

# African Renaissance Conference

28-29th September 1998

## Education, Culture and African Renaissance

Dr Catherine A. Odora Hoppers  
Human Sciences Research Council

### Introduction

The Session "*Culture and Education*" addressed itself to several questions. The first question was: how can African education provide the necessary capacity and conditions for sustainable development in Africa? Secondly, why had the institutions in African imploded in the post Uhuru? Thirdly, what is the missing link between culture and the curriculum in African Education? Are we still not chasing gods who are not our own? Fourthly, what is the place of African culture and social values in the Renaissance and as a solution to the education malady?

These questions were not addressed in any particular sequence, but one of the anticipated outcomes of this conference, which is to consolidate and elevate the conscience of African people about African Renaissance, was kept very much in focus. True to this commitment, the Session sustained a spirit of vigilant rebirth that was witnessed from the word go with the vivid approaches employed in the actual presentations. The line-up of the presenters could not be better. Brains, acumen, and obstinacy of the most astute degree were not wanting whatsoever throughout the session.

In some instances, African history was not only recounted in great detail, but various analytical webs too intricate to summarize here, were drawn between Eurocentrism and colonialism, the construction of the "African", and the types of silences maintained in presenting credits due to the continent by way of its civilizations. The dis-information is so severe, the permeation of Eurocentrism so acute in their colonization of scholarship, history, reality, and humanity, that it is often impossible to imagine anything else than that the rest of the world have waited in darkness for the Europeans to bring the light. All books, all institutions are run in a manner that glorifies this fundamental falsity resulting in the generation and profusion of a profound sense of self-perpetuating amnesia to all children and adults all over Africa<sup>1</sup>. History, it was felt, is pertinent to the forward movement not least because of the need to understand *when*, and in some instances, even *how come* the rain began to beat us.

What hit everyone right away however, was that clearly, the African paradigm simply had to enter the academia, not as a hypothetical proposition or plea, but as an urgent imperative. The spirit of the session was informed by the conviction that we have to jog our evasive conscience and make this our last passive moment. The session was therefore treated to African participatory and anti-podal culture in practice through a series of *Rhetorical Orature*

### *Interludes.*

At issue, as Micere Mugo was to pin down so eloquently, is the sheer fatigue from talking, talking, till our words have turned into static verbs in our mouths. We have heard others speak, she stated, just remaining sufficiently awake to hear the end of their speeches before yawning with relief. We have read volumes of books till their pages threaten to drop off in sheer fatigue from schizophrenic fingering. Soon, very soon, we shall be talking to ourselves because there will be no-one listening. For now, only the task of doing remains looking us in the eye, interrogating our inaction, jogging our evasive conscience. We know what needs to be done and must get on with it before the sun set. We must take a vow to make this our last passive voice on this topic<sup>2</sup>

### **We Need An African Renaissance!!**

In revisiting the world's, and especially Africa's most painful moment of silence, we observe that, ever present and not to be wished away is the memory and acknowledgement of a state of *deep trauma* (in the psychiatric sense), arising from the slave trade, for the people of the entire world, particularly for those who were directly involved in the dehumanization of Africa whether as perpetrators, victims, or as witnesses. This trade not only turned the African into a semi-animal, but confused the notion of what a human being is - culminating into a profound identity crisis that became lodged in the psyche of modern men and women. With Africa denied the status of a civilization (unlike the Orientals), a psychic knot emerged, linking Africa and the West in a twisted bond of underdevelopment and poverty on the one hand, and moral and spiritual illness (i.e the "social character") of capitalist civilization on the other<sup>3</sup>.

Yet, in order to successfully regard and treat the African as "semi-animal", the dominator himself had to bow down to the level of semi-animal. The monuments to this can be analogically drawn as was done by Karl Marx when he noted that slavery was absolutely crucial for capitalist production. Once slavery is struck off in North America's cartography for instance, the significance of North America is also struck off for the world economy. Strike off North America, and you strike off World Trade, and then you strike off the modern world economy and modern capitalist civilization.

On the other side of this equation lies the consequence of this dehumanization and trauma which has been a sharp and deep decline in moral, mental and spiritual health of the generality of men and women in the capitalist world, as well as in the overall social character of the modern capitalist civilization. As the fall of Africa brought about the profound illness in the moral, spiritual and mental "social character" of modern capitalist civilization, so the rise of Africa and of African renaissance shall be the foundation for healing the social character of modern capitalist civilization of the mental, moral and spiritual illness afflicting it and that of humanity at-large. African renaissance should therefore be part of a strategy for resolving the gigantic crisis in which Africa finds itself.

