

African Renaissance

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Mbeki on African Renaissance: A Vehicle for Africa Development

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Phemelo Olifile Marumo

Senior Lecturer, School of Philosophy

Faculty of Humanities

Northwest University

South Africa

&

Mompati Chakale

Tutor-School of Philosophy,

Faculty of Humanities,

North West University, Mafikeng,

South Africa

Abstract

The birth of the African Renaissance was articulated by Cheikh Anta Diop who believed that the challenges of the African continent shall overcome through the confrontation of cultural, scientific and economic renewal. Former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki populated it with an intention of advocating for self-determination, unity, identity, development, and transformation of political and economy of the continent. The envisioned statement was to see Africa as a unitary continent that could fight imperialism and capitalism which were seen as enemies of development from an Africanism

perspective. The dream was however not realized due to the influence exerted by the western on other states in Africa and that affected development in Africa. From this premise, the study will start by outlining the African Renaissance quest for unity, followed by how the dream of Mbeki was thwarted away by the suspicion and doubt among the African states and how African Union was seen as an entity to promote Africanism and African Renaissance. From that, the study will suggest a plan that could be implemented to resuscitate the African Renaissance from a development perspective.

Keywords: *African Philosophy; African Renaissance, Ubuntu, World View, African Union*

Introduction

According to Kunze (2016), the African Renaissance is the concept that African people and nations shall overcome the current challenges confronting the continent and achieve cultural, scientific, and economic renewal. The African Renaissance concept was first articulated by Cheikh Anta Diop in a series of essays beginning in 1946, which are collected in his book "*Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946-1960*". Diop was vocal in accepting the wrong of colonisation but retained that even if Africa has been ransacked and abuse by colonialism, Africa cannot die a natural death. He believed that there is a power of reawakening among the Africans and their black colour makes them unique for a renaissance. Doup advocated for a better Africa which will be available to all those who live in it and will be proud to be associated with Africa as Africans. One prime issue which Doup advocated and maintain that it was the core to African Renaissance was language, he argued that Africans has lost their identity and dignity and self-determination by allowing themselves to change their language which was the only means that was explicit in communication. The language was one of the things that change a worldview. Thence he resonated that; "the development of our indigenous languages is the prerequisite for a real African renaissance, and in justifying his claim, he was quick to remind Africans of the detrimental effects of using foreign languages as a media of instruction in African schools. He was of the mentality that an African is forced to make double efforts; to assimilate the meaning of the words and then through a second intellect effort, to capture the reality expressed by the words."

In bringing forth the danger of linguistic and cultural diversity which was the works of the colonist, Doup makes an example of his language Valaf which has lost its originality due to colonisation. In his mindset was the content that Africans has the same origin and that was changed by colonists indoctrination through linguistics. That is why he dispelled the conventional notion of race and sets up an environment that favours African Unity which will bring all Africans together and enhance the spirit of self-determination which will not be politicised by colonisation.

According to Gumede (2014), “Cheikh Anta Diop, the pioneer of the concept of the African renaissance, would have us understand the concept as a call to and a programme of action for the renewal of the African continent. Pan-Africanism, as espoused by its originators such as Ras Makonnen, has to do with the mobilisation of Africans and people of African descent towards the complete liberation of the African continent. As motif force, pan-Africanism and African renaissance should anchor the further advancement of the African continent. However, both pan-Africanism and African renaissance need to be redefined for the practical development challenges facing Africa today.”

Gumede’s articulations clearly demonstrate that the pioneer was in a recruitment campaign of inviting all the stakeholders to participate in building one nation one Africa. This can be attributed to how zealous was he in propagating the formation of Africa for Africans who will be proud to share in the development and the welfare of Africa. The spirit of self-determination was the way key in finding a path to propel African Renaissance.

