramogale calls ‘pockets of excellence in the sea of mediocrity that is South Africa’.102 The Renaissance was never a mass movement, and will not emerge as a result of throwing money at people who are doing nothing, but rather from a commitment to change things and the establishment of role models in all sectors of society. I believe that this calls for the strong mobilisation of grassroots efforts to get people involved in a project of change grounded in a critical appropriation of competing political and economic visions.

Third, Van Niekerk argues that the Renaissance rediscovered the values and potential of the people because rebirth was grounded in the view that ‘[humanity] is the measure of all things’.103 In this sense, some scholars believe the Renaissance is a recovery of the

98 Ibid., p. 68.
99 Ibid., p. 69.
100 Ibid., p. 69.
103 Ibid., p. 70.
The values of *ubuntu*. The European Renaissance that championed human dignity revitalised a civilisation, which later gave birth to the Holocaust. African civilisations have faced similar challenges because human dignity has been crushed by post-colonial regimes, and the Rwandan genocide and the continuing civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo call for a Renaissance that forces Africans to rethink their commitments to human dignity. *Ubuntu* values must check the decline of concerns about human dignity in Africa today. In addition to rethinking African values, other scholars argue that African civilisation has a rich heritage that should be explored in the quest for rebirth. These scholars often point to the fact that Egyptian wisdom influenced Greek thought, that the University of Timbuktu was a great centre of learning, and great civilisations existed in Ghana, Songhay, and Zimbabwe. Van Niekerk, argues that we can certainly also learn something from the great African theologian, St Augustine. Africans need to revisit past ideas, remembering that what is learned from the past could be used to re-invent and re-live African historical traditions in a manner that Hans Georg Gadamer calls effective history, *wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein*. I must add that the issue is not the recovery of the historical traditions of Africa, but rather recovering ideas from the past that we can deploy to transform human conditions today for good.

Fourth, Van Niekerk argues that rediscovery was accompanied by a rigorous study of men and women in an education that emphasised the humanities. In the debate, the issue of the humanities is important because some people are interested in promoting science and technology at the expense of the humanities. Africa’s problems stem from the distortion of human relations. The humanities are important because we need to communicate well. The humanities are necessary to give a humanising bent to what we do in other fields and to help us to deal with the disenchantment with the present age. The humanities also contribute to religious consciousness. They help us to both preserve and restore moral consciousness. Concerned scientists in South Africa, who argue that scientific inquiry cannot be sacrificed in the name of a Renaissance, have also raised concerns about intellectual programmes that implement the Renaissance.

W. J. R. Alexander of the University of Pretoria, who has served on the United Nations’ Scientific and Technical Committee on Natural Disasters has pointed out that Africa faces a massive deterioration of its natural ecosystem in addition to political upheavals, loss of human dignity, civil wars, and anarchy. He concedes, but warns:

... the term African Renaissance is appropriate, neutral, eye-catching and focused. However, it has one serious shortcoming. It visualises the start as being a point on a graph from which growth progresses upwards with time. This is not so. The starting point on this graph is an ever steepening downward curve. This downward trend has to be checked and conditions stabilised before upward growth can take place. This is the most difficult phase to implement. It will not be possible to achieve the African Renaissance without a major scientific input.

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104 Ibid., p. 71. Van Niekerk argues that *ubuntu* values are as important as the values articulated by the American Declaration of Independence.


106 K. Clark, *Civilization* (1969), p. 70. Van Niekerk cites Joe Teffo’s argument: ‘Indeed, the idea of an African renaissance makes sense if it can be coherently argued that Africa’s own history has something to offer in the current attempts at development ... [O]ther African scholars ... have contended that indeed we have our own civilization which we can appeal to in the manner in which European Renaissance scholars appealed to Greco-Roman civilization’.


Alexander argues that scientists in Africa must pay attention to the El Niño problem, rethink misguided notions of sustainable development that assume that the heavily taxed environment in Africa can be managed to achieve the goals of sustainable development. ‘No African countries have successfully reduced vulnerability to climatic fluctuations through large-scale environmental conservation measures, and it is unlikely that future political decision makers will attempt to enforce conservation practices against the will of the electorate’.110 He doubts whether financial loans and debt relief from the developed countries will help African countries achieve a renaissance. Central to his argument is the view that the struggle for democracy must include the input of scientists who would encourage the implementation of projects that could help with economic recovery, although such projects might be unpopular in the short term. In order to succeed, Alexander suggests that Africans must (1) depart from abstractions on environmental issues and focus on ‘concrete human livelihood concerns’ (2) introduce drought-tolerant crops and (3) educate people by carrying out work projects in the rural areas, to demonstrate new techniques and changes that must be introduced. Alexander argues that the declaration at the UNESCO/ICSU Conference on Science (Budapest, 26 June to 1 July 1999) is consistent with the aims of the African Renaissance: ‘Scientific research and its application may yield significant returns towards economic growth, sustainable human development, including poverty alleviation, and that the future of humankind will become more dependent on the equitable production, distribution and use of knowledge than ever before’.111

While I share Van Niekerk’s views that Africa’s problems stem from the decline of human values, implementing a Renaissance agenda calls for a holism in intellectual pursuits that cannot be compromised. The example I have cited from Alexander highlights only one area where there is a call for constant scientific research. There is no doubt that with the decline of universities in the wake of state collapse, scientific research has collapsed. Many African scientists have moved to the West, a situation that further complicates dreams of restoring rigorous scientific research. While these conditions validate Alexander’s concerns, the intellectual quest for the recovery of African values and to achieve sustainable development must take humanistic and scientific research seriously. This demands serious efforts to fund basic research in all fields, and the encouragement of liberal arts education as well as professional and technical education.

