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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**  
**5<sup>TH</sup> AFRICAN INTELLECTURAL LECTURE**  
***REVISITING THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE 21 YEARS ONWARDS***  
**FUNCTION HALL, 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, KGORONG BUILDING**  
**02 SEPTEMBER 2019**

It is once again a great pleasure and privilege to welcome you all to yet another instalment of the African Intellectuals Project. Thus far, the project has brought in and afforded us to learn from some of the great minds in our country, from the continent and indeed across the African diaspora. We are therefore delighted to be joined today by Professor Malegapuru Makgoba.

**Colonialism and Resistance**

At the heart of the colonisation project was the full intention to exploit the physical resources of Africa, Americas, Asia and Australasia. Enriching and turning itself into a superpower, betraying its small size

and lack of any natural resources, Europe went on to dominate the entire world.

Despite the attaining of independence by all African countries, the effects of colonialism have been so deep that the hegemony of Europe, and the world system and relations that were produced by colonialism, are still felt to date. Previous direct colonial economic relations have since turned into skewed economic relations between Europe and its former colonies, except the United States of America, which successfully turned into a dominant settler colonial state.

The current economic relations between Europe and USA on the one hand and the African continent and South America on the other were shaped by a deliberate and systematic policy and praxis of under-development and establishment and subsequent reproduction of dependence on former colonial centres.

This dominance and dependence have extended and translated broadly into cultural dominance. I use the term broadly to include the arts, education, literature, fashion, religion, *et cetera*. In fact, no aspect of life in Africa and South America remained untouched by the dominant tastes of Europe and the USA.

There is no area where this dominance is as manifest as the self-reference of Africans and peoples of South America. Africa defines itself as Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone. While South America is also termed Latin America, from the dominance of the two Latin languages - Portuguese and Spanish.

On the other hand, colonial conquest and the slave trade were not achieved through passive reception by Africans and indigenous peoples of America. Brute force was used.

Wars of resistance were fought by successive generations of African and indigenous peoples of America. From up north in the USA through to here in the southern tip of Africa, African and indigenous peoples of America waged wars of resistance against colonialism.

### **Antecedents to the African Renaissance movement**

Out of this was born the resistance movement, which transformed into the broad liberation movement; manifesting into varied organisational and conceptualisation expressions – from nationalist to decolonisation efforts to free the oppressed peoples of Africa and South America, and also the indigenous peoples of North America, Asia, and Australasia.

Efforts to fight against the continued colonisation and dependence of Africa included a logical realisation that colonial conquest and the subsequent dependency relations took various forms.

At the most obvious and manifest level remains the economic relations which are characterised by dominance and dependence. This presents itself in the form of unfair and unbalanced trade relations and direct economic 'bullying' by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.<sup>1</sup>

In other instances, this dominance takes an even crude form, such as the almost mandatory use of the CFA Franc as the denominated currency for some West and Central African countries (the so-called Francophone countries) and the fact that they have to keep their reserves in French.<sup>2</sup>

Related to and enhancing the economic dominance model is the cultural aspect. The systematic relegation of African languages into only conversational mediums and not languages of science has meant that Africans view and treat their languages as being of inferior and lower quality than European languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Chossudovsky, Michel (1997) *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms*. London, Zed Books

<sup>2</sup> Sylla, Ndongo, S (2017) The CFA Franc: French Monetary Imperialism in Africa, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/07/12/the-cfa-franc-french-monetary-imperialism-in-africa/>. Accessed on 31 August 2019

African knowledge systems have also been relegated to exotic views, or what some term 'museumization', that are studied in order to be rejected, ridiculed or judged as being of inferior value.<sup>3</sup> Where they are found capable of offering valid knowledge such is treated only in relation to and adding to the mainstream, which is European and North American.

The academy is therefore framed by and seen through European and North American ontological and epistemological terms. Both the natural and social science teaching, research and application reflect this dominance and related marginalisation of African knowledge systems, whether ancient, medieval or contemporary.

But this marginalisation did not just come in the form of conquest. It arose largely through deliberate distortion. Thus, what we now know as classical philosophy is referred to as Greek Philosophy. Yet, as George James' undisputed thesis proves, this is 'stolen legacy' from Kemet, as Molefi Kete Asante correctly calls Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kraak, Andre (1999) Western Science, Power and the Marginalisation of Indigenous Modes of Knowledge Production (Interpretative minutes of the discussion held on 'Debates about Knowledge: Developing Country Perspectives' co-hosted by CHET and CSD, Wednesday 7 April 1999), <file:///C:/Users/matha/Downloads/KRAAK%201999%20SCIENCE,%20POWER%20AND%20MARGINALISATION%20OF%20INDIGENOUS%20MODES%20OF%20KNOWLEDGE%20PRODUCTION.pdf>. Accessed on 31 August 2019

<sup>4</sup> James, George G.M (1954) *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, The Journal of Pan African Studies, 2009 eBook. Accessed from <http://www.thehouseofsankofa.com/books/eBook%20Stolen%20Legacy.pdf>. Accessed on 25 May 2019

The same can be said about medicine, mathematics, and the development of the alphabet and writing.