Because the colonist has indoctrinated the political thinking of Africans through introducing a new type of thinking which was far from the communalistic thinking of African, Doup was conscious that Africans have been torn apart by politics and unity was no more investable. Through this, he envisioned a united Africa which is not divided into fragmentations which made it a target of divide and rule and manipulation arena by colonists. Hence he advocated for African renaissance as the way to address the imbalance of colonisation. The concept did not die after Duop but Nyerere and Nkrumah also advocated for African renaissance but it was not in full blast due to some colonies saw colonialism as a basket of hope.

The other aspect that made African engage in African renaissance was the fear of the slave trade which was introduced by the colonists and its aftermath was still fresh in the minds of the Africans. Political power

which was enthroned to African leaders by colonist whereby wealth was enmeshed to the leaders and their families and being given the military power through soldiers being trained in an imperial state gave some leaders the nerve to feel more powerful than other Africans. The clinging to power also was the thorn in the flesh of other Africans but due to despotism, materialism, and militarism which were prevalent in Africa, Africa could not be resuscitated by was slowly being captured by Imperial forces. Mention should be made that Doup's ideology on Africans was spearheaded by other African leaders.

Mbeki and African Renaissance

On the 5th April 1906, one of the founding fathers of the African National Congress (ANC) Pixley Ka Isaka Seme said the beginning of an iconic speech "*I am an African*" which was aimed at conscientise Africans about their Africa and bringing awareness of Africanism which was slowly being taken to the grave by colonial rule. The was of the same notion as that of Doup that Africans need to know that they are Africans and reclaim the dignity which has been trodden upon by colonisation. Thence Seme said; "I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion. Men have tried to compare races on the basis of some equality. In all the works of nature, equality, if by it we mean identity, is an impossible dream! Search the universe! You will find no two units alike. The scientists tell us there are no two cells, no two atoms, identical. Nature has bestowed upon each a peculiar individuality, an exclusive patent from the great giants of the forest to the tenderest blade. Catch in your hand, if you please, the gentle flakes of snow. Each is a perfect gem, a new creation; it shines in its own glory - a work of art different from all of its aerial companions. Man, the crowning achievement of nature, defies analysis. He is a mystery through all ages and for all time. The races of mankind are composed of free and unique individuals. An attempt to compare them on the basis of equality can never be finally satisfactory. Each is self."

The iconic speech "I am an Africa" was repeated by the 2nd president of the Republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, on behalf of the African National Congress in Cape Town on 8 May 1996, on the occasion of the passing of the new Constitution of South Africa. At the time Mbeki was the vice president of South Africa under the presidency of Nelson Mandela. This concept has been popularized by South African President

Thabo Mbeki during his term of office addressing the conference held at Corporate Council on Africa in Chantilly, VA, USA, in April 1997.

In most of his “I am an African” speeches during the launch of African Renaissance, Mbeki was cautious of the fact that there were differences among Africans and westerners and desired that he could bring about reconciliatory utterances who will embrace all people as citizens of Africa. That is why Sheckels (2009:330), analyse the speeches as follows; “Mbeki was walking a rhetorical “tightrope” in this section, wanting to neither offend nor absolve Afrikaners. For the sake of unity, he did not want to assail the Boers, the ancestors of the Afrikaners who created apartheid. Rather, he wanted to embrace them as Africans within the “new” South Africa. Nonetheless, he did not want South Africans to forget what the Boers did to the Khoi and the San and the Malay slaves many centuries earlier. Furthermore, he wanted his Black audience to embrace these early victims, although they were the ancestors of a group, the colored, who have not always found common cause with the majority Black population.”

African Renaissance, therefore, implies a revival of an Africa of hope and prosperity, positive vision of Africa as a peaceful, democratic and market-orientated region that will attract foreign trade and investment, as well as the return of thousands of talented Africans and billions of flight capital now in safe havens abroad. Calls for a renaissance will encourage all Africans to confront the harsh realities and to take greater responsibility for reversing them. Stremlau (1999) state that African renaissance alternative to the prevailing European concepts of, and structures for, African and global order with the basis for advancing peace and prosperity throughout Africa and for enhancing Africa’s influence in world affairs. The paper contends that the future of Africa lies in the hands of the Africans, that is why in re-building Africa, all the Africans in the diaspora should be invited to participate in this task.