Calls in our time for African renaissance is therefore part of a response to a deep crisis in which the whole continent finds itself. It is a crisis that originates from a slave trade, a "racial slavery" that was deepened and systematized by European colonialism and domination of Africa and the consequent universal contempt for the African as a human being. That this crisis continues in the form of mass poverty, dislocation, destabilisation of the entire

continent must not be missed in any analyses or strategies for action.

African renaissance is also part of the construction of counter-hegemonic, and is itself, a counter-hegemonic vehicle growing out of our awareness for the need for meaningful change. It offers us an opportunity to re-invent ourselves in line with our new insights as we pass through a transition period, a period in which our perceptions, our values, and the way we look at our new society and our relationship with each other must be reconstructed to meet new realities. For us the African renaissance is a vehicle and product of these nascent struggles. The African renaissance is a cultural movement in the sense of culture being a weapon for organizing people for both domination and emancipation

To suggest solutions to the problematic of the missing link between culture and education, from a perspective of African renaissance therefore, it is important to lay down some critical theoretical context within which to examine the African renaissance concept itself. To begin with, there are many reasons why Africa must acknowledge both the decay in its fabric, as well as the rebirth that is central to the refashioning of a new humanism that can steer the continent to recovery and prosperity. At times, African renaissance will mandate a strategic retreat to pre-colonial Africa in order to extricate some of the knowledges that are relevant for the fashioning of an educational model to meet our needs in the next millenium.

Right here within South Africa, apartheid as a grand narrative of legitimation, the author of so much pain and underdevelopment, is dead, and out of this death is born a sovereign subject. But this birth of the new sovereign subject signified by the prefix "post" as in "post-apartheid" also points to a haunting continuation of the past re-inscribing itself into the present, whilst struggling at the same time to reconcile the two moments of something being both alive and dead. In order to make sense of this life/death moment in our history, only the African traditional thought, like the Asian can enable us to comprehend the phenomenon of the living, the dead and the living-dead.

By daring to retrieve and apply the reservoir of valuable conceptual tools from African thought systems for analyzing our current situation, we can begin to construct new starting points. We need new starting points in order to rethink the transformation of the curriculum, rethink our methods of teaching and research and by so doing, tread a path through which African people can regain their pride, their dignity and their identity. It is also through such retrieval and rethinking that Africa can reject the notion of being the "Other", the inverted mirror against which Westerners can measure themselves. Such starting points would also help to gradually expose the provincial nature of European universalist discourses.

In fact it is only through such fundamental rethinking that we can even begin to fathom the infinite creativity and survival techniques used by the *post-colonial subject* (i.e us) to continually bargain and improvise, mobilizing not just a single 'identity', but several fluid identities which, by nature of the circumstances, have to be continually 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required.<sup>4</sup>

Ingrained in the emerging debates would also be a search for a sustainable guide to Africa's intellectual recovery from its interpellation into discourses that positioned and framed Africa as incapable of formulating its own knowledge systems. For these debates to bear fruit however, they need to go beyond mere academic disciplinary exchanges and involve a broader area of contestation. Africa must not, for instance, simply enter the information technology era obliviously, but must battle for a response to the question "whose

knowledge?” The issue of whose knowledge determines the parameters of discourses in the global arena has to take the same intensity as the issue of “decolonizing the mind”, and in particular, “decolonizing the African mind” of which so many African writers and politicians have pleaded case.

Because the hierarchy of cultures created by both colonialism and apartheid has left such a legacy of deep fear and suspicion among Africans, on the agenda of transformation has to be the *re-Africanization* rather than simply Africanization. This re-Africanization is not a semantic issue, but a serious project of re-inculcation of Ubuntu without which no true reconciliation would take place. There is a strong need to create a framework within which forms of resistance to the hegemony of Western scholarship, the pacification of the natives, the status of reverse discourses as oppositional practice and counter-hegemonic work, as well as appropriate models for change can be debated and given shape.

