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**WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH:
REFLECTIONS ON THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

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Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I rise.

Maya Angelou

AFRICAN RENAISSANCE: MYTH OR REALITY?

Since 1994 South Africans have had an endless volley of buzzwords unleashed on them, sometimes little more than sloganeering and empty rhetoric passing for originality and profundity. 'African renaissance' is perhaps the catchiest of these new phrases to enter the lexicon of most South Africans. The expression itself reflects in some quarters a new orthodoxy, which has been embraced by politicians, academics and the nouveau riche.

One of Thabo Mbeki's earliest public references to the African renaissance appears in his speech as deputy president—reproduced in his collection of speeches *Africa: the time has come* (1998: 201)—delivered at the Summit on Attracting Capital to Africa that was organised by the Corporate Council on Africa in Chantilly, Virginia, 19–22 April 1997, in which he said:

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.

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Since Mbeki first popularised the concept and raised the clarion call, there have been several gatherings held in South Africa; numerous deliberations have taken place and many articles and books have been written devoted to the subject. An African Renaissance Institute has been established and the concept has become a rallying point for South Africans in many spheres of life. In two significant addresses that I examine, one given in Abuja and the other in Accra during his October 2000 state visits to Nigeria and Ghana, respectively, President Mbeki spoke at some length about the concept that has become the driving force behind his domestic and foreign policies. It also underpins the Millenium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP)—his plan for Africa's social, political, and economic recovery—which I also examine later in the article.

An exceedingly vexing series of questions for exponents of the African renaissance is: What is African about the African renaissance? What are Africa's unique characteristics, which are identical from one African country to the next and are not replicated elsewhere in the world?

Problems of war and peace and statehood in Algeria, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan are also the problems of the breakaway republics of the former Soviet empire, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe and Asia. From China to Chile to Chechnya, from Peru to the Pacific islands, secessionist and pro-democracy movements litter the world's stage, along with the instability and the volatility that go with the terrain. One tally of wars around the world since Hiroshima and Nagasaki lists no fewer than 175, from Afghanistan to Zululand. There are no less than 30 conflicts going on now, in four continents—and armies of the remaining continent are stoking the flames of war by supporting, directly or indirectly, one or the other faction in these fratricidal wars. There are no African interests we could aggregate as a common point of departure toward the African renaissance. If there were, there would be no war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo involving, among others, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda, Namibia, and Angola, with each country having its own interests to protect.

Poverty may be more acute in Africa; but poverty characterises most of the former colonised world in the Latin American, Caribbean, African, Asian, and Pacific (LACAAP) countries. Throughout the globe drought, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters are a function of climatology, not demonology. HIV/AIDS may be most rampant in Africa, but it is not some special scourge God has reserved for unsuspecting, sinful Africans. Bad governance, corruption, autocracy, and demagoguery are found everywhere. What we find in Africa is an extreme manifestation of these problems.

There is undoubtedly a shared colonial history in all of Africa; but again the experience of colonialism is shared with most of the LACAAP world and the Balkan nations, the Irish and many others beside. Within Africa itself, there are variations on the colonial theme, arising from different stresses in the colonial policies and practices of Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and other ‘scramblers’ for African colonies. Most African states have internalised their colonial legacies to a point where they identify themselves as Anglophone, Francophone or Lusophone and sometimes create alliances based on those divisions. There are also ideological differences foisted upon most African states by alliances with one superpower or the other during the Cold War era. There may be common aspirations among African nations, arising from the common aspirations of all human beings, but there are also competing and contending interests.

I must not be construed to mean that African solidarity and recovery are undesirable or unattainable goals. For the first time since Africa’s anti-colonial struggle, we see the emergence of visionary leadership that seeks to be equal to the challenges of the ‘second revolution’ and the new millennium, none of which are insurmountable. But, equally, we must stop essentialising and romanticising Africa if we are to grapple with contemporary African reality. Africa is not a country but the most culturally diverse and complex continent on earth. Beyond the colonial legacy, the misadventures of the post-independence era, the conflicting interests of the post-Cold War period, there is today a ‘new world order’ that is in every respect as constraining to corrective action—or to patenting medicines of one’s choice—as colonialism. Africans downplay these challenges to their own detriment.

In what follows, I suggest a need to reconceptualise the African renaissance, first, and situate the movement within its proper historical context. Thereafter, we may be able to free the concept from the mystification into which it has fallen, confront the realities of Africans universally, and chart a way forward to a true new world order.

‘STILL I RISE’: THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE REVISITED

The African renaissance in proper historical context is essentially the rise of Africans, on the continent and in the diaspora, from slavery, colonialism, segregation, Apartheid and neo-colonialism. The African renaissance is not a single event. There have been many episodes, spanning several generations, in the rise of Africans, many episodes in their still unfolding culture of liberation.