By the returning of the African masses scattered around the world to Africa asserts the paper that it will enrich the utilisation of the human capital which has gained enormous knowledge and enriched their potential abroad. Furthermore, it will promote self-determination and inject the nationality of Africanism as well as rekindle identity and replenish lost dignity. Note should be made that leaving African has resulted in most African unlearning their African values and norms.

Olivier (2003:818), in analysing the Mbeki’s speech refers to the sovereignty of Africa and how that is possible and achievable during his

address of the 12th February 2002 during the African Mining Indaba in Cape Town. Mbeki state that the national sovereignty should no longer serve as a barrier behind which African governments could hide and do what they liked, echoing Mandela's earlier exhortation that 'tyrants should not be allowed to shelter behind national sovereignty.'" However, sensing that vast majority of his African colleagues would probably disagree with him because most of them were guilty of such an animosity which was undemocratic and was an exploitation of humanitarian, the statement was never being followed up which in effect came down to changing the 'holy script' of African unity and contradicting his own policy of 'soft diplomacy' towards Mugabe and other repressive African dictators."

African independence transition from a white minority regime is the justification of the essence of this search for indigenous value systems is the need to redefine ourselves and our value systems which are today engulfed in the foreign, alien, exploitative and oppressive values which have been imposed upon black people, both physically and psychologically, by our oppressors in order to make them malleable to subjugation. With fall in the 21st century, the ideological practices of colonialism and apartheid have left behind devastating social and psychological legacies, which have greatly negated, and continue to, the creativity and identity of the African personality (Tondi, 2018). Africa renaissance is intending to harness Africa's potential, it also is an effort to remove the sources of conflict, restore its self-esteem and turn it into a zone of economic prosperity, peace, self-determination, identity, restoration of dignity, and stability.

Thabo Mbeki made the African Renaissance a key component of his governing ideology, which was and still is crucial for reconfiguring the human condition in Africa. From his speech I am an African, of 8 May 1996 to the Constitutional Assembly of South Africa, Mbeki hinted at what the renaissance project symbolized. It was not viewed that only signaled future policy, but that also recognized the common bond between South Africa and other African countries (Tondi, 2018).

According to Cossa (2009), The main objective was to define who we are and where we are going in the global community, and to formulate practical strategies and solutions for future action that would benefit the African masses. The presentation done by Mbeki was intended to equip African to react against the overwhelming influence of globalization and to advocate for indigenous systems in various sectors of African life.

According to Mbeki (1998), the intention of African renaissance in Africa is based on the changing images of hope and despair, the rediscovery of ourselves, learning from other countries on the social and economic development and the impact of politics rebirth in the transformation of Africa, redefining liberation, and cooperation against violence. His vision is an all-embracing concept that draws its inspiration from the rich and diverse history and cultures of Africa and which acknowledges Africa as the cradle of humanity, whilst providing a framework for modern Africa to re-emerge as a significant partner in the new world order. Mbeki believed that the achievement of an African renaissance is not just the interest of African countries and the African people, but it is in the interest of the whole world. This is articulated in his statement proclaimed that:

I am convinced that a great burden rests on the shoulders of Africa's intelligentsia to help us to achieve these objectives... we have arrived at the point where the enormous brain power which our continent possesses must become a vital instrument in helping us to secure our equitable space within a world affected by a rapid process of globalization and from which we cannot escape (Cossa, 2009).

Within this statement Mbeki emphasis that, there is need to advance developmental agendas that would bring Africa to a position of competitor in the global world economy, social and human resource development, the building of a modern economic and social infrastructure, the cancellation of Africa's debt, improvement in trade, increase in domestic and foreign investment, expansion of development assistance, and better access of African products into the markets of the developed world. But this only is done through the advancement of African education. Mbeki reflected that the educated elite is the necessary condition for Africa's development, which is the primarily responsible for helping Africa to restore her dignity, to define her future, and to develop to a level of a competitor in today's world economy.