It is such a framework that can enable the deconstruction and displacement of the Eurocentric premises of the discursive apparatus which has comfortably constructed the Third World not only for the West, but also for the cultures so represented. Restoring the African as subject of its own history is therefore not the search for an originary pristine, authentic past to be venerated, but a search for guidelines for future programmes

### **Education and Culture: The Linkage**

Education and culture are closely linked institutions of the superstructure, brought into being as people address the issues of personal and collective survival as well as perpetuation. Within this, education is a key institution for inculcating and promoting cultural values and practices. It is a communicator as well as reservoir of culture. In its liberative sense, education includes the right to self-definition/naming, self naming, self-knowledge, and self-determination as well as the acquisition of general knowledge and skills. It is education in this composite form that can lead to the cultivation of consciousness which nurtures creativity, perpetuation, development and invention, plus all other human endeavours that lead people to the highest points of self-realization

In a neo-colonial situation, education has a class point of reference. In other words, as one of the most political social institutions, education is not, and cannot be neutral. The political system that nurtures it into being ensures that it exists to serve its interests, to service its econo-political base. In other words the education we are part of are key servicing departments for the ideas and social values of the ruling class. Those who have tried to inject educational paradigms that go against the interests of those who rule and control our economies know how swiftly and ruthlessly we are reminded that we are crossing the white lines as service men and women of the system. Where such people have been in administrative positions that might influence policy changes, they have been demoted unceremoniously<sup>5</sup>. To talk of education is to talk of community culture and cultural communities.

### **Culture: A Tool, an Ideology**

Culture is both a product and source of creation. It is both the expression and result of the relationships between human beings and nature as people wrestle with their natural and social

environment. Within this, culture becomes a carrier of their moral, aesthetic and ethical values. At the psychological level, these values become the embodiment of the people's consciousness as a specific community. It is this consciousness in turn that has an effect on how they look at their values, their culture, at the organization of power, at the organization of their wealth extracted from nature through the mediation of their labour.<sup>6</sup>

Culture acts to unify and order experiences so that its members perceive organization, consistency and system. It offers a "World-View" through which we create our own conceptions of reality. It gives people group identification as it builds a shared historical experience creating a sense of cultural identity. It "tells" members "what to do", thereby creating a "voice" of prescriptive authority. To its members, culture represents values as a systematic set of ideas and a single coherent statement. It provides a basis for commitment, a priority, a choice, and thereby imparting direction to group development and behaviour. It acts to limit the parameters for change, and to pattern the behaviour of its members. In this way it helps to initiate and authorize its own creation. It provides for the creation of symbols and meanings. It is therefore the primary force of collective consciousness in that it makes it possible to construct a national consciousness. For all the above reasons, it impacts on the definition of group interest and is thereby potentially political.

Both strata of culture, the *material* (manifested in tangible physical objects) and the *non material* (reflected through ideas, beliefs and philosophies), are testimonies of human creativity. They are created individually as well as collectively as human beings interact with each other, intervene in the historical process and respond to the challenges of natural/unnatural phenomena to perpetuate their existence. Culture is rooted in the history of a people, a tool for survival and progress. It is inseparable from the struggle for freedom.

Intellectual activists from dominated cultures Cabral and Freire<sup>7</sup> distinguish between two main cultures: culture for conquest, oppression and enslavement; and its dialectical antithesis - culture for self-naming, liberation and true human progress. Culture is dynamic and changes all the time registering either progression or retrogression, and reflecting the sociol-economical environment around its creators. Thus culture reflects the class base, the position and allegiance of its communicators. As a social process, it is durable and resilient, especially in the face of repression, dehumanization and threat to life. Culture also integrates society on the basis of common reactions, actions, attitudes and common values. The main thrust of this integration is in securing for a common destiny, a common ideology to pursue it. Culture's aspects are ideology, ethos and world view; its factors are ontology, cosmology and axiology; and its manifestations consist of behaviour, values, and attitudes<sup>8</sup>.

The success of Western powers in effecting world domination for instance, was predicated precisely on their use of *culture as ideology* - in which Christianity was used as a subtle battering ram to gain hegemony over the rest of the world. Mission schools forbade the natives from the use of "their" language. At the same time, nuances of communication in the colonial language could not be grasped with in all its subtleties. Where complementarities existed, binary thoughts were introduced which began with Plato's suspicions of emotions, leading to the Cartesian imperative to instrumental reasoning - and how capitalism utilized it!

In the meantime, African's worship of nature was termed "animistic". Where African conservationist practices involved the planting of trees whenever a child's umbilical cord drops off, the animistic label went along with that of being "victims of tokenism", and all the

descriptors we are all too familiar with. In the area of education, the clash of world views is consistently evidenced in the gap between the living culture and the way we were taught and/or expected to teach. Any counter-hegemonic discourse ignores this fundamental cognitive violation at its own peril<sup>9</sup>.