The early phase

The rebellion of African slaves in the New World marked the earliest episode in the rise of people of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean.

In Haiti Francois Macandal, drawing from African traditions and religions to inspire his followers, led the rebellion of 1751–1757, presaging the 1791 slave rebellion that evolved into the Haitian Revolution. Spurred by the French Revolution of 1789, the slave uprising of 1791 finally toppled the colony. On 1 January 1804, Haiti proclaimed its independence under military strongman Dessalines. Like Ethiopia—except for its brief occupation by Italy during World War II—Haiti's unique position as an independent state came to symbolise the aspirations of enslaved and exploited people around the globe.

On the American mainland, Nat Turner led a slave revolt in 1831 in the state of Virginia. It was unsuccessful, but inspired the anti-slavery movement. Two years later abolitionist groups from New York and New England founded the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1839 the Liberty Party, the first anti-slavery party, held its national convention in Warsaw, New York, and the following year the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London condemned American churches for supporting slavery. In 1848 California became the first state to adopt a constitution forbidding slavery, thus opening the floodgates for other states to follow suit.

Booker T Washington sounded an apt note of triumph in his celebrated book on the subject, *Up from slavery*. His abiding legacy lies in realising the need for a shift in struggle tactics. His most notable achievement was the Tuskegee Normal School for Coloured Teachers (later known as Tuskegee Institute) that he founded and built into a major centre for African-American education. Tuskegee set an example of education for self-reliance that was emulated by African educators.

On the African continent there were valiant but largely unsuccessful armed struggles against European colonialism, from the seventeenth century resistance of the Khoikhoi on the southernmost tip of the continent; the 100 years war (1770s–1880s), which pitted Xhosa people against successive Dutch and British colonial armies; the Maji-Maji rebellion (1905–1907) against German encroachment in East Africa; the 1920s struggle of the Igbo women; the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962); the Mau-Mau guerrilla campaign in Kenya (1952–1956); the first and second Chimurenga wars of liberation in Zimbabwe in the 1890s and 1970s, respectively; to the stone throwing children of Soweto, Langa and Mdantsane in South Africa. They laid the foundations for and complemented the political struggles that eventually brought independence from European colonialism to every African country.

Pan Africanism on both sides of the Atlantic took various forms. A body of Pan African scholarship, for example, developed to challenge European supremacist notions and refute stereotypes that ascribed backwardness to Africans as a race. In America, David Walker's book, *Appeal*, published in 1829, drew attention to Africa's glorious history, including that of ancient Egypt, when Europe still wallowed in darkness.

Pan Africanism gathered further momentum after the 1884–85 Berlin congresses that carved up Africa between European powers. In 1886, George Charles, president of the African Emigration Association, announced to the US Congress that his association planned to establish a United States of Africa, an idea that has continued to be espoused by several generations of Pan Africanists.

The twentieth century witnessed an acceleration and intensification of the unfolding culture of liberation among Africans the world over, including African-Americans and their counterparts in the Caribbean, building on the foundations of previous struggles.

In 1900, Henry Sylvester Williams, alongside such other eminent leaders as the academic-activist WEB Dubois, the first African-American to obtain a doctorate from Harvard University, convened the first Pan African Congress in London to raise consciousness and forge solidarity in struggle. They passed a resolution to form a movement that would campaign for the rights of African people universally. This formally brought the Pan African Congress into being.

The immediate offshoot of the Pan African Congress of 1900 was the formation in 1909 of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the South African Native National Congress (later the African National Congress or ANC) in 1912. The NAACP and the ANC remain the African people's oldest organisations of Pan African character and persuasion.

The two major figures of Pan Africanism in the first half of the twentieth century were without doubt Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. But they were as different in their personalities, appeal and styles as opposite sides of a coin.

Marcus Garvey was born and raised in Jamaica. An admirer of Booker T Washington's philosophy of self-reliance for people of African descent, in 1914 he started the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) with the goal of unifying 'all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body and to establish a country and government absolutely on their own'. When the organisation failed to take off, he moved to New York in 1916. His ideas sparked an immediate response among Harlem's working class and underclass inhabitants who hailed him as the 'Black

Moses'. He held a Black Convention that was attended by delegates from 25 countries and led a march through the streets of Harlem with 50 000 participants. He campaigned under the slogans that became popular rallying cries among his followers: 'Back to Africa' and 'Africa for Africans'. Garveyism remained the most popular variant of Pan Africanism especially in the Caribbean and resurfaced long after his death, owing in no small measure to the influence of Bob Marley and the reggae scene of the 1970s. In the US, too, he was not without followers particularly in the Black Power movement.