Mbeki as cited in Thompson (1995), stated that the rebirth of Africa requires a rebellion action against political instability on the continent, and an end to the mixture of greed, dehumanizing poverty, obscene wealth and endemic public and private corruption practice that give birth to many of Africa's *coups d'etat*, civil wars, and situations of instability. This was drawn from the fact that fifty years after decolonization began, the majority of Africans still remain chained in poverty, and largely poor,

ill-educated and living in squalor, and believe that they are ignorance and backwardness, mostly lack the skills and capital necessary to prosper (Barrell, 2000).

African Renaissance should therefore reflect the need to empower African peoples to deliver themselves from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism through the advancement of African economic, political, or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies and to situate themselves on the global stage as equal and respected contributors to, as well as beneficiaries of, all the achievements of human civilisation. This can also be built through a growing and sustainable economy capable of assimilating the best characteristics, contribute to and take advantage of the real flows of the economic activities around the world. In this point Mbeki emphasizes that Africa must learn from China and Japan, who have got the potential to use their indigenous properties and knowledge together with the culture to advance the economy and develop the lives (Mbeki, 1999).

In order to address this problem, a model consisting of four consecutive stages to implement the *rebellion* referred to by President Mbeki is proposed. The first stage will be to determine whether the concept of the African Renaissance could indeed be practically implemented to promote the notion of peace and stability. If it could be done, the second stage would be to develop an implementation plan according to which the concept could be implemented. The third stage would be the actual execution of the plan and the fourth the monitoring of the execution of the plan. Due to Africa's unpredictability, the model is also based on constant renewal and reinvestigation of the basic understanding of the concept.

The Resourcefulness of African Renaissance in the Development of Africa

As a new Pan-Africanism vision in the 21st century and a philosophical framework for reconstruction and development, and a strategy for the reasserting of the African personality, the African renaissance call is an important counter-hegemonic vehicle in the struggle against subjugation tendencies and practices. Mamdani (1998) argues that Renaissance is first and foremost a reawakening of thought which, in Africa's case, means decolonizing the mind, because renaissance is the right tool for drive forward creative thought and frame debate, recognizing and

acknowledging the fact that intellectuals are central to the process of identity formation and outline the needs for intelligentsia to drive it.

African renaissance is a positive dynamic process, characterized by global socio-economic paradigm, which can be interpreted as African people's own reassessment of their own institutions, the revitalization of their cultural heritage with the view to establishing total African hegemony all over Africa. As a socio-economic strategy for reconstruction and development, the African renaissance call has as its objective to ensure Africa's participation and competitiveness in the global arena, validating Africa's progress and development in economic, cultural, technological, spiritual, communications and socio-cultural spheres and the reclamation and revitalization of traditional African cultural experience(s) and practices that are functional and viable in modern times. Hence it can be said African renaissance call regard the process as an important socio-economic tool for the total emancipation and development of Africa, they are also conscious of the fact that unbridled and uncritical allegiance to the African past can be an insurmountable obstacle to recognizing and acknowledging those structural and behavioral adjustments necessary for modern times (Owomoyela, 1996).

According to Mbeki (1999), the emergence of a new, unionised countries that is not only concerned with traditional issues such as working conditions and wages but that is also involved in ownership and enterprise management of the emerging of large urban professional and entrepreneurial middle class that is property-owning and is an active participant in the development of small and medium enterprises.

African Union in Promoting Africanism and African Renaissance: A Quest for Unity

The biggest role of African Union (AU) is to promote African culture which should occupy a central position in the overall social activity of African society. African identity encourages equal participation and recognition of the African culture on the world scene so that everyone in Africa, regardless of nationality and race, is accepted, treated fairly and with dignity (Prah, 1998).