Amilcar Cabral counselled that history teaches us that in certain circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But he also teaches us that, whatever may be the material aspects of this domination, it can only be maintained by a permanent, organized subjugation of the cultural life of the people concerned- - for with a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation<sup>10</sup>.

The call therefore, is for progressive, liberating patterns and paradigms of indigenous cultural life, and not to be celebrants of fossilized culture that is locked in the museum of antiquity's still life. It is often this heritage of antiquity that, under the guise of "African culture", justifies patriarchal repression of women and silencing of youth. In the context of African Renaissance, culture should not close itself in the past, but rather, has to be located in the "realm of the beyond"<sup>11</sup>, offering new possibilities in changing times.

### **Education, Civilization and the Challenge to African Universities**

Every proper system of education is founded upon, and develops a particular civilization. At essence of the problem of education in Africa is that, with the conquest of Africa by Europe, Africa was denied the status of a civilization. When one speaks of China, Europe, India or the USA as a civilization, what is in mind is a complex of culture, language religion, a world view, a pattern of historical experience, a certain technology and manner of using that technology, and identifiable pattern in architecture, art, music, poetry, literature and dance, a certain body of knowledge, science, medicine and values, cuisine, a manner of dress and general habits.

A civilization is so powerful that it acts like a magnet, drawing outsiders to it, influencing others and being influences by it. But with the slave trade, the creators and sustainers of African civilization were reduced from human status to the *semi-animal*. Within this frame, the African became a non-living possession of western civilization. Educated Africans were educated as part of western civilization, but unlike their Western counterparts, they were placed in a suffocating status of not being able to engage themselves in developing a civilization<sup>12</sup>. Whites, Arabs, and Indians in Africa formed their own separate communities almost completely sealed from the communities of the overwhelming majority society - - Africans - - thereby saddling themselves with a terrible handicap of not being acquainted from the inside with the people and culture of Africa.

The crisis in South Africa at present for instance, comes about when, in this era of democratization, the majority of society, the non-Western African people, and the non-western culture of the majority are supposed to be the motive power and guide for the future development of African societies. It is at such a moment that it is possible to begin to recognize how racism actually prevented any spontaneous synthesis of African and European cultures. Europeans in Africa remained European while educated Africans became Europeanized.

Europeans, Indians, coloureds and educated Africans alike became alienated from the mass

base of African society and culture, with educated Africans somewhat better off than the others. In the hiatus to emerge between Western educated society on the one hand and the patterns of African civilization on the other, knowledge of the principles and patterns of African civilization became lost in the consciousness and mind set of African intellectuals, not to mention the non-African communities who never saw the need to engage with it in the first place and thereby by-passing the experience completely.

The peculiar situation to emerge was that knowledge of the principles and patterns of African civilization remained with ordinary, uncertified men and women in urban and rural areas, especially in rural areas. In the meantime, as a consequence of the European conquest, Western educated Africans absconded and abdicated their role as developers and minstrels, and became lost and irrelevant as intellectuals who could be the voice of African civilization, and develop it further. As African civilization stagnated, what remained alive in the minds and languages of the overwhelming majority of Africans remained undeveloped. To add insult to injury, uncertified Africans were denied respect and opportunities for development.

Now that Africa is attempting to rise from its prostrate position to which it was cast she needs to develop a system of education founded upon and the civilization of the majority at a moment when her intellectuals are strangers to this civilization. In South Africa, the white and Indian intellectuals who are disproportionately influential in policymaking and as experts are several times worse off than educated Africans in their familiarity with principles and patterns of African civilization. This brings serious distortions and errors in policies in the sphere of culture and education!<sup>13</sup>.

In the history of civilizations, no intellectuals of a particular civilization have ever been placed in such a tragic situation in relation to the civilization of their own people such as that occupied by African intellectuals in relation to the culture of their own people. African intellectuals must therefore initiate the formulation of a new and proper education policy for Africa and engage in a massive and serious process of re-education of themselves on the principles and patterns of African civilization whose knowledge they have largely lost.

The biggest mental and spiritual challenge in all of this is that the only teachers they have on this re-education strategy are the ordinary African men and women who are uncertified, and largely in rural areas. The massive cultural revolution in proposition here must therefore entail firstly, the intellectuals going back to ordinary African men and women, to receive education on African culture and civilization. Secondly, it shall break new ground in that non-certified men and women shall be incorporated as full participants in the construction of the high culture of Africa. The breaking of the traditional mould shall imply that certified intellectuals alone shall not be the sole determinants of high culture, but fellows with ordinary people in the great effort aimed at reconstructing Africa and preparing all of humanity for retrieving the lost **HUMANITY**.