WEB Du Bois was as formal as Garvey was flamboyant. In opposition to Booker T Washington's philosophy of 'pulling oneself by one's own bootstraps'—through manual labour and black capitalism—Du Bois believed in higher education and the cultivation of the 'talented tenth' for leadership in the African-American community. He devoted his life to meticulous and prodigious scholarship regarding the social conditions of African-Americans.

The Harlem renaissance that blossomed in the 1920s was largely a cultural manifestation of the spirit engendered by Pan Africanism. It was a coming-out party, in America's heartland, of the descendants of African slaves. Although its concerns were largely local its reverberations came to be felt throughout the African world and on the international scene.

Although Pan Africanism became an important aspect of its political program and despite Marcus Garvey's 'back to Africa' call, the Harlem renaissance never became a roots movement. Those who subscribed to its tenets were more concerned with the affront to their dignity in the US than with the liberation of the African continent as such and of the people of African descent universally. That task within the context of the US was left to writers and political activists of the Black Power and civil rights movements.

In the 1930s Negritude emerged in Paris. Negritude was rebellion by people of African descent, first, against physical alienation (from Africa to the Caribbean to France) and, simultaneously, against cultural estrangement foisted by the French colonial policy of assimilation. Exponents of Negritude saw the assertion of their cultural identity as people of African origin, their psychological and cultural emancipation from European domination, as a prerequisite to the political liberation of Africans universally. Some writers attempted to return to their African heritage by transcribing and translating into French the legends and folklore of their own people.

The proponents of Negritude shared a view of the African renaissance that did not imply a rejection of the benefits of the technological civilisation developed in the

West. They cautioned, however, against uncritical acceptance of everything emanating from the West—its ‘Coca-Cola’ culture—and sought a meaningful fusion between Africa and the West. These are also the preoccupations of the current phase of the African renaissance that Mbeki champions. Beyond the limited concerns with cultural awakening and political emancipation that marked Negritude in the 1930s, he adds questions of economic development and technological advancement, as I discuss further on.

The post-war period

The post-war period unleashed some of the most tremendous struggles by people of African descent on the continent and in the ‘New World’.

The African National Congress Youth League (ANC-YL) was formed in 1944 in South Africa. The ANC-YL, fueled by the ideas of Anton Mzwake Lembede, catapulted into leadership roles within the organisation Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Robert Sobukwe, Govan Mbeki and other ‘young Turks’ who came to be associated with the new radicalism that was a departure from the old style politics of petitions, delegations and cooperation. The ANC-YL became the breeding ground of radicals from the rest of the subcontinent.

The Pan African Congresses spearheaded the twentieth-century struggle for decolonisation in Africa and in the Caribbean. They demanded an end to colonial rule and an end to racial discrimination. The Pan African Manifesto positioned the political and economic demands of the downtrodden and oppressed within a new world context of international cooperation, arising from the ‘grim ordeal of the war of liberation against Fascism’. The Pan African Congresses threw up successive generations of leaders for the cause.

After the sixth Pan African Congress held in 1945 in Manchester, England, Kwame Nkrumah emerged as the leading voice and driving force of Pan Africanism. He championed the idea of an independent West African Federation. After becoming Ghana’s president, Nkrumah convened a Conference of Independent States in 1958—at the time there were only eight independent African states—to forge African solidarity and to undermine and transcend the boundaries imposed by the 1884–85 Berlin conferences. In general, though, the former French colonies looked with disfavour on unity with other African states if this was going to be at the expense of their ties with France, and this put an end to the immediate prospects of forming an African federation among the newly independent African states.

Paradoxically, with the attainment of independence Pan Africanism went on the retreat. All that could be accomplished was the formation in 1963 of the Organisation of African Unity, a largely ineffective collection of nation-states much like any other grouping of states in the world.

Just as the 1945 Pan African Congress had unleashed forces that culminated in the independence of most African countries, the founding of the ANC-YL in 1944 had several beneficial spin-offs for the rise of African people internationally. Africa and the US, in particular, benefited from the political legacy released by the ANC-YL, who in 1949 spearheaded the adoption of the Programme of Action that was to become the blueprint for non-violent, passive resistance against racial oppression.

The Programme of Action led to the defiance campaign against unjust laws in South Africa in 1951–52 and to the civil rights movement in the US in the mid-1950s. The civil rights campaign employed strategies and means culled from the Indian struggle against British colonialism and the South African struggle against segregation and Apartheid. Although Martin Luther King never visited South Africa, from his visit to India in 1957 he learnt of the efficacy of passive resistance, satyagraha, first developed earlier in the century by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of turbulence and violence in the US, when southern blacks protested, demonstrated, and even died in order to achieve integration into the American system. From the civil rights campaign in Montgomery, Alabama, in the early 1950s to the upheavals of the 1960s in Watts, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York and all over the US, African-American communities threw up important leaders such as Martin Luther King, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), Le Roi Jones (Imamu Baraka) and others.

