

Cosmopolitanism and the African Renaissance: Pixley I. Seme and Alain L. Locke

Leonard Harris

Purdue University, Indiana, United States of America
harrisl@purdue.edu

Abstract

The heretofore unknown relationship between Pixley kaIsaka Seme, one of the founders of the African National Congress, and Alain L. Locke, the primary architect of the Harlem Renaissance, is revealed and explored. I suggest that Seme's Pan-African sensibilities created the conditions for Locke to explore what it means to pursue an African Renaissance; and Locke's focus on literary expression was an exemplar for Seme's later forays in journalism and cosmopolitan unions across ethnic lines. Seme and Locke, however, created significantly different concepts of African regeneration, Renaissance, race and cosmopolitanism. Their concepts are described and evaluated. Seme's approach to Renaissance is criticised for its reliance on an ideal of valuation that renders values stable and unchanging. Locke's value theory contends that valuation is necessarily engaged in transvaluation, thus, human cognition is necessarily always engaged in creating new value categories. Locke's approach is criticised because it allows for what I define as 'sophisticated cruelty' – the unintentional social destruction of ethnic group values. I argue that Locke's approach of moderate cosmopolitan has the least theoretical disadvantages of major concepts of cosmopolitanism and Pan Africanism.

Keywords: African National Congress; African Renaissance; cosmopolitanism; Harlem Renaissance; language and translations; nativism; Pan Africanism; race; regeneration; transvaluation; value theory

Introduction

Imagine that a letter had magical powers, especially one dated 7 March 1907. This letter arrived in Boston, Massachusetts from Oxford, England, in 1907 with the wrong address for the recipient. The letter was nonetheless shortly delivered to the right person. The author was a young man in his early twenties, born in Inanda (1881?), in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Unbeknownst to him at the time, he would be a central figure in bringing down the most powerful racist government in the modern world. His ‘Regeneration of Africa’ (1906) speech won the Curtis Medal, Columbia University’s highest oratorical honour. It defined a concept of regeneration, Renaissance and race that would guide his efforts of African regeneration for years to come. Although the author once lived on 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, Harlem, New York, he sent the letter from Oxford to an African American he had never met. The recipient would lead one of the world’s most influential cultural movements, the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance movement, arguing in his ‘Legacy of ancestral arts’, *The new Negro*, 1925, that traditional African culture was the source of ‘classical’ aesthetic values that informed not just Negro culture, but carried universal value. He would create a philosophy, critical pragmatism and a cultural orientation, cultural pluralism, and provide a conception of aesthetic beauty for a community of artists, musicians and literary authors from New York to Sophiatown, South Africa; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; and Paris, France. The recipient was born in 1885 in Philadelphia. He would visit Egypt and be present at the opening of Tutankhamen’s tomb, use Azande rhythms in a play, receive the National Order of Honor and Merit from the Haitian president, Elie Lescot, and representatives of the faith with which he was most closely associated, the middle-Eastern faith of B’hai, would attend his funeral.

The sender and the recipient of the magical letter became, once they met, members of the Oxford Cosmopolitan Club and life-long friends. However, the letter did not mention – and there is no evidence that they never discussed – any feature of their different conceptions of regeneration, Renaissance and race.

The bond: Seme and Locke

Alain L. Locke (1885–1954), while a student in philosophy at Harvard University in 1907, received the magical letter – a letter of welcome – from Pixley kaIsaka Seme (1881?–1951, patrilineal clan name, *isibongo*, Tonga) who was a student at Jesus College reading law. Locke, in competition with other students nationally, had won the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, becoming the first African-American winner. It was for this reason that Seme wrote to Locke, to welcome him as a fellow of African descent to Oxford.

Locke intended to pursue his academic career without others treating him as if he were the embodiment or representative of Negroes, let alone Africans. He resented the idea that his role was to represent the interest of, or knowledge of, African Americans. Consequently, his self-assurance, individualism and refusal to be racially segregated came as a surprise to white Americans accustomed to treating African Americans (and

African Americans too often acting) as self-deprecators. However, shortly after arriving at Oxford, his self-concept changed radically (Harris and Molesworth 2008).