From this perspective, it can be said that thus far, African universities have failed to fulfil their role as the guiding light of the continent and of the societies within which they are located. As such, they must master the crisis intellectually and scientifically and demonstrate to society and to the continent the way out of this crisis. A failing of the South African government in the new dispensation was its omitting to introduce a university of relevant scholarship capable of bargaining for or seizing the space, and undertaking to quality, the type of work that an African renaissance demands of tertiary institutions<sup>14</sup>.

The neglect of agricultural production for subsistence and sustainable livelihoods in favour of agricultural production for exports alone for instance, has resulted in a food crisis of unprecedented degree, disrupting the immune system of African bodies, opening up channels for the infections and attack by various diseases. Yet African universities appear not to connect with this crisis. What is needed fairly urgently therefore, is a vision among the leadership elite consisting of strategies and tactics necessary for addressing this magnitude of crisis. Irrespective of discipline or field of specialization, African scholars must take a position on the mandatory desirability of this process

When universities have been designed to serve the masses of society members as is seen in the State Universities and the Land Grant Colleges in the United States, they become community service centres with massive extension services to the communities. This approach enhances relevance as well as contributes to increasing productivity in both agriculture and technology<sup>15</sup>. Africa in general, and South Africa in particular, needs similar development. Apart from this, there are questions to be asked about how the former Soviet Union could succeed in producing roughly one fourth of the world's scientists and mathematicians in the world by the 1980s. What system of education did it follow? How did the Soviet Union succeed in teaching mathematics and the hard sciences to children of peasants and of ordinary workers? The answers to these questions have to do with both policy and methodology. Whichever it is, we need to find that secret if we should try to figure our way through the dismal failure of our schooling system to achieve some of these basic goals.

### **Challenge to Education and Training**

In South Africa, we know that the African community is the pool from which the vast majority of skilled workers, scientists, mathematicians and intelligentsia must be drawn to meet the development needs of the country from now on. The White, Indian and Coloured communities shall no longer suffice as they did for the very narrow industrialization and development needs of the past. The racist denial of infra-structural facilities to the African majority meant that for the vast masses of Africans, a very low ceiling was set for the development and growth potential of the economy - -and of human capital! The education policy and system were not oriented to developing the African population.

Part of the crisis of the South African economy is largely due to the fact that the economy has reached the point where it can no longer develop and widen in scope on the basis of non-African skilled and intellectual labour. As the African community was for long the large pool from which to draw abundant unskilled labour, now the very same African community must be seen as the vast pool from which abundant potential skilled leadership talent must be drawn for the further development of the economy and society. This abundant human capital must be trained, developed and tapped, and at the heart of training, developing, and tapping this vast potential human capital is *proper and properly planned education*<sup>16</sup>.

Not only must we embark on a vast and serious educational effort aimed at training and developing this potential human capital, we also need to formulate and implement the right kind of education policy. This requires intense advocacy work to awaken people to the urgency and nobility of this need. We also need a well planned and implementable component of adult education. Where necessary, we need to understudy models in the world that have succeeded with human capital formation through adult education.

## Language

It remains for us to ask ourselves, who are we? How do we name ourselves and the world around us? What is our language? The question of language as a key tool in defining what we are or are not, is still on the table, and will not go away till we name ourselves. Fanon reminds us that to speak a language is to carry the weight of its civilization<sup>17</sup>. The question therefore is: how successfully have we bent and reconstructed the languages of colonialization to make them say what we want? Or has the colonial system squeezed us betwixt the crevices of cultural conquest and cultural invasion resulting in involuntary "cultural inauthenticity"? Have the values of the invaders so become our pattern, alienating us from the spirit of our own culture and ourselves that we now want to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them?<sup>18</sup>.

Language is the gateway to culture, knowledge and people. From the perspective of classroom interaction, the mastery of the language in which the subjects are taught is a prerequisite to the mastery of the subject matter. To this extent, the Eurocentric character of our education (at the heart of which has been the European languages), has constituted a barrier to the successful education of the masses of African people. The African student has had to make acquaintance of the subject through a language not his or her mother tongue, making language become a tension generating factor irrespective of subject content.