Black Consciousness in South Africa modelled itself closely on Black Power in America. Parallel struggles in the rest of Africa saw Ghana, under Kwame Nkrumah, become the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to attain independence from European colonial rule in 1957. The ‘winds of change’ that British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had spoken of during his 1960 visit to Cape Town started to blow across the rest of the continent, with South Africa almost the last country to breathe the air of freedom and attain majority rule in 1994.

The African renaissance: reprise

From the foregoing overview, we are able to see the African renaissance in proper perspective, not as a single event or some once-off occasion. It is an episodic and cumulative epic story of the rise of a once enslaved people across the globe. It is a

continuing revolution that unfolds toward the total liberation of people of African origin in the political, economic, cultural, educational, technological and social spheres.

My final point in this section is that the African renaissance, like the European renaissance before it—a phenomenon that took upward of three centuries to spread across and benefit all of Europe—will lie in the realisation of each African country's potential. In most African countries, this potential has been stifled for now by a combination of external and internal forces, both self-induced (war, graft, corruption, etc) and due to adverse natural conditions (famine, drought, floods, disease, etc), as earlier described.

The post-independence era in Africa—I dare not call it 'post-colonial' yet anymore than I can speak meaningfully at this stage of the post-Apartheid state that is still in the making—is littered with renaissance efforts that, at best, succeeded partially and, at worst, failed miserably. The story of Africa since independence is a story of false starts that failed to sustain social, political and economic reforms on the continent. The champion of Negritude and one of its chief architects, Leopold Sedar Senghor, on becoming Senegal's first president, touted a brand of African socialism, but promptly threatened with arrest dedicated Marxists of the calibre of Sembene Ousmane, who went into exile. Jomo Kenyatta's Haraambe ('let's pull together') efforts, Kenneth Kaunda's African humanism and Julius Nyerere's more earnest Ujamaa (village collectivisation) schemes saw productivity in Kenya, Zambia and Tanzania, respectively, and the GDP in those countries plummet below their levels in the colonial era. Nigeria is a sorry tale of state profligacy, corruption, graft and squandered opportunity on a monumental scale. Socialism in Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso and Mozambique met the same sorry fate and produced the same miserable results as capitalism in Cote d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Malawi and Zaire. The litany of Africa's social, political and economic woes is, indeed, endless. Stagnation is everywhere a monument to mismanagement of Africa's vast natural and human resources. All this raises the most significant question for exponents of the African renaissance: What must be different about current efforts to re-ignite the African renaissance? What must be tackled differently to make the twenty-first century truly 'the African century'?

The most intractable problem in most African countries today, and therefore the precondition for their resuscitation, is how to effect reconciliation and reconstruction, the twin pillars on which the stability and prosperity of all nations rest. President Mbeki, who has emerged as one of the most significant leaders in Africa in the laboratory of modern times, says, as quoted in Antjie Krog's *Country of my skull* (1999: 167): 'Reconciliation and transformation should be viewed as interdependent parts of one unique process of building a new society.'

I have attempted to provide a context within which to understand the true import of Mbeki's clarion call, when he says: 'Those with eyes 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.' It has, indeed, been upon us for a while.

MBEKI'S REFLECTIONS ON THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

Two speeches that spell out President Mbeki's views on the African renaissance more elaborately than any others are (1) his address at the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, Abuja, 3 October 2000 titled 'Democracy and renaissance in Africa: in search of an enduring pax Africana' and (2) his address to the Ghana-South Africa Friendship Association, on 5 October 2000 titled 'The African renaissance: the challenge of our time' that focuses on strategies for sustainable development. Each deserves to be discussed separately, although they bounce off each other. The speeches seize on the preoccupations of previous exponents of the African renaissance with cultural re-awakening and political independence, but extend the discourse to matters of economic advancement and technological development.

The Abuja address

Mbeki's Abuja address, 3 October 2000, dealt with the question of how to nurture and consolidate democracy in Africa. He began by expressing the following sentiments about the continent while, at the same time, acknowledging the enormous problems confronting various African states:

When students of history look back to the past few years, I am sure that they will be able to see beyond the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region.

They will see beyond the savage brutality of those who terrorised and mercilessly killed and maimed innocent people, especially women and children in Sierra Leone.

They will see beyond the unspeakable genocide that took place in Rwanda, which took place while the world watched as though this was nothing but the swatting of a fly.

They will see something beyond the never-ending war in Angola.