The point in highlighting these is not to fall into a glorification of the African past. Like all peoples, Africans had their moments of glory, and moments of barbarity. What we seek to do in highlighting these stolen and suppressed legacies is to show that Africa was never the dark continent that it subsequently (subsequent to colonial conquest) got to be presented as.

The most devastating legacy of colonial conquest was to deny the African a point of reference to any past achievements. The effect of this was an African who only sees herself or himself as a failure. Someone who never contributed to science and knowledge in general. Such a person would, logically, accept that s/he is inferior and therefore deserving of dominance and condescending treatment.

Just like the knowledge systems, African arts and fashion are treated as poor but exotic cousins of their mainstream European and North American counterparts. What is sad is that this treatment is perpetuated by Africans themselves. Hence, we would reduce African music on radio to be played at a particular hour on a Sunday afternoon, when we are relaxing.

The suggestion therefore is that African music is not good enough to be played during morning drive hour, so that it can stimulate you for the day of work ahead, or to help you to reflect on the day's work on your way home. That it cannot be mixed with 'intelligent' talk on talk radio in the morning and afternoon but must only be played on a 'lazy' Sunday afternoon.

A cumulation of all these manifestations of conquest has led to an African with an inferiority complex. As both Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko have pointed out, the African, the black person, has been stripped of their humanity. They are shadows of people who have a low sense of self. In turn, they view other peoples, who they should be regarding simply as fellow human beings, as being superior to them, which they are inferior.<sup>5</sup>

Programme Director, earlier on I referred to generations of resistance fighters who sought to push back colonial conquest and reclaim their land and dignity. I also pointed out that these resistance efforts took the form of the nationalist and related movements. With their strengths and weaknesses, the national and Pan Africanist movements led many efforts to restore the dignity of African peoples.

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<sup>5</sup> Fanon, Frantz ([1961] 2001) *The Wretched of the Earth*. London, Penguin Classics; Biko, Steve ([1978]2004) *I Write What I Like*. Johannesburg, Picador Africa

From the rebellions against colonial conquest through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the nationalist movement was formed, attempts to rid Africans of colonialism took many forms. The first was the decolonisation movement. This took the actual physical effort of organising the people to resist and rise against colonial governments and demand the liberation of their countries.

Starting off at times as liberal petitions to colonising countries and their rulers, these movements turned radical as young students who were, ironically, educated in Europe, began to pose sharper questions than their predecessors had done.<sup>6</sup>

But these struggles were not waged in isolation. At the same time as the nationalist movements were beginning to gain momentum on the African continent, there was emerging at the same time, the Pan-Africanist movement. Led initially by WEB du Bois, inspired surely but refining the earlier ideas of Marcus Garvey, the Pan Africanism movement sought to establish and demonstrate linkages between the struggles of peoples on the African continent and the diaspora.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Limb, Peter (2010) *The ANC's Early Years: Nation, Class and Place in South Africa before 1940*. Pretoria, Unisa Press

<sup>7</sup> Du Bois, W.E.B (1900) To the Nations of World, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1900-w-e-b-du-bois-nations-world/>. Accessed on 31 August 2019



As we now know, these earlier efforts by WEB du Bois would ultimately lead to the establishment of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), this after a number of African countries had gained notional freedom. I say notional deliberately because, as Kwame Nkrumah was to later realise and show, the so-called independence of African countries moved from a state of colonialism to what he would later term neo-colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

The liberatory efforts of the nationalism movement were accompanied directly by intellectual reflections and innovations by the movement pioneers themselves – Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Anton Lembede, and many others – who produced books, essays and pamphlets that are now classics in their own right.

Indirectly, the movement benefitted, influenced and was in turn influenced by other reflections, both on the continent and in the diaspora. First there was the Harlem Renaissance movement in New York. Focusing mainly on literature, art and music, the movement challenged prevalent negative stereotypes about black people at the time and ushered in a feeling of pride, incorporated and promoted Pan-African perspectives.