Shortly after Locke's arrival at Hertford College, Oxford, Seme introduced him to the Cosmopolitan Club. Seme was the treasurer for the Summer term, 1908. He used French accents for his name, Sèmé, and his African middle name, Isaka, as his first name. The Cosmopolitan Club included not just British and American nationals, but also Hamil El Alaily (future President of the Egyptian Society of England), Lala Har Dayal from India (a future nationalist and Marxist author), and V. Mukerjea (future proponent of independence for India). The European and American white national members of the club defied the norm. Phillip Guedalla, for example, was English, born of Jewish heritage, who would come to support home rule for Ireland; Carl Downes, an American whom Locke knew from Harvard, helped Locke become an officer of the Cosmopolitan Club. Locke wrote 'Cosmopolitanism and culture' shortly after arriving at Oxford; he presented a feature of it as 'Cosmopolitanism' to the Cosmopolitan Club on 9 June 1908, at the end of his first academic year at Oxford. The talk was given in the rooms of Hamed El Alaily and in October of 1908, El Alaily presented his paper, 'The Egyptian question', at a club meeting in Locke's room at 14 Beaumont Street. Locke was elected as an officer in the club in 1908 and editor of its publication, the *Oxford cosmopolitan*.

I speculate that he gained from Seme more than anyone else knowledge of African grievances and African racial pride. Lala Har Dayal, who wore his turban to a formal black-tie dinner of the club, I surmise, helped reinforce Locke's sense of pride and expand his knowledge of African grievances. Locke published quite astonishing works during his Oxford days. Shortly after his welcoming from Seme, Locke's first publication was a newspaper article that addressed colonialism, entitled 'Roosevelt agitated anti-British factions: Egyptian speech recalls myriad grievances of nationalist based on England's negligence of education' (1907). His future publications, while in England, would address cosmopolitanism, race and academic issues: 'Epilogue' – which borrowed from 'Cosmopolitanism and culture' (1908), 'Oxford contrasts' (1909) and 'The American temperament' (1911). Locke and Seme spent a great deal of time appreciating British culture and making contacts in an Edwardian world ruled by Victorian virtues. In addition, horseback riding, afternoon teas and dinners dressed in suits often occupied their time.

In June 1909, Seme gained a Bachelor's degree in civil law and passed his first bar examinations. The following year he was called to the bar at Middle Temple, London. Seme returned to South Africa in 1910, joined a law firm and then helped organise the first meeting of the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress, ANC), on 8 January 1912, in Bloemfontein. He then helped organise the Native Farmers Association of Africa Limited; first meeting 25 October 1912 in Johannesburg. The purpose of the Native Farmers, with Seme as its chairman, was to buy land for blacks. In the Wakkerstroom District of the Eastern Transvaal the farms of Daggakraal and Driefontein were eventually purchased. In addition, on 24 January he writes Locke that '[t]here is a great chance here of organizing and directing Native Journalism along National Lines'. Later Seme became instrumental in starting

the newspaper *Abantu-Batho*, an early organ of the liberation struggle. It was Locke's deep commitment to the power of literature and popular media that, I speculate, Seme gained from Locke. Seme had regularly given Locke comments on his work while they were at Oxford.

Abantu-Batho was launched with C. Kunene as English and isiZulu editor and D. S. Letanka as Sesotho editor. The circular was published variously in isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho and English. *Abantu-Batho* replaced the two competing smaller circulating publications, *Morumioa*, founded and edited by D.S. Letanka, and *Molomo Oa Batho*, founded and edited by L.T. Mvabaze. *Abantu-Batho* began, according to one author, with financial support from Queen Labotsibeni Mdluli (c.1859, 15 December 1925), also known as Gwamile, daughter of Chief Mvelase Mdluli and wife of Ngwenyama Mbandzeni, royal regent, ruling her country from the death of her son Bhunu in 1899 until the accession to the throne of her grandson, Crown Prince Mona (King Sobhuza II) in 1921 (Odendaal 1984).

The idea for the publication had long occupied Seme. From Joubert and Anderson Streets, Johannesburg, the P. kaIsaka Seme, B.A., Bar-at-Law Office, he wrote Locke on 27 January 1913 about his forthcoming marriage to a daughter of a Zulu chief and on 29 January he wrote Locke to request that he write an article for 'our Native Paper'. He also informed Locke that he had spread Locke's name among native counsels. In later years, Seme would write Locke from the Lombamba Royal Kraal, Swaziland; in 1923 he sent a cable from a ship, Union Castle Line, R.M.S. 'Briton', regarding his efforts to sue the British government for the freedom of the territories. The seminal moments in Seme's life can be marked by his graduation picture from Columbia University in 1904, his picture with the Cosmopolitan Club at Oxford with Locke in 1908, and his group portrait in 1912?,¹ with Queen Labotsibeni Mdluli and Crown Prince Mona.