The significance of an African Renaissance its function is to promote responsible and accountable government in African states by eliminating dictatorships and wars in order adequately to address the issue of

poverty, African Renaissance its objective is to promote democracy for it's for the sake of liberating African to be able to participate in the programmes that are intended to develop and transform the cultural, economic and political character, these is emphasised by Mbeki (1998), democracy should not be seen as an end in itself but it should be seen and promoted as a means to an end, not least the elimination of poverty in order to ensure a better life for all. Within in Africa renaissance, the role of African intellectuals is to denounce ineffective and corrupt governments just as they fought against racism induced by colonialism and neo-colonialism and to address the issue of transformation of gender relations and act towards the elimination of subjugation of women. African renaissance needs to revise its role in order to cope and address the challenges posed by globalization as a strategy for postcolonial liberation depends upon the extent to which people from a wide spectrum of social categories such as youth, workers, political organizers, trade unionists, women activists and intellectuals can be brought together to stand behind a common vision of black empowerment at a global level and should play a role in transforming gender relations and eliminating sexism in the world in all its forms, benign and malignant because it subjects women to social, economic and political exploitation as well as sexual manipulation.

Challenges in Achieving African Renaissance in Africa

A number of possible challenges blocks the effective implementation of an African Renaissance. The challenge that faces Africa is that of a lack of leadership and a hesitancy to take the lead.

Africa countries should get its house in order before it flexes its muscles outside, thus implying that for example what it preached in South Africa should set the example by implementing the concept of the African Renaissance internally first, and if it succeeds, then try it elsewhere.

According to Hanekom, the human factor in sub-Saharan Africa further contributes to the continent's problems. Many of these problems relate to a remarkably similar way of thinking and a tendency for over-optimism. This he ascribes to the inclination of the African people to, regardless of their ethnic compilation, suddenly become volatile or provoke volatility, and their strong tendency not to question or openly speak out against authority. Freedom of speech and challenging

obviously wrong decisions or perceptions, as a result, pay the price in this regard, with the concept of democracy the ultimate victim. Another factor is a certain naivete regarding successes elsewhere and a tendency to jump on the bandwagon and to implement solutions that worked elsewhere in their own environments without investigating the practical implications (Hanekom, 22 September 2000).

Further factors that compound Africa's dilemma are the phenomena referred to as "Africa fatigue" and "Afro-pessimism". Although the two concepts are inter-related, the concept of "Africa fatigue" refers to a global perception that Africa has lost its strategic value after the end of the Cold War and due to its high volatility, non-development, corruption, discrimination and conflict potential, also its potential for involvement and investment by the world's donor community. "Afro-pessimism", in turn, relates to sub-Saharan Africa's seemingly inability to contain its regional conflicts and resulting refugee crises. It also refers to its lack of will to do something about its appalling systems of governance and approach to human rights, its huge poverty-problem, debt and dependence on charity, its ailing infrastructures and the quality of life of all its peoples, including the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The perceptions of Africa fatigue and Afro-pessimism that has made clear that Africa will in future have to fend for itself, which therefore call for Africa to wake up and sort itself out in the problems and conflicts, while demanding world bodies such as world bank and UN to honour promises of assistance, and for the mere fact that it cannot afford involvement and will have to look at other alternatives to address inter and intra-state conflict.

Dangerous levels of xenophobia could harm relationships with neighboring countries, especially in light of the fact that free movement in the region for trade purposes is currently being investigated. Furthermore, the impact of globalization (the linking of the world through technology, competition for resources, the disappearance of borders and the changing of levels of influence and decision-making) and its impact on the economic, political and cultural spheres of society, are further factors that must be considered. Leaders appear not to notice the pervasive influence of the West in Africa's economies and in African economic policy-making as a fundamentally undesirable obstacle to the continent's ability to forge its own economic identity.

Moeletsi Mbeki (1999) stated that state corporations are sold to foreigners and are managed by non-Africans. This signals a resignation

by Africa's leaders to the idea that, despite many words to the contrary, Africans are not capable, in the foreseeable future, of running their countries' economies, nor of being able to master modern technology and management, and the new African leaders no longer see the state as an important vehicle for bringing about socio-economic change on the continent.

Conclusion

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 modern Africa to re-emerge as a significant partner in the New World order. This framework touches all areas of human endeavour; political economic, social, technological, environmental, and cultural.

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