The students of history will see something other than the negative news of disease and hunger that dominate news headlines in the countries of the North, as if to say that the single definition of Africa is calamity.

Africa is experiencing its 'second liberation', Mbeki said, in 'the establishment of stable democratic systems of government, political accountability and respect for human rights.' Under-reported in the Western media are these gains of the 'second revolution' sweeping across Africa, such as the successes of the pro-democracy movements that arose in many countries of central and west Africa in the 1990s. 'An important and critical element in this Renaissance is that in the last few years we have witnessed a widespread democratic awakening in all parts of our continent,' he said. 'Today, many countries have gone through more than one multi-party election since 1990.' He advocated strengthening pro-democracy movements, from Algeria to Zimbabwe, so that 'the democratic wave becomes an unstoppable and irreversible tide'. In the rest of his text, he tried to demonstrate that there can be no renaissance without due regard for the democratic process.

He advocated consolidation of Africa's nascent democratic institutions by mobilising civil society as a foil against the machinations of leaders who 'take advantage of the dust occasioned by the struggle for democracy ... to steal power from the people and place it in their own hands'. That constitutes his clearest statement to date in condemnation of efforts to abort democracy as witnessed in Zimbabwe.

South Africa's transition to democracy since 1994 has occasionally been bedevilled by conflict between the government, broadly representing popular African aspirations, and the media, generally reflecting the views of the mainly European opposition and some disgruntled Africans. He picked on this conflict-riddled relationship when he said:

Clearly one of the critical elements of the process of deepening democracy is to build, nurture and strengthen indigenous institutions of research, information gathering and dissemination, including the media.

Our own experience tells us that as long as these important institutions are owned and controlled by people other than Africans, we will fail to end the distortions about ourselves; distortions that lead to the disempowerment of our people, to self-hate and confusion about what we ought to do to advance our development.

South Africa's problem is how to rebuild institutions of research, information gathering and dissemination, including the media, to reflect African reality more faithfully so that these resources can be used, as Mbeki says, 'to produce appropriate solutions to our problems' and thereby 'assist in the process of democratic consolidation'. He would also like to see such institutions help in monitoring good governance, pointing out weaknesses and transgressions, and otherwise offer constructive criticism.

With particular reference to the situation in South Africa, he discussed multi-party democracy as follows:

Clearly, the consolidation of democracy is also dependent on the strength and maturity of political parties. In situations where there is an absence of strong mass-based political parties, it has been easier for democratic forces to impose their will on the rest of society.

In addition, parties that are not rooted in the ideology that is informed by the plight and concerns of poor people are unable to respond to the challenges of underdevelopment and poverty.

His emphasis on the ownership of the process by ordinary citizens is sparked by the realisation that renaissance efforts in the past, such as Black Consciousness in South Africa and Negritude among people of African descent living under French colonialism, were limited in their impact largely because they did not take hold among ordinary citizens. The discourse that underlies the African renaissance is obscure to the vast majority that are its target—few African language speakers can even translate the concept into their first languages—nor can one at this stage point to any concrete programs to ignite the popular imagination and empower local communities. He returned to this subject in his Accra address. He is, nonetheless, hounded by past failure in this regard, when he says further:

Whether the organisation of power still reflected the colonial legacy, whether the form of the independent state was deeply shaped by the African colonial experience are questions we must still grapple with, for they may explain past failures and point the way to present and future successes ... We must be in a position to create democratic systems appropriate to the African reality.

Furthermore, we must recognise that the organisation of power and how democracy is practised in any given time are surely influenced and shaped by the arrangements of economic power within our societies globally.

Past renaissance efforts shared a common failing in that they did not prioritise the economy as the principal arena of struggle. Participatory democracy can only be enhanced, and the African renaissance fully realised, when attention is paid to the economic plight of the majority of Africans that live in abject poverty and under dehumanising conditions. 'There can be no genuine democratic empowerment of the people without economic empowerment,' Mbeki said.

He argued that poverty, which has been exacerbated by colonialism and neo-colonialism, has debilitating and disempowering effects. The preoccupation of the poor with issues of survival leaves them virtually no time to invest in other social issues. By contrast, people in affluent societies do not have to worry to the same degree about how to satisfy ‘their basic needs such as food, security, welfare and basic amenities, hence, the proliferation of movements that are vocal on all manner of issues as represented by organisations of civil society and numerous NGOs ... Undoubtedly this situation contributes, in many respects, to the deepening of democracy within a country.’ The African renaissance is thus inconceivable without effective poverty relief programs that will bring about ‘sustained socio-economic development, put an end to the poverty afflicting millions of the African people, increase the capacity of our economics and strengthen our democracies’.