Forms of cosmopolitanism

A cosmopolitan is a person who eschews the partisanship and parochial commitments of city-states and principalities. Pan Africanists are necessarily cosmopolitans. They are, using some form of cosmopolitanism, committed to a united Africa such that local nationalities and ethnicities are subordinate to the more compelling interest of at least the geographic unity of the continent and conviviality of its people. All of the versions of cosmopolitanism categorised below are committed to human emancipation from undue conflict and the creation of progressive development for all persons; however, their philosophical foundations are radically different.

Radical cosmopolitans reject the idea that ethnic or racial identities are justified for the purpose of groups forming cohesion to protect themselves against dominant groups. A radical cosmopolitan is 'one who refrains from fixating on tribal (racial/ethnic/national) loyalties and is especially suspicious of employing such loyalties as criteria in moral deliberations ... a radical cosmopolitan feels no compulsion to be loyal to his roots, origin, or heritage' (Hill 2000, 121; Nwankwo 2005). A radical cosmopolitan rejects the need for individuals or groups to define themselves in terms

of authentic cultural moorings (for example, the Stoic Diogenes Laërtius, Karl Marx, Jason Hill).

A moderate cosmopolitan is one who favours cultivating cultural resources associated with specific ethnic, racial or national groups on the premise that in-group cohesion and cultivation are provisionally necessary, if not also socially beneficial. Moderates, at the very least, believe in some form of social transformation through communicative agencies and consider authenticity as a continually created phenomenon (for example, Alain Locke, K. Appiah, M. Nussbaum, I. Nwankwo, P. Unger). Moderate or situated cosmopolitans consider such identities warranted, but hope that in an ideal world such identities would dissipate, or that at least their salience would have no effect on life chances.

Nativist cosmopolitanism emphasises cultivating and maintaining separate ethnic, racial, national or cultural communities, because a nativist cosmopolitan believes groups are substantively natural or social kinds. They also believe that some form of group separation allows groups to protect and transmit their cultural values. A nativist believes that cosmopolitanism is a negotiated set of relations between co-equal groups, and considers authenticity as a function of traditions (for example, E.W. Blyden, J.G. Herder, J.E.C. Hayford, P. Seme). Nativists believe racial and ethnic identities are cardinal features of humanity.

Seme's concept of regeneration: Renaissance, race and cosmopolitanism

Seme's first foray into public oration and essay writing began with his expression of self-dignity and pride. 'I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion' (Seme 1905–1906, 75). This was immediately followed by a defense of African humanity, contending that a common standard for judging different civilisations is impossible. He then explores regeneration:

By this term, regeneration, I wish to be understood to mean the entrance into a new life, embracing the diverse phases of higher, complex existence. The basic factor, which assures their regeneration, resides in their awakened race-consciousness. ... The African people, although not a strictly homogenous race, possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallizing itself into one common controlling idea. ... common destiny The ancestral greatness, the unimpaired genius, and the recuperative power of the race, its irrepressibility, which assures its permanence, constitute the African's greatest source of inspiration. ... The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. (ibid., 79, 80–81)

In 'The regeneration of Africa' Seme used rather standard conceptions of native African populations and expected native populations to sustain their traditions in the face of modernity. Seme thought of races as stable kinds. Africa's regeneration depended on the re-emergence of the subjugated features of not just African traditions, but also the

authority associated with native populations, generally defined as black or African, as locally defined in terms of their own languages, religious and ethnic heritages.

At the formation of the ANC, Seme's cosmopolitanism emerged: 'The demon of racialism, the aberration of the Xhosa–Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other native must be buried and forgotten ... We are one people' (ibid., 75). In his monumental speech before the founding meeting of the ANC, Seme boldly declared: 'Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race, we have gathered here to consider and discuss a theme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. ... devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges' (ibid., 10).

Seme's cosmopolitanism faces several classical problems: he submerges local conflicts and differences in order to generalise common interests and traits; he imagines African modernity, but allows old institutions to remain; he identifies common moral virtues between different African populations while simultaneously ignoring differences and the degree that local provincial bonds limit the range that moral sentiments are extended to members outside of a provincial community. The character of these difficulties is discussed below.