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<sup>8</sup> Nkrumah, Kwame ([1965] 1987) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Colonialism*. London: Panaf Books

While it had its own weaknesses, such as the criticism it had that some of its pioneers sought to mimic their white counterparts in terms of clothing, sophisticated manners and etiquette, there can be no argument that the movement contributed immensely to the advancement of African American arts – jazz, blues and literature. In anyway, WEB du Bois himself is still criticised as having been too obsessed with the concern that black people should not display manners that can feed the stereotype that that they are ‘backward’.<sup>9</sup>

The Harlem Renaissance movement had an influence on some of the Caribbean writers and students who were based in Paris. The Nardal sisters, Paulette and Jeanne, originally from Martinique, established and managed a salon (a meeting place where intellectual ideas would be shared over food and drinks) in Paris.<sup>10</sup> Their salon served as the launching pad and foundation for what was to be termed Negritude, later advanced by Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor and Leon Damas.

Césaire was to later become a major influence on Frantz Fanon. His 1950 publication, *Discourse on Colonialism*,<sup>11</sup> offered an analysis of

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<sup>9</sup> Muhammed, Khalil. G (2011) *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press

<sup>10</sup> Janken, Kenneth. R (1998) African American and Francophone Black Intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance, *The Historian*, Volume 60, Number 3, pp. 487-505

<sup>11</sup> Césaire, Aimé (2000 [1950]) *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, Monthly Review Press

the negative and dehumanising effects of colonialism. This analysis was to be elaborated on by Fanon,<sup>12</sup> and here at home by Biko.<sup>13</sup>

But before Biko, and going back to the 1940s, Anton Lembede laid what would be the foundations of Pan-Africanism in South Africa. Lembede can rightly be said to be the first person who articulated the concept of Africanism in a more coherent manner within the context of South Africa.<sup>14</sup> He would later be followed by Robert Sobukwe, who advanced the Pan-Africanism in the South African context.

From the Harlem Renaissance, through to the Nardal sisters in Paris, Césaire, Senghor and Damas, Fanon, Lembede to Biko, there emerged a movement that sought to understand, analyse, and confront the negative psychological effects of colonial conquest and racial oppression on the person of black people.

Overall, this movement sought to challenge the eugenicist foundational assumption of black people being inferior to any, challenge and conscientize black people to never believe that they are inferior. Most importantly, this movement sought to make a clarion

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<sup>12</sup> Fanon, Frantz ([1952] 1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*. London, Pluto Press; Fanon, Frantz ([1961] 2001) *The Wretched of the Earth*. London, Penguin Classics

<sup>13</sup> Biko, Steve ([1978]2004) *I Write What I Like*. Johannesburg, Picador Africa

<sup>14</sup> Lembede, Anton (1996) *Freedom on our Lifetime: The Collected Writings of Anton Muziwakhe Lembede* (edited by Edgar, Robert. R and ka Msumza, Luyanda). Ohio, Ohio University Press

call to the 'black world' to rise against the commonality of their oppression.

Fusing an analysis of the economic devastation and domination of the African continent and the assumption of Europe of a self-arrogated status of themselves as being superior to other continents and therefore imposing a hegemonic European worldview, was Samir Amin. The first to coin and develop the term Eurocentrism, Amin observed that the dominance of Europe extended beyond economics. It went into the entire cultural edifice of the world.<sup>15</sup>

For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the economic domination of Europe and North America over the continents, as first analysed by Nkrumah and later by Walter Rodney,<sup>16</sup> also manifest in the epistemological subordinating of Africa.

This unacceptable state of affairs calls for sustained efforts to 'move the centre', which is Europe and North America, from their state of dominance.<sup>17</sup> This can be achieved by, amongst many efforts,

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<sup>15</sup> Amin, Samir (2010 [1988]) *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturism*, 2nd Edition. New York: Monthly Review Press

<sup>16</sup> Rodney, Walter (1974) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Nairobi, East Africa Educational Publishers

<sup>17</sup> wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ (1993) *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London, James Currey; Nairobi, East Africa Educational Publishers; Portsmouth, Heinemann Educational

continuing the struggle to decolonise Africa, because it must still be fully decolonised, by first 'decolonising the mind'.<sup>18</sup>

### **Locating African Renaissance**

Programme Director, what I have tried to do thus far is to paint a picture of how varied efforts on the continent and the diaspora have emerged, influenced and reinforced each other to develop multi-faceted programmes to intensify the effort to liberate the African continent from the clutches of colonialism and imperialism.

These efforts have taken varied shapes, adopted different grammars, and emphasised multiple points and nodes of importance.

It is not that any of the efforts was superior to the other. What they all illustrate is that humanity develops through analysing existential material conditions on the basis of the present, the past, and in attempts to shape the future. So, from Garveyism with its serious weaknesses, African Nationalism, to Pan-Africanism, the Harlem Renaissance, Black Power and Black Consciousness.

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<sup>18</sup> wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ (1986) *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Portsmouth, Heinemann Educational

All these movements and ideas must be seen as attempts by African people to 'wrestle' with the cause and state of their dispossession and oppression.

