

**AFRICAN IDENTITY**  
**AND**  
**AN AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

By

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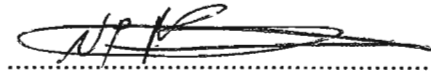
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## **Declaration**

I declare this thesis to be entirely my own work except where otherwise stated in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Jili', is written over a horizontal dotted line.

**Philani Jili**

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## **Introduction**

### **a) Hypothesis and objectives of the dissertation, and brief chapter summaries**

When thinking about a topic for postgraduate research, my motive for doing research on culture and identity in Africa is to outline and challenge certain perspectives within (South) African political discourse. These perspectives got my attention as a result of the media debate in South Africa regarding an 'African Renaissance' and the question: 'who is an Africa?' This debate went public as a result of then Deputy President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki's speech (1996) 'I am an African'. It seemed to me that a lot of this public discourse turned on issues of culture in identity formation. Thus, my intention is to examine the role of culture in identity formation. My departure point and broad hypothesis is that culture is not static but it is dynamic. The way we view our culture has an impact on the way we view ourselves and our identities. Thus in this research I want to argue that identities are not closed entities but they change over time to reflect our changing circumstances and aspirations. My objective is to research and to some extent challenge essentialist views on identities with particular relation to identity formation in colonial and postcolonial Africa. I want to argue mostly in favour of non-essentialist perspective on African identity. Put differently, the questions that I intend to address in this research are: is there an African 'essence'? Are identities pre-given and pre-constituted or do they change over time? My hypothesis is that identities are not fixed. Hence, I examine the debate between essentialism and non-essentialism in Africa. I argue it within two particular contexts: philosophical discourse (Chapter One) and Pan-Africanist discourse (Chapter Two). After that, I look for and discuss elements of essentialist and non-essentialist thinking in Renaissance discourse among South Africans, with input from other African scholars like Kwesi Kwaa Prah and Mahmood Mamdani (Chapter Three).

To reiterate, the link between African identity and an African Renaissance, as I see it, is that in most of the discussions about the African Renaissance the question of 'who is African?' arises. It has been argued that Africans should be at the forefront of the 'renaissance' so that they determine their future and their destiny. This is where the issue of African identity comes in. An aspect of my hypothesis is that issues of identity are significant in the postcolonial context in the sense that colonialism distorted identity perspectives in Africa by dividing African people (to a greater extent than has been the case prior to colonialism) along ethnic lines which colonialists called 'tribal'. As a result, colonial administrations made worse existing divisions among African peoples, as well as creating new ones in the name of alleged 'tribalism'. Thus, the broader notion of African identity was compromised in favour of particular identities through colonial policies of divide and rule. This created not only divisions among Africans but also reinforced ethnic animosities which manifested themselves in ethnic conflicts both in the colonial and the post-colonial period. The same argument can be advanced in the case of post-apartheid South Africa. Apartheid - an extreme form of settler colonialism - both reinforced existing divisions among black South Africans and created new ones called 'tribalism'. Just like its colonial predecessor, it divided black South Africans along so-called 'tribal' lines whether Xhosa, Zulu and so on. This was done through the same strategy of divide and rule used by colonial powers, particularly Britain, to dominate African people. This explains an important aspect of the reason why identity issues continue to be debated within the context of postcolonial Africa in general and post-apartheid South Africa in particular. The second part of the argument about the continuing importance of identity issues relates to the devaluation by colonialism of African cultures and histories. African histories were denoted as 'not worth knowing about', and African cultures called 'primitive', even 'barbaric' as a way of justifying European conquest and domination. Much



of the debate around ethnophilosophy and Pan-Africanism of 'essence' attempts to address this 'discourse of denial' (that Africans and their cultures are valuable in themselves) on the part of European imperialism. Having now explained the broad context of my research, I shall now expand on my hypothesis. The issue of culture is significant within identity and renaissance discourse. To reiterate, the way we define culture has a bearing on the way we view our identity. If we talk about 'renaissance' and juxtapose it with 'identity' are we saying that we want to return to our pre-colonial past? - 'the way we were' before European domination? In talking about culture and identity within the discourse of the African Renaissance my objective is to examine how the debate on the African renaissance deals with the question of African identity. According to Mbeki, what does it mean to be an African? What makes one an African? Is it skin colour, citizenship, geographical location or is one simply an African because one is regarded as such by other Africans? These questions and more will form the content of this research. The broad hypothesis on which my argument is based is that identities are socially and historically constructed. In his work, **Ideology and Utopia** (1936), Karl Mannheim argues that, "the sociology of knowledge seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought only very gradually emerges" (1936 : 3). His conclusion is that it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain situations characterizing their common position. (Ibid). The notion of an African renaissance is important to South Africans in order to address the legacy of apartheid and the divisions it entrenched among South Africans. In the South African context the notion of a renaissance can help in the process of nation building and reconciliation. This will depend, I argue, on the extent to which the idea has filtered through

to people on the ground, or to grassroots level, so that it can become relevant to 'ordinary people'. The idea is a matter of debate among intellectuals and politicians, yet I question whether ordinary people are particularly aware of the debate about 'African Renaissance' never mind how to define it. On the other hand, one can argue in its favour that 'African Renaissance' in the South African context is a new discourse which seeks to replace the discourse of apartheid. One of the objectives of an 'African Renaissance', as I see it, is to create an appreciation of diversity by creating a national culture which 'celebrates diversity'. Put differently, through African Renaissance discourse, South Africans are trying to achieve peaceful co-existence between groups which constitute South African society. Thus, African Renaissance discourse tends to reinforce an inclusive notion of African identity in line with African National Congress policy of 'non-racialism'.

#### b) **Research methodologies and sources**

My preliminary research assisted my understanding that an 'African Renaissance' as discussed in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century South Africa is but the most recent manifestation of a series of discourses going back at least to the early 1900s and the first Pan-Africanist Congresses organised by descendants of slaves (the African Diaspora). I have therefore selected as an organising principle, the methodology of the school of 'new realists', or deep structure. 'New realism' is opposed to the school of 'empiricism' which looks at events on the surface of current politics and calls them 'reality'. This is not the position 'new realists' or 'deep structuralists' take. In his book, **A Realist Theory of Science** (1978) Bhaksar explains this methodology by comparing it with an iceberg. As I see it, when applying it to my research, deep structures have surface manifestations (like 'African Renaissance' discourse in post-apartheid South Africa) but these manifestations are only the immediately

evident part of reality, that is, its most recent manifestation. Beneath the surface is the bigger part of the reality which makes the surface manifestation what it is. By adopting this notion of 'deep structure' I examine the pedigree (or lineage) of African Renaissance and identity discourse with reference to past and present Pan Africanist discourse, as well as issues raised by ethnophilosophy, its critics and supporters. Chapter Three examines a recent manifestation of deep structures, thus, the methodology of 'deep structure' has served its purpose, in a way. I put more emphasis on a dialectical understanding of current South African discourse, using the Hegelian version of the dialectic in which thesis, antithesis, and synthesis are forms or stages of development (to Hegel, of ideas). Put