Critique of Renaissance nativism

All forms of Renaissance entail revolutionary conceptions of what it is to be human. The Italian, Giovanni Pico, understood 'man' as an agent due dignity. Yet Pico's world, while providing an ascent for serfs in *On the dignity of man* (1486), allowing them to claim a right to dignity, simultaneously denied the same to persons who were not Christian. The great Muslim philosopher, Ibn Khaldun, insisted that the deepest sentiments of humankind – sentiments compelling man to seek enlightenment – defined a new emergent being. Nonetheless, Khaldun as well as Aristotle would find it strange to include slaves as members of an emergent enlightenment. And the great African nationalist, J.E. Casely Hayford (Fente; Anono group), in his *Ethiopia unbound* (1911) created a utopic vision reminiscent of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), but conceived the best of all possible worlds not with the contented slaves of More's *Utopia*, but contented Africans entrapped in an eternally stymied set of values that never change. In Hayford's utopia, Africans mystically enjoy all the benefits of modernity created by routine labour, corporate ownership (collective or private), management structures, urban-based anonymous identities, and wealth defined by exchange rather than by the character of personal relationships. Nonetheless, they live in a seemingly isolated village without the impact of emigrants, pollution or new technologies displacing workers.

Hayford imagined African communities of no particular ethnicity practising values of communalism. The same happens with the concept of *ubuntu*: there are no Zulus, Xhosas, San, etc. – there is only care for others, openness to others, and a host of values akin to liberal egalitarian sentiments. The types of virtues Seme associated with all African populations, such as communalism, altruism, tolerance, piety and benevolence,

were the same kinds of virtues that J.E. Casely Hayford identified in his utopia, *Ethiopia unbound*. Seme, like Hayford, was trapped by using traditional Africa as a model for development and utopia. Development necessarily entails transvaluation – values such as dignity are not achieved by relying on an unchanging tradition, but rather, traditions can be used to create new expressions that allow for a respect of the past, while transcending its limitations (Harris 1992–1993, 1997).

Local knowledge forms are always subject to the vicissitudes of dominant regimes. Whatever the benefits of local herbal remedies, for example, they are not fully marketable in the capitalist sense unless approved by methods associated with mass marketing empires. They can at best benefit the local population, but if they are to become generally available, they must be marketed using a lingua franca; the copyright must be recorded in a lingua franca. Local knowledge can function as a contributor to dominant regimes. One difficulty Seme's conception of regeneration faces, is that he wants groups to remain empowered as aboriginal authority and simultaneously produce knowledge and goods in modernity. The difficulty is analogous to listing all of the benefits of a closed ethnic market, including the benefit of ethnic members being protected from outside control, and – simultaneously – including on that list all of the benefits gained by participating in the dominate market regime, including selling products in the open market and producing competitive technologies.

The very identity of 'black' and 'African' are, as Mudimbe (1988) has so well established, modern constructions. 'Black' and 'African' are already forms of self-definition that have greater salience than 'Fente' or 'Tonga'. In effect, local populations are reliant on the bilingual speakers who become their new masters, because they are masters of the languages and businesses of the dominant knowledge regime, whether dominated by the languages of Amharic, Arabic, Yoruba, English, Portuguese or French. The role of the parasitic translator arguably is a feature of a pariah culture, one that helps sustain the dependence and separation of native populations. 'Black' and 'African', in some cases, can themselves be alien identities paraded as a catch-all identity that is characteristically modern – leveling all differences for the sake of productive and social efficiencies.

Seme considered such virtues as communalisms, altruism, tolerance and benevolence common to all African people. However, these general virtues function to efface the actual virtues associated with distinct populations. Communalism, altruism, etc. surreptitiously efface because all forms of unique interest and particular beliefs are considered subordinate cognitive features to general virtuous traits. The description of African cultures as cultures based on general values are descriptions that necessarily exclude all forms of substantive differences and conflicting subtleties. The name of the gods worshiped by each group, for example, and the trust they accord to in-group members with the same religious beliefs are reduced to a nebulous spirituality as a good. The trust accorded to in-group members as a function of membership is reduced to altruism as a general virtue identical to the altruism practised by other groups. That is, virtues are described as generalised traits devoid of particular innuendos, symbols and meanings; there simply are no details of the way virtues are embedded in generations

of any group's heritage. Whether newly married couples traditionally live near the family of the bride is irrelevant; what is relevant is that they are communal and altruist. Communal care and altruism are attributed to African populations whatever the history of territorial conflict between populations. Virtues are pictured as ubiquitous because all Africans, at least traditional Africans, practise them. They are thus found nowhere in particular. Consequently, actual populations are effaced.