The problem, clearly stated, is that instruction does not build upon the linguistic and conceptual resources possessed by the student from his/her home and residential environment, but seeks, as it were, to implant linguistic and conceptual apparatuses from somewhere else. This means that African children and students, to whom English in most cases, is a foreign language, shall most frequently be underachievers in standard tests compared to first language speakers of say, English.<sup>19</sup>

Multi-lingualism must therefore be implemented in all our schools. However, the early years of education should be in the mother tongue. Any, and all languages can be developed to become adequate for the teaching of sciences and other modern subjects - - just as Afrikaans was developed in the early part of this century. Quite apart from pedagogy however, there are other considerations to be taken up by our intellectuals. If language determines, and is a vital aspect of discourses, then the challenge before elites who transcend the parrotry and crevices is to emerge with uprising discourses in response to cultural domination. Talking back is the least human response that we can give to the silencing we have experienced, because at that point (of talking back) we are positioning ourselves to identify not just *when* and *where* I enter, but also *how* we enter.

### Making This Our Last Passive Moment: The Way forward

When you deal with people who have lost their self esteem, their pride as well as their dignity, it is important that the "knowledge" fed to them is fused with a sense and objective of helping them regain that which they have lost. Gramsci tells us that one is either controlled by coercion or consent. At the same time because education is linked to the productive process and economic system, the starting point for addressing the issue of education and culture must begin with a fundamental reconstruction, or overhaul of the entire econo-political system. To this end, the following could be gleaned as propositions on the way forward;

### 1. *Developing the whole person*

This overhaul must begin with a re-institution of an explicitly people centered conception of development; developing a sense of commitment and loyalty to the development of the “whole” human being (spiritual, mental, social, as well as other aspects such as economy etc.); an emphasis on collective development rather than individualistic accumulation of wealth, and a conscious learning from African philosophies and putting that wisdom to overt use.

By developing the whole person is also meant the reversal of the crippling effect of fragmentation in human development that locks up each person into a specialized production activity, with the result that only those talents necessary for the performance of that activity were developed. This esteemed production of one-legged, one-armed, or one-eyed individuals unable to relate to the other parts of themselves and to others as well as to life itself so characteristic of the industrial oriented development must be addressed and reversed. Education in the way we know it today, has adjusted itself snugly to the industrial mode and produced specialists rather than focussing on the training of both mind, soul and the human body. This is not sustainable, definitely not in the context of an African renaissance.

### 2. *Guerrilla intellectuals and productive education*

Mental and psychological re-conditioning has to be undertaken in the manner and scale of *national reconciliation* projects. The objective here is to re-educate and rehabilitate the lost historical memory of victims of “mis-education”, validate African cultures, and create what Walter Rodney called the “guerrilla intellectuals” who knows his/her terrain so well that he/she is able to use the enemy’s weapons to subvert the invader<sup>20</sup>. In this connection, education should be consciously shifted from a banking concept (master/servant) to one that has a productive component. This is the way to rescue the victims of neo-colonial education in the face of unemployment and other forms of rampant deprivation. This draws attention to the issue of “*who exactly are writing the curricula in Africa?*”

### 3. *“Language” in African renaissance*

African languages, multilingualism, and especially lingua francas should be promoted to avert the privilege by default given to English at the moment. Closely related to this, the African renaissance debates should be offered in as many different local languages as is possible to enable the actual bearers of culture to partake and participate effectively in it. While on this issue, funders of this conference should consider continuing to support satellite efforts at articulating the concept of African renaissance beyond the big shows such as this one, to the satellite micro settings of community fora. In many ways, “African renaissance” as an ideal is not new. As such, we need to make overt mention of the unsung heroes like Steve Biko and earlier and simultaneous struggles for African consciousness such as what was achieved by the Black Consciousness movement. We need to connect with the decentred efforts towards African Renaissance being undertaken by individual people and groups. At the same time, we need a strategy to make people benefit from this particular input from the speakers at this conference.

### 4. *Complementing literacy with oracy on equal terms*

Education should have a cultural component which specifically draws upon African indigenous knowledges and culture. An *oracy revolution* that recognizes that Africa’s civilization was based on the *orate* as opposed to *literate* culture could provide the starting point for this turnabout. Oracy and literacy should go hand in hand with the implication that

we abandon once and once for all the assumption that orateness is equal to ignorance, or that the two traditions are antagonistic and incompatible.

#### **5. *Confronting the problem of poverty***

African scholars in Africa and the diaspora, and African institutions such as universities must take a stand now, confront the problem of poverty, come up with a programme of development to inform policy formation and formulation, and help pull the continent out of this poverty into food self sufficiency. This requires a renewed focus on agriculture and rural development as an antidote to the prevalent urban-centric bias.