Another major point he discussed is how to effect reconciliation and reconstruction—that is, how to bring about lasting peace in every African country so that democracy and development, and therefore the African renaissance, can take firm root and blossom. ‘One of the most important challenges facing Africa today is to achieve a comprehensive and sustained peace and ensure that we arrive at an enduring pax Africana,’ he said, ‘for democracy and sustained development are possible only in conditions of peace and stability.’ On a continental scale, conflict resolution to bring about the envisaged pax Africana requires continental organisations that have the capacity to translate rhetoric into meaningful and enforceable action.

The Accra address

In his Accra address, 5 October 2000, Mbeki made another impassioned case for the African renaissance, in what can be regarded thematically as a continuation of his Abuja talk. Having dealt in Abuja with how to implant a democratic culture, he then proceeded to discuss two other issues: how to restore Africans to their culture and reclaim their humanstory (history) and how to meet the challenges of development, including agriculture, industry, technology, communication, investments and markets.

He began by invoking the past in order to build a common identity and purpose.

I am sure that we would agree that to be able to discuss comprehensively the challenge of our rebirth as a continent, it is necessary to take a brief journey back into our history, into some of the many monumental and epoch-making phenomena that have shaped and defined us as Africans.

His speech invoked majestic ancient African civilisations to buttress his point about the need for Africans to develop a sense of pride in themselves that was flattened by slavery and colonialism. His address also referred to distortions in African history—he is not above distorting it himself, however laudable his purpose—owing to what he described as ‘euro-centric, colonial and racist’ interpretations.

He is aware, however, of the temptation in such a revisionist or neo-Negritudist project to romanticise and glorify the past and gloss over its imperfections. He appealed for a balanced record of past accomplishments ‘as well as the dark periods of our existence’. The history project he proposes is also intended ‘to inspire every one of us to overcome the real and artificial obstacles to our development’. The language he used was that of Black Consciousness when he said:

It is therefore critical that we begin deliberately and consciously to engage in the process of reclaiming our history, our culture, our heritage so as to challenge the stereotypes, distortions of Africa and Africans which even some amongst us have been socialised into accepting as fact.

There is a sense in which most of what he is speaking about has more pointed application to South Africa, recently emerged from the shackles of European domination, than to Ghana and other African states where scholarship since independence has served the purpose of reintegrating the people to their culture and history. Moreover, nowhere else on the continent has the degree of alienation been as pronounced as in South Africa. Liberation from the slave mentality is a prerequisite to total liberation in all spheres of human endeavour.

While projecting notions of African nobility and achievement as reflected in ancient history, he also stressed the need for Africans not to wallow in their past achievements, however glorious:

The point however is not nostalgia. The point is that we must use the knowledge of our past to ensure that we ourselves act in a manner that says that so great a Continent can no longer continue to be one of backwardness, underdevelopment, poverty, war, rampant disease and ignorance, an object of pity and charitable concern by peoples of the world.

The purpose then in understanding the past is to better enable Africans to deal with the present.

An important point emphasised in the Abuja speech is that after independence leaders arose in most African countries who looted their own countries on a scale colonial rulers would have envied, thereby squandering the wealth of their countries. Mbeki chastised corrupt and autocratic leaders toward the end of his address, in an effort to balance his criticism of foreign powers with some mention of self-induced problems: ‘Of critical importance is that we should have a leadership that is committed to defending the interests of our people, a leadership that has turned its back from corrupt practices and abuse of power for self-interest.’

The fundamental economic questions that he wanted to raise, however, are two-fold: The first is that African countries are now in a position to use their vast ‘natural resources for the benefit of the peoples of Africa’. The second is that the imperatives of sustainable development dictate that African countries should not only produce raw materials for export but they should also produce processed products that build local economies and do not just buttress foreign economies.

He also pointed out that Africa’s economies were developed to service European metropolitan centres. The transport and telecommunications infrastructure was intended to link the colonies with their colonial powers for the purpose of siphoning African produce. The fact of the matter is that, in an age of globalisation, every country needs, in Mbeki’s words, ‘to create capacity in the area of communication and information technology or face the risk of permanent global marginalisation of our countries and peoples’. He added: ‘We cannot begin to be fully integrated into the global economy if we do not develop the necessary skills to participate in the increasingly knowledge based communication society.’ He also stressed the need for Africans to participate fully in the information revolution that rapid improvements in mass communication have brought about.

African markets are obviously inadequate to support large-scale economic development on a sustainable basis. A recurring theme in Mbeki’s presidency has been access on favourable terms to European and North American markets.