Locke's concept of Renaissance: Transvaluation, race, cosmopolitanism

Locke left Oxford within a few months of Seme's departure. He went to the University of Berlin, 1910–1911, to study with Georg Simmel and Hugo Münsterberg before joining Howard University in 1912. In 1916, a few years after arriving at Howard, Locke presented a series of lectures sponsored by the then nascent National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These lectures were collected in an anthology, *Race contacts and interracial relations* (Locke 1916c; 1992). Locke argued that race did not determine culture and that race was not a biologically determined category. He contended that race was strictly socially defined and thereby constantly changing. Racialised groups, for Locke, were warranted in organising themselves as socially shaped cultural groups, of which their racialisation was a cultural feature, in order to defeat racism and promote their cultural goods.

Locke's Pan Africanism and cosmopolitanism were important features of his life. He was with the French Oriental Archaeological Society, Cairo, Egypt, in 1927 and thereafter he travelled to northern Sudan; he was commissioned by the League of Nations to evaluate the African Mandate system (forced labour) in the Congo. His report was so critical of forced labour that the League of Nations chose not to publish his findings. Locke, who in 1943 was the Inter-American Exchange Professor, Committee for Inter-American Artistic and Intellectual Relations, travelled to Haiti under the Haitian presidency of Elie Lescot, from whom he received the National Order of Honor and Merit. Locke delivered a series of public lectures with the aid of Haiti's Ministry of Public Instruction. He was a member of the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, the League of American Writers, the Society for Historical Research, corresponding member of the Academie des Sciences Coloniales and honorary fellow of the Sociedad de Estudios Afro-Cubanos (Mangeon 2009).

The concept of transvaluation is at the centre of Locke's philosophy. The philosophical basis is this: persons are necessarily valuing agents, engaged in transvaluation and transposition. Values, for Locke, are inherently preferences that constantly undergo subtle shifts; value categories are inherently unstable and the search for unchanging categories is analogous to the useless search for value absolutes that are, for Locke, the basis of dictatorship and dogmatism. According to Locke, a cosmopolitanism of confraternity (one that appreciates the dignity of different communities and their contributions to a common humanity, one that is itself open to constant revision) is preferable to a cosmopolitanism of absolutism and universal

uniformitarianism (one that defines dignity as a good one has, because one is a member of a singular culture considered as the *sum bonorum* of the good, or one that attempts to make existing provincialism unchanging).

Locke's moderate cosmopolitanism, I argue below, suffers from some of the same problems as radical cosmopolitanism. I also argue that Locke's approach of moderate cosmopolitanism carries the least theoretical disadvantages of the invariable association of cosmopolitanism with 'sophisticated cruelty'.

Cosmopolitanism as sophisticated cruelty

Although a cosmopolitan eschews parochial commitments, unfortunately, societies promoting cosmopolitanism frequently practise sophisticated forms of cruelty. By 'sophisticated cruelty' I mean the kind of cruelty that sustains socially effective ways of subjugating native or ethnic cultures within a society, by producing increased efficiencies such as standardised weights, currencies, languages and religious practices. Major forms of cosmopolitanism – both radical and moderate – are compatible with (even if they do not intentionally justify) cultures that have practised the greatest forms of sophisticated cruelty. Historians of numerous persuasions, for example, Orlando Patterson in *Freedom* (1991) and *Slavery and social death* (1992); Fernand Braudel in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (1972); Adam Hochschild in *King Leopold's ghost* (1998); and Jared Diamond in *Guns, germs and steel* (1997), present the seemingly always concurrent presence of increased efficiencies that enhance human wellbeing concomitant with, but not necessarily causal of, sophisticated subjugations.