Finally, Van Niekerk argues that one thing that proponents of the African Renaissance could learn from the European is that a rebirth takes place in a climate where there is a free flow of information. This remains a difficult challenge in many African countries where the government controls the main sources of information such as radio, television, and newspapers. In many countries, government has expected the media to act as an arm of the government rather than to play the role of watchdog. In the early stages of the debate on the Renaissance in South Africa, it seemed as if Mbeki wanted the press and intellectuals to depart from taking a critical stance to one of advocacy. Mbeki questioned the role of the media at a conference held at the Natal Playhouse in March 1999. He wondered whether the press would play the role of promoting, building, articulating, defining, the African Renaissance.112 While one can understand Mbeki’s concern to have the media disseminate the idea of a Renaissance and to educate the public about the concept, this certainly must take place in the context of vigorous and robust debate. Such a debate must begin in Africa about the nature of society, the grim reality of the human condition and the options

110 Ibid., p. 424.
111 Ibid., quoted p. 426.
available to all people. Differing viewpoints cannot be criminalised, as is the tradition in African countries.113 Van Niekerk is correct in saying: ‘All real political, economic, scientific and technological progress that the world has known has only come about, with lasting effects, in a social context that encouraged differing viewpoints and took seriously the criticisms and alternative positions/suggestions of dissenters’.114 Africa faces a great challenge in this regard.

After this discussion of the European Renaissance, I must refer to the other Renaissance that the African Renaissance reminds us of, which took place among Africans in the African diaspora. At the turn of the last century, there was a rebirth of black culture and arts in the Harlem Renaissance, which reached out to all people of African descent around the world. Intellectual giants of the movement included W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke who wrote the influential essay ‘the New Negro’, and Langston Hughes. Other writers included Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, Arna Bontemps, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer. Artists included Richmond Barthe and Aaron Douglas. This rebirth was later followed by a revival of scholarly representations of Africa and the African diaspora by Francophone scholars studying in Paris, an intellectual engagement that gave birth to the movement Négritude, and the influential publication Presence Africaine. One could argue that the African-American Renaissance was an anti-racist project and the movements that began in Paris were anti colonial projects, focused on cultural retrieval. What is different today is that an African Renaissance must not only aim at a cultural revival, but also restore values and lift African countries out of the present doldrums.

One cannot claim that it is only humanistic perspectives that would build a Renaissance spirit, but I highlight them because they play a very important role. One cannot neglect the calls for African states to institute democratic rule, to practise good governance, to restructure their economies, and to allow civil society to operate freely. These approaches offer structural interventions that are crucial to recovery. However, Africans must restore those intangible values that we find in the arts, philosophy, and religion. These disciplines offer different perspectives on human values such as respect for people, love of community, and participation in family and community activities. This includes celebrating life together through community rituals, which bring people together, and links them with the world of ancestors. Those values call for concern for other people, providing for those who do not have, and making sure that there is enough for tomorrow. In economic terms it means providing for the community but living as wise people. Among the Wimbum, it means that you do not eat the seed corn. If you do that, there will be no corn for you to plant when the planting season comes. In post-colonial Africa, the leaders who have governed us have eaten the seed corn, and have left us to figure out what to do to ensure that there will be a future. We have been condemned to dependence on foreign lenders. A restoration of those values would establish human relationships at a point of trust and help African communities begin to rethink the major socio-economic issues in a global economy.

Conclusion

It is fitting that I conclude this reflection on the African Renaissance by recalling the quest for peace and stability in Africa reflected in Ali Mazrui’s Towards Pax Africana.115 In it, Mazrui placed the responsibility for keeping peace in the post-colony on the African

114 Ibid., p. 74.
nations, arguing that they must police themselves. In his BBC lectures nearly two decades later, Mazrui described the crisis that has plagued Africa, resulting in the displacement of people, and proposed that Africa ought to work hard to end these problems and to play a key part in pacifying the world.\(^{116}\) He expressed concern about military power and pointed out that Africa was weak, although Africans could bring themselves to a level where they would be able to contribute to the establishment of order from a position of strength. In order to do this Africans must develop technology. He argued that the incompetence that besets Africa is mainly sociological and the remedy was to carry out social reform and cultural adjustment.\(^{117}\) He further argued that Africa should not define itself as a nuclear-free zone. In what appears as a critique of African machismo, Mazrui noted that developments in the feminist movements in the north would as equally contribute to world peace, as would the commitment to nuclear power that he was advocating.\(^{118}\)