He returned toward the end of his speech to the subject of culture as a manifestation of imperialism and warned against succumbing to “‘Coca-Cola culture” at the expense of our own cultures, identities, and national heritage’. The pervasive dominant culture, he said, denies ‘the validity of our knowledge systems, our morals and ethics and denies that there are other solutions to our challenges other than those imposed by the dominant culture’. The tricky question that haunts exponents of the African renaissance is how African countries can open their doors to western capital, on the one hand, and keep out the cultural baggage that comes with capitalism and consumerism, on the other hand. In similar fashion, when he nudged African

developers in his Abuja speech to take full advantage of the information revolution and the new technologies, he added that ‘We should do so while remaining true to ourselves, retaining our identity, our culture, our values and concepts.’

The speech ended with a call for closer African cooperation across the divisive barriers set up by European colonisers and now perpetuated by Africans themselves. ‘We have to overcome the artificial divide, a relic of the colonial era, which still defines and identifies us according to our old colonial masters,’ he said. The adherence to colonial borders is a reflection of the operation of mental borders that are barriers to true liberation.

MAPPING THE NEW AFRICAN INITIATIVE

Abuja and Accra were, in some important respects, dress rehearsals for the launch of the Millenium Partnership for African Recovery Program (MAP). The speeches may be regarded as highlights of the main coordinates of the macro-economic plan for Africa that was first touted by Mbeki.

Since ascending to the presidency in June 1999, Mbeki has played a pivotal (if under-appreciated) role internationally in such matters as the European Union (EU) negotiations of the post-Lome arrangement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries; the introduction of US legislation to accelerate the access of African products to US markets; and the unprecedented attention paid by the Okinawa G8 Summit to the global challenge of development. He represented the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the G8 meeting in Tokyo in July 2000 and again in Genoa in July 2001. He continues to speak for the cause of the world’s oppressed and disadvantaged.

He has gone further than any other African head of state in history by developing a plan for Africa’s economic, political and social recovery: the Millenium Partnership for African Recovery Program (MAP). MAP and a subsequent plan, the Omega Plan, drawn up by President Wade of Senegal, were merged to produce the New African Initiative that was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, soon to become the African Union) and presented at the July 2001 G8 meeting in Genoa.

The New African Initiative aims to ‘counter Africa’s peripheral and diminishing role in the world economy’. It charts a way to eradicate poverty and Africa’s underdevelopment that ‘stand in stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world’. It also seeks to place each African country on the road to sustainable growth and development and thus integrate Africa in ‘the global economy and body politic’. In some respects, the plan employs an if-you-can’t-beat-them-join-them strategy. It is

predicated on an acceptance of globalisation as a fact of modern life, against which it is futile to struggle. It provides a framework for Africa's 'interaction with the rest of the world', based on a developmental agenda agreed to by African leaders. The envisaged end is empowerment through participation, as much in conceptualisation as in execution. The MAP, then, seeks ways for willing African countries:

To build on and celebrate the achievements of the past, as well as reflect on the lessons learned through painful experience, so as to establish a partnership that is both credible and capable of implementation. In doing so, the injunction is for the peoples and governments of Africa to gain the conviction that development is a process of empowerment and self-reliance. Accordingly, Africans must not be wards of benevolent guardians; rather they must be the architects of their own sustained upliftment.

MAP rejects reliance on both credit, which has led to Africa's debt trap, and foreign aid, which has now been cut drastically, made basket cases of most African countries, and entrenched dependency. It calls on African countries to wrench themselves from spiraling underdevelopment and dependency, determine their own destiny, and seek international assistance for the express purpose of complementing African efforts.

MAP sets certain conditions that must be met for sustainable development to take effect:

- cessation of war within and between African states;
- installation of democratic regimes that are committed to the protection of human rights, participatory democracy, and accountability and transparency in governance;
- people-centred development;
- market-oriented economies marked by macro-economic stability;
- education, technical training and health services, with priority given to combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases; and
- the promotion of women's role in socio-economic development.

The document further proposes strategies and partnerships for ecologically sound development and for the preservation of resources that are the common heritage of all

humanity. 'It is obvious that, unless the communities in the vicinity of the tropical forests are given alternative means of earning a living, they will cooperate in the destruction of the forests,' the plan states. 'As the preservation of these environmental assets is in the interests of humanity, it is imperative that Africa be placed on a developmental path that does not put them in danger.'

MAP proposes to obviate the problem of the small populations and per capita incomes of African countries, by fostering development through the five regional clusters of west, north, central, east and southern Africa. African countries need to pool their resources and enhance regional cooperation and economic integration in order to improve their international competitiveness. The document also calls for regional cooperation and economic integration to develop around projects relating to transport, energy, water, health, agriculture, the environment and so on. In addition, MAP enunciates the need to address Africa's exceptionally poor infrastructure, including information and communications technology.