#### **6. *Realigning sectoral ministries***

In this regard, African renaissance cannot happen without fundamental re-adjustments to, and re-alignments of the existing sectoral ministries in such a manner that the link education and culture, for one, can be clearly seen and operationalized. How can we talk of African Renaissance when in practice, national departments dealing with education and culture are situated separately? There is hope however, in that within the South African government, following the Presidential Review Commission, there is now a proposal for the rearrangement of the education and culture, and education and science portfolios. It is believed that new patterns of governance can be established which can adequately replace the British/American models that are currently in place. Even if there were different ministries of education and culture, there can still be clusters of ministries that can work together so that there is synergy that can enable us to focus on programmes in a non-compartmentalized way.

#### **7. *Counter-hegemonic discourses and creating a body of African knowledge systems***

Counter-hegemonic discourses must be generated in order to enable the triple agenda of de-construction, re-construction, and regeneration to be realized. At stake here is the battle of world-views and the conceptions of reality, and the role of higher education and that of intellectuals generally in shaping the direction toward a more culture specific or culturally relevant curriculum is a critical one. The following are critical objectives and priorities in this regard:

- to create a body of African knowledge systems (both contemporary and indigenous), and a directory of experts in African indigenous knowledge systems.
- create core courses on the African Renaissance perspectives in all faculties. This should lead to the development of guidelines towards an African-centered teaching methodology.
- create linkages between institutions, government structures and the community in order to enable the latter to make meaningful contribution to policy development.
- Establish a think-tank and coordinate pro-active and remedial projects in the community in zones of conflict.
- Develop mentorship programmes within the framework of the philosophy of UBUNTU and create programmes for its application in practice.

#### **8. *Awakening the agential citizen within us***

We should see ourselves as people who are capable of taking initiatives, especially to create a new perspective that will challenge the dominant perspective that has engulfed Africa. Moreover, education is a multidimensional project. It is to develop the human being as an end in itself, but also meet the needs of society. We need to work towards developing a developmental strategy, a long term vision for Africa. We hope that discussions like this will become part of public policy. But we also know that universities can be likened to the church - - very resistant to change - -. This presents very special problems that must be targetted. How come is it that major breakthroughs have always come from outside the established

academics. Something must therefore be done about the mindset of the university. To make it worse, being black does not mean being amenable to change. Some of the people most resistant to change are blacks. None-the-less, we also need to talk about how, as intellectuals, our word can become influential to government. It is clear that African intellectuals are marginalized in policy circuits, and this marginalization is partially responsible for the distortions in policies.

#### **9. *Towards an African Renaissance Decade***

An African Renaissance decade must be declared in the fashion of the Women's Decade for the sole purpose of focussing on means and methods of battling Afro-pessimism, putting to appropriate perspective Eurocentrism, and celebrating as well as giving content to African culture and knowledge forms. However, it may also be time to take stock and conduct some kind of evaluation of the actual achievements of the various movements such as the cultural identity movement in order to determine their contribution to the re-birth of the continent.

#### **10. *"Elites", that odious vermin***

There is also a need to deconstruct the notion of "elites" - that odious vermin - and attempt to distinguish those who are really not supinely sitting by endorsing the status quo, but who struggle with the masses. Meanwhile it is true that there are elites who continue to support repression and rationalize oppression, it must also be said that Africa has trusted its life too much in the hands of elites. Where are the people? Where are the youth? Where are the women? This African Renaissance is a collective project, must be seen and practised as such<sup>21</sup>.

#### **11. *The Western and the African within us***

Whether we like it or not though, we are of two worlds, both Western and African, and the success of our renaissance will depend on how we position ourselves and reconcile the world views we have inherited. In its attempts to evolve an African education that provides the necessary capacity and conditions for sustainable development in Africa, the African renaissance project must always ask the question: where is the person? Where is the human being? As Aime Cesaire was to caution: an education system or civilization that does not solve its social problems and that does not affirm its people's human dignity is not only a failure but also a rotten decadent affair. This goes against the grain of progress.<sup>22</sup> There is therefore a need to link the talk about Africa with African culture. African culture has its story, its contents, its features, its languages, its literature, its system of ideas. It is something global which can be very different from the European tradition. However, there are people who can assume African culture and either maintain it, or transform it deeply. This means that we must think in terms of pluralism when we talk of African culture.