Sophisticated cruelty is not necessarily intentional. In Ghana, for example, there are 78 different language groups, such as the Akan, and its subgroups Twi, Fante and Akuapen Twi. There are also very small groups of language speakers, such as Animere, with approximately 700 speakers, or Dampo, with approximately 70–90 speakers and 900 persons self-identified as Dampo. Some of the extinct languages of South Africa, for example, //Xegwi, /Xam and Seroa, were once identical to populations that no longer are committed to the use of these languages. Genocide and disease are not the sole causes of language and population disappearance – very often, especially in the modern world, it is attributable to progressive assimilation. Neither the Akan nor the Xhosa are populations with organised groups working intentionally to assimilate or annihilate the Dampo or Ku|khaasi speakers. Minority languages frequently become moribund because the personal networks of their speakers have become entwined with individuals, groups and languages foreign to the native population: this has happened in Sultanates and tribally structured populations, whether in East Africa or West, prior to European colonialism and settler colonial domination (Kresse and Simpson 2007). It happened during the expansion of Islam, which was accompanied by slavery (Lovejoy 2004). In addition, it happened after the demise of slavery, colonialism and the dictatorship of settler colonial regimes. The official languages of South Africa – Afrikaans, English, Ndebele (isiNdebele), Northern Sotho (Sesotho sa Leboa), Sotho (Sesotho), Swati (siSwati), Tsonga (Xitsonga), Tswana (Setswana), Venda (Tshivenda),

Xhosa (isiXhosa), Zulu (isiZulu) – are associated with large populations and important institutions that perpetuate their use in both written and spoken forms (Magubane 1998). However, dead and moribund languages and associated communities are, at least in part, victims of sophisticated cruelty – an unintentional result of national unity, freedom for cultural reciprocity and cosmopolitan sensibilities. Increased cases of alcoholism, wife battery and petty theft are always exhibited by populations compelled to integrate into a powerful cosmopolitan culture. Whether applauded by radical cosmopolitans because it spells the loss of identities, described as one feature of invariable transvaluations by a moderate cosmopolitan, or understood as a function of social conditions, the cruelties wrought by value changes are facts in real lives.

At the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia women are seen with their vagina or lobes sewn together. Much like genital mutilation, a woman's female relations may be involved in performing and perpetuating this practice within a patriarchal community. Almost every woman from a minority language group must relinquish control over her body to a translator if she wants to tell a doctor from the modern world her medical symptoms – that she is pregnant, that she has pain in her abdomen, that she was raped and is bleeding, or that her vagina has been sewn shut to assure her virginity. An unintentional consequence of cosmopolitan reality is deleterious effects on local social networks and moral sensibilities. Women who have been viciously subjugated within their own communities and households may gain help by escaping their communities and getting assistance from strangers. Their local community network and bond is thereby shattered. If they remain entrapped in their family's household and provincial community, they arguably face existential hopelessness and despair. Their suffering will be unredeemed because the kinds of persons who promote values that are compatible with relieving their suffering are alien to their community. The medical personnel providing help may be nurses and doctors from different ethnic groups, or persons with no particular religious, cultural or national ties. Even if the suffering of women were to end, no real-life salvation for such women is foreseeable in the near future, except by transvaluation.

I believe that the universe is amoral. I will not argue here that the universe is not a place where some set of all good and bad acts is recorded. There is no mysterious realm where people who performed bad acts are punished and those who suffered receive due relief such that the universe, on balance, is a good place. Slave masters and marauding colonial thieves, as well as rapists, murderers and sexists often live happy lives, die peacefully, and leave sufficient wealth to help their children prosper. If I am right, suffering is very often without recompense for victims, and thereby personal and physical losses are irredeemable. In addition, the shame associated with both being a victim within one's own family and simultaneously a traitor to one's own communally sanctioned practices is not repaired by the benefit of getting help through the institutions of modernity. The sense of being abject and parasitic is real; the harm is permanent, the suffering is not redressed and perpetrators may remain unrepentant. Given that the universe is amoral, the least offensive way in a social world that too often fails to save existing persons from suffering and sophisticated cruelty is intuitively appealing.

Locke's value theory contends that valuation is necessarily engaged in transvaluation, thereby creating new aesthetic categories. The continual conflict between the natural commitment to one's own community and the knowledge regimes integral to that culture is not resolved by nativisms' ethnocentricity or a cosmopolitanism blind to local knowledge, but 'the only solution is an enforced respect and interest for one's own tradition, and a more or less accurate appreciation of its contrast values with other traditions' (1908a, 16). For Locke, universally appreciated aesthetic forms of the beautiful are often created from local folk culture. In this way the local, provincial and parochial become universal. In so doing, populations that are the source of such creations enhance popular perceptions of them as worthy of respect and dignity. Conviviality between the local and the cosmopolitan is created in such cases. Minorities, parochial communities, partisans of ethnic and racial groups across social strata can achieve dignity – a recognition of worth by others as a function not of a static essence or unchanging character, but as a function of the continual reality of transvaluation that creates the possibility of the local making its voice universal.