The list of other priority sectors includes health, education and training, culture and agriculture ('a prerequisite of economic development on the continent'). In all spheres of production, it proposes expansion and diversification of production and exports, beyond the production and export of raw materials and unprocessed products. It seeks cooperation from the industrialised world in terms of foreign direct investment, market access, and transfer of appropriate skills and technology. The plan calls for local and international partnerships in every area of activity, such as mobilising local resources through an increase in savings and attracting investments from abroad. Thus the plan will stand or fall by its success in galvanising adequate resources, as its originators readily submit.

MAP is also predicated on a series of commitments by participating African countries. The plan makes the following impassioned plea:

The African initiative's objective is to consolidate democracy and sound economic management on the continent. Through the programme, African leaders are making a commitment to the African people and the world to work together in rebuilding the continent. It is a pledge to promote peace and stability, democracy, sound economic management and people-centred development and to hold each other accountable in terms of the agreements outlined in the programme.

In proposing the partnership, Africa recognises that it holds the key to its own development. We affirm that the African initiative offers an historical opportunity for the developed countries of the world to enter

into a genuine partnership with Africa, based on mutual interest, shared commitments and binding agreements.

The adoption of a development strategy as set out in the broad approach outlined above, together with a detailed programme of action, will mark the beginning of a new phase in the partnership and cooperation between Africa and the developed world.

In fulfilling its promise, this agenda must give hope to the emaciated African child that the 21st century is indeed the century of Africa's renewal.

There are at least three hurdles to be negotiated. First, even if debt relief comes about past experience shows that promises of direct foreign investment are never fulfilled. The logic of capitalism (whether called 'compassionate conservatism' or 'the third way') is exploitation and accumulation, not goodwill and redistribution. Second, some participating countries are led by illegitimate regimes whose stock-in-trade is looting state coffers. In others, democratically elected leaders are not any more democratic or disciplined. Third, deadlines and some targets are completely unrealistic. The 7 per cent GDP per annum is unrealisable; South Africa, which is better positioned than a number of the other countries, has yet to realise an annual growth rate in excess of 3 per cent. How does Somalia or Congo achieve a growth rate of 7 per cent? The most likely outcome of the plan is growth and development for some countries that can get their national act together—even if not on the grand scale or fast pace envisaged—but continued retardation and underdevelopment for the rest well beyond the Year 2015.

'Capital is not in our hands', Mbeki observed with disarming candidness and realism with regard to dependence on foreign direct investment. 'We have got to create the conditions to attract people.' There can be little doubt, however, that MAP holds the best hope for African recovery. Speaking in an SABC TV3 interview on 19 July 2001, Mbeki spoke resolutely about creating the conditions necessary to attract capital and launch Africa on the road to recovery from 'the general regression that has characterised it for the last few decades': 'We are taking our destiny into our own hands to end the wars, to end dictatorships, to end corruption, to ensure the development of the continent.'

CONCLUSION

The African renaissance is ANC policy that informs its activities in government, including its economic and foreign policies. In his report to the fiftieth national

conference of the ANC, December 1997, President Mandela summarised the principal aims of the African renaissance as follows:

- the establishment of democratic political systems to ensure that ‘the people shall govern’;
- ensuring that these systems take into account African specifics so that, while being truly democratic and protective of human rights, they are nevertheless designed in ways that really ensure that political means can be used to address the competing interests of different social groups in each country;
- establishing the institutions and procedures that would enable the continent collectively to deal with questions of democracy, peace and stability;
- achieving sustainable economic development that results in the continuous improvement of the standards of living and the quality of life of the masses of the people;
- qualitatively changing Africa’s place in the world economy, so that it is free of the yoke of the international debt burden and no longer a supplier of raw materials and an importer of food and manufactured goods;
- a rediscovery of Africa’s creative past to recapture the people’s cultures, encourage artistic creativity and restore popular involvement in both accessing and advancing science and technology;
- advancing in practical ways the objective of African unity; and
- strengthening the genuine independence of African countries and the continent in our relations with the major powers, and enhancing our collective role in the determination of the global system of governance in all fields, including politics, the economy, security, information and intellectual property, the environment, and science and technology.

These are also the grand themes of the Mbeki presidency. There may be steep hills to climb and high hurdles to scale but they are not insurmountable. The vision of the rise of a once oppressed people is a concrete one, entirely realisable, as the triumph over slavery, colonialism and Apartheid amply demonstrate. Beyond the political, economic, cultural, scientific and technological aspirations that President Mbeki articulates, the final vision is of a humanity liberated from all forms of oppression and

exploitation. It is a vision of tightening the 'ties that bind', of the restoration of the rights of African people, and of the recognition of their dignity and humanity. It is for most Africans, throughout the ages, a compelling and sustaining vision—for where there is no vision, the people perish.

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Maya Angelou

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