#### **12. *A cultural revolution to transform educational institutions***

We need to begin to interrogate the manner in which schools are functioning at the moment, and to examine the degree to which it contributes to the alienation. We need to explore the nature of the schizophrenia that bedevils Africans. African intellectuals are strangers to African civilization. Universities have become the dominant source of the guiding light of society. As such there is a need for a massive cultural revolution. How can we begin to realize an African Renaissance when our universities are based on importing knowledge and the very foundation of knowledge and knowledge systems, and systems of knowledge production are actually based on Euro centric views, ideals, systems of domination, oppression, appropriation etc? Is there any such thing as an African University really? Or are we talking of European cultural institutions in Africa? What, for instance can be said of the criterion of

“excellence”? To what extent does such criterion itself facilitate progressive alienation from the African in us?

**13. *Converting basic research findings to applied use for policy***

It is clear that we have unfinished business to attend to. There is an urgent need to clear space within existing institutional arrangements and within existing policies, in order that new conceptions of reality can be accommodated. We need, for instance to re-examine the scattered pieces of basic research conducted on African systems and convert them to applied form ready for use by policymakers. We also need to find a new corpus of knowledge that can inform young people being educated through existing institutions.

**14. *Globalization***

Then comes globalization and the “New World Order” which was the cornerstone of the Bush administration in the United States. In that conception of the New World Order, America, through the conquest of the Gulf would give new leadership and democracy to the world. But what is our say in all of this? Have we put in a single idea of what our world order is? Where do we belong in that world order? Instead we remark on how impressed we are with this initiative and parrot the slogans undisturbed. What we should be aiming at or strategizing about is *glocalization*, in which we look at our local, and localize our knowledge, localize our strategy as a strategy of entering and engaging meaningfully with globalization. Africans had their space in their own time. This space was invaded and re-ordered. It took us time to regain even portions of this space. When we did, it was only the spaces of articulation. It is now this space we have to use to wit in the context of African Renaissance to fight for the greater space.

**15. *Towards an African language of arts, culture, science and technology***

There is a need to develop an African language of arts, culture, science and technology. We need a language that can make Africans talk to each other. As it stands at the moment, African intellectuals are not talking *with* the masses at all, but rather, supposedly *for* them. There is a fundamental absence of interconnection, and interlinking with the masses, and this issue must be confronted. There is a need to bring women in. Women must become part of this dialogue on education, on poverty etc.

In other words, are we still chasing gods which are not our own? The answer appeared to total a “yes” indeed. There will always be elements of searching for Gods not our own in the globalization process, in part because we cannot isolate ourselves from the world. We have however to maintain vigilance of the elements in that globalization wanting to undermine what we see as our aspirations. The only difference is that now such an admission is not an empty rhetorical trope, but part of a call for action NOW.

---

<sup>1</sup>see Mbulelo Zamane 1998. Eurocentric and Afrocentric Perspectives on Ancient African History. Paper presented at the African Renaissance Conference. Johannesburg September 28-29th 1998.

<sup>2</sup>see Micere Githae Mugo. 1998. Culture and Education. Paper presented at the African Renaissance Conference. Johannesburg September 28-29th 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Vilakazi ibid p: 3

<sup>4</sup> Pitika Ntuli 1998. What is the Missing link between Culture and Education? Are We Still Chasing Gods Not Our Own? Paper presented at the African Renaissance Conference. Johannesburg September 28-29th 1998. p:1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Micere Mugo ibid p:4

<sup>6</sup> Pitika Ntuli ibid p:5.

<sup>7</sup>Micere Mugo ibid pp:4

<sup>8</sup>Pitika Ntuli ibid p: 8.

<sup>9</sup>Pitika Ntuli. 1998 ibid. p:6-7

<sup>10</sup>Amilcar Cabral, cited in Micere Mugo p:6.

<sup>11</sup>Pitika Ntuli ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Herbert W. Vilakazi 1998. The Problem of African Universities. Paper presented at the African Renaissance Conference. Johannesburg September 28-29th 1998.

<sup>13</sup>Vilakazi ibid p:8

<sup>14</sup>Vilakazi, Ntuli ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Vilakazi ibid p:20

<sup>16</sup>Vilakazi ibid p:17-19.

<sup>17</sup>cited in Micere Mugo ibid p:5.

<sup>18</sup>Freire 1983 cited in Micere Mugo ibid:5.

<sup>19</sup>Vilakazi ibid p:23-24

<sup>20</sup>in Micere Mugo ibid pp:13

<sup>21</sup>Micere Mugo ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Micere Mugo ibid pp:16.