The letter: Cosmopolitanism and the African Renaissance

The magical powers of Seme's letter unintentionally formed a new network that grew into a union between men with radically different philosophic orientations. Arguably, the magical power of the 7 March 1907 letter was its message of welcome from one African to another, thereby initiating the creation of a confraternity between enlightened scholars under the African Renaissance umbrella.

Note

- 1 Seme's graduate portrait, 1904, Columbia University, Archives; Cosmopolitan Club, 1908, Moorland-Spangarn Library, Howard University; Seme with Queen Labotsibeni Mdluli, and Crown Prince Mona is identified as 'Sobhuza' in the photo, 1912?, in Odendaal (1984).

References

- Appiah, K.A. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Blyden, E.W. 1887, 1967. *Islam, Christianity, and the Negro race*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Braudel, F. 1972. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Diamond, J. 1997. *Guns, germs and steel*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Harris, L. 1999. *The critical pragmatism of Alain Locke*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 1997. Honor, eunuchs, and the postcolonial subject. In *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. E.C. Eze, 252–259. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company.
- . 1992–1993. The horror of tradition or how to burn Babylon and build Benin while reading a preface to a twenty-volume suicide note. *Philosophical Forum* XXIV (Fall/Spring) (1–3): 94–119.

- Harris, L. and C. Molesworth. 2008. *Alain L. Locke: The biography of a philosopher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hayford, J.E.C. 1911, 1969. *Ethiopia unbound: Studies in race emancipation*. London: Cass.
- Herder, J.G. 1968. *Reflections on the philosophy of the history of mankind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hill, J. 2000. *Becoming a cosmopolitan*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Hochschild, A. 1999. *King Leopold's ghost: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa*. New York: Mariner Books.
- Kresse, K. and E. Simpson, eds. 2007. *Struggling with history: Islam and cosmopolitanism in the western Indian Ocean*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Locke, A. 1907. Roosevelt agitated anti-British factions: Egyptian speech recalls myriad grievances of nationalist based on England's negligence of education. (Newspaper unknown) Alain Locke Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University, 164–126/33.
- . 1908. Cosmopolitanism and culture and cosmopolitanism. Alain Locke Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University.
- . 1908a. Epilogue. *Oxford Cosmopolitan* II: 15–16.
- . 1909. Oxford contrasts. *Independent July* (67): 139–142.
- . 1911. The American temperament. *North American Review* 194 (August): 262–270.
- . 1916. 1992. *Race contacts and interracial relations*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Lovejoy, P.E., ed. 2004. *Slavery on the frontiers of Islam*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Magubane, P. 1998. *Vanishing cultures of South Africa*. Cape Town: Struik Publishers.
- Mangeon, A. 2009. *Alain L. Locke: Le rôle du Nègre dans la culture des Amériques*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- More, Sir T. 1516, 1965. *Utopia*. Trans. and introduction by P. Turner. New York: Penguin.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. 2006. *Frontiers of justice*. Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press; Harvard University Press.
- Nwankwo, I.K. 2005. *Black cosmopolitanism: Racial consciousness and transnational identity in the nineteenth-century Americas*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Odendaal, A. 1984. *Vukani Bantu!* Cape Town: David Philip.
- Patterson, O. 1991. *Freedom*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1992. *Slavery and social death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Pico, G. 1486, 1965. *On the dignity of man*. Trans. C.G. Wallis. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Saunders, C. 1991. Pixley Seme: Towards a biography. *South African Historical Journal* 25: 196–217.
- Seme, P.I. 1905–1906. Regeneration of Africa. *Journal of the Royal African Society* 5: 75–81.
- . Letters, cables, and notes from Seme to Locke, Alain L. Locke Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University, Folders 164–184.
- Steward, J.C., ed. 1983. *The critical temper of Alain Locke*. New York: Garland.
- Unger, P. 1990. *Identity, consciousness, and value*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Copyright of International Journal of African Renaissance Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.