It is within this historical context that we must approach, understand and treat African Renaissance. Commenting in 2001, Eddy Maloka made the observation that African Renaissance was so ubiquitous at the time that it was spoken and referred to throughout varied sectors.<sup>19</sup>

We are therefore gathering here today to reflect on a concept, a movement, that captured our imagination in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Having outlined some of the antecedents to the current debates on the state of coloniality that we are faced with, it is not my intention to proffer a detailed academic examination of the concept of African Renaissance. Like I said before, such an exercise would require either a full lecture on my side, or an article. What I wish to do though is to provide a simplified reflection of the concept.

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<sup>19</sup> Maloka, Eddy (2001) The South Africa "African Renaissance" Debate: A Critique, <http://polis.sciencespobordeaux.fr/vol8ns/maloka.pdf> (Accessed 31 August 2019)

## **African Renaissance: A Brief Reflection**

Again, like I said before, there should be consensus that, in its modern conceptualisation, African Renaissance can be traced to the collection of essays by that great African mind, Cheik Anta Diop, in his *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946-1960*.<sup>20</sup>

In advancing his argument and call, Anta Diop was not simply adding to the movement that was fighting for the liberation of Africa and her peoples. Theirs was also part of the broader humanity to restate the fact that all of humanity is equal, and that none of us was born a master or a slave.

Located and understood within the great movement for the liberation of Africa, African Renaissance has a rich history which must still be researched and shared with generations to come.

At its core African Renaissance is a cry, a call by and to African peoples to raise their hands and be counted as men and women who do not allow anyone to trample on their dignity. But more than that, it is a resolve by African people to eradicate out of Africa those practices, whether visited upon the continent by others or by ourselves, which

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<sup>20</sup> Cheik Anta Diop (2000) *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946-1960*. New Jersey, Red Sea Press

hold us back. Thus, it is a call to carve a developmental path for the continent; a path that can lead to her prosperity.

Since the 1960s the most clarion call for African Renaissance was reinvigorated by our own Chancellor and former President of the Republic, President Thabo Mbeki. Many agree that his 1996 '*I am an African*'<sup>21</sup> speech on the occasion of the adoption of the country's constitution marked the revival of the concept.

Since then, others went on to develop, debate and critique the concept. Our gathering today is therefore an addition to that journey, in the form of an evaluation of how far we may have travelled along both the political and intellectual path, wrestling with the challenges facing Africa and her peoples.

### **A word of caution**

Programme Director, what I have tried to do in this welcoming is to locate African Renaissance within the multiple and yet related and mutually reinforcing efforts to formulate a programme for the liberation of the continent from neo-colonialism and imperialism.

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<sup>21</sup> Mbeki, Thabo (1996) Thabo Mbeki's speech: I am an Africa, [http://afrikatanulmanyok.hu/userfiles/File/beszede/Thabo%20Mbeki\\_Iam%20an%20African.pdf](http://afrikatanulmanyok.hu/userfiles/File/beszede/Thabo%20Mbeki_Iam%20an%20African.pdf). Accessed on 31 August 2019



Related concepts in this regard, and especially for us in higher education, include the decolonial theory; Africanisation, which Professor Malegapuru Makgoba co-pioneered in the mid-1990s to early 2000, and which far from what Professor Kwesi Prah wrongly and unfortunately reduce to replacement of European faces with African faces;<sup>22</sup> and, indigenisation.

For us here at UNISA all these constitute the grammars of our transformation lexicon, with none being regarded as superior to the other but enriching us in our journey. Otherwise that will be a tribalistic approach in an academic setting.

### **Conclusion: Towards *Die Groot Gariep***

If we may draw inspiration from what Neville Alexander used to say, talking about the richness that can be derived from developing African languages, allowing varied grammars of transformation is like letting, affording and celebrating the many tributaries that come together into the great confluence that we call the *Gariep*, otherwise known wrongly as the Orange River.

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<sup>22</sup> Prah, Kwesi. K (2017) Has Rhodes Fallen? Decolonising the Humanities in Africa and Constructing Intellectual Sovereignty, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315684012\\_Has\\_Rhodes\\_Fallen\\_Decolonizing\\_the\\_Humanities\\_in\\_Africa\\_and\\_Constructing\\_Intellectual\\_Sovereignty](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315684012_Has_Rhodes_Fallen_Decolonizing_the_Humanities_in_Africa_and_Constructing_Intellectual_Sovereignty). Accessed on 31 August 2019

We look forward to learning from Professor Makgoba as he reflects on the 21 years of the revival and re-invigoration of the concept of African Renaissance.

On behalf of the Council, Management, Staff and Students of UNISA, I welcome you all.

A special welcome to Professor Makgoba!

Thank you!