I do not endorse Mazrui’s position on Africa’s place in a militarised world for obvious reasons. First, I do not endorse the kind of military build-up that he has suggested. Militarisation has devastated the continent and nuclear weapons would turn the present catastrophe into a nightmare, and could very possibly render Africa a wasteland. Secondly, we are still far away from realising his prediction that Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo will play an important leadership role in Africa. If anything, those two countries have declined significantly since Mazrui made those predictions. Wole Soyinka demonstrates the extent of the decline in *The Open Sore of a Continent*.\(^{119}\) A democratic South Africa could play a key role in Africa as Mazrui predicted. It is for this reason that I hail Mbeki’s call and leadership in developing practices that could bring about a Renaissance, as a welcome development.

South Africans are cautious about the leadership role of Mbeki in championing the African Renaissance because they do not want to be seen as dominating other countries. The leadership role of Mbeki, as well as that of other Africans interested in a renaissance, must not be interpreted as an act of domination. To avoid domination, the Renaissance must be grounded in and sensitive to African ideals, which promote community development and individual achievement. Mbeki has pushed through the South African Parliament the ‘African Renaissance and International Co-operation Fund Bill’ to demonstrate South Africa’s desire to cooperate with other African countries in creating a new society of values. In a situation where genuine dialogue on the issues raised by Mbeki and others takes place, African states and intellectuals could realise that the African Renaissance is not just another project planned by the World Bank and the IMF, or intended to promote South Africa’s mercantile ambitions over the projected African market.

I am also sympathetic to two points Mazrui has made. First, he suggested that the feminist movement would influence world peace in the future. The feminist movement now includes positions taken by African women who find themselves at different points on the spectrum of feminism and women of African descent in America who call their position ‘womanist’.\(^{120}\) The social agenda that feminism and womanism has unleashed will continue to affect policy and politics in Africa, even if it speaks with only a small voice now. Mbeki has called for the empowerment of women as part of the African Renaissance. This task must begin at the grass-roots’ level and the national agenda should reflect serious commitment to the empowerment of women. What happens in this area will determine the

\(^{116}\) Ibid., p. 113.
\(^{117}\) Ibid., p. 128.
\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 134.
success of a genuine renaissance and recovery in Africa. At the Natal Playhouse conference on the African Renaissance held 26 March 1999, Professor Dlamini of the University of Zululand reminded participants that poverty in Kwa-Zulu Natal had a feminine face. In rural South Africa as well as the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, women do most of the household work, and have not been given enough attention by development projects. If there is a going to be a rebirth of values, attention must be paid to values and practices that recognise and raise women to the level of equal partners in the revitalisation of political and economic life. In addition, there are cultural values that may be perceived as a hindrance to development by the partners that African countries need as they seek to transform their economies and political culture. Writing on a different topic, connected with the Renaissance project, Hunter R. Clark has argued that certain cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation and polygamy, continue to be a concern for many people in the West. Hunter does not propose that the West should put an end to this because it is something that African states must address. He does, however, refer to other customs that people find disturbing because of the way in which women are treated, such as the ‘reed dance’ of the Zulu and Swazi people during which the King selects a virgin child-bride from thousands of pubescent girls who are scantily clad. The irony is that during the dance the girls are given lectures on virginity, an idea that bothers some people because the girls wear very little clothing. One might add here that it is difficult to moralise on this issue given the reality shows that have begun appearing recently on television in the West. Hunter argues that some people think cultural activities such as these undermine the place and role of women in sustainable development. An African Renaissance should contribute to the rediscovery of the role women play in rural development, especially in areas where the men have gone to the urban areas to work.

Secondly, Mazrui argued: ‘the struggle against organisational incompetence is fundamentally sociological, and may need a long period of social reform and cultural adjustment’. This remains a compelling claim today. It seems to me that we can take that argument further by arguing that interpersonal relations, which determine the ways in which people relate to one another and order their lives in society, as well as in the institutions of that society, precede sociological categories and structures that breed incompetence. The idea of a Renaissance offers an opportunity to revisit and revive African values of creativity, generosity, communal spirit, and hospitality, to name only a few. It calls for Africans to look inwards, and to reassert a self that is full of pride and dignity, so that Africans could recover their humanity, and on that basis establish viable communities and financial institutions that would not be held hostage to private whims and personal greed. The African Renaissance may indeed be Pax Pretoriania, in its genesis and provenance, but it is Pax Africana, and indeed, Pax Humana. Rather than ask (as African diplomats did in Johannesburg) ‘What is this Renaissance thing?’ Africans ought to embrace the spirit of the Renaissance and work towards the reality of a new day.

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121 Sehume, ‘Strategic Essentialism and the African Renaissance’, p. 129.
125 Mazrui, Towards Pax Africana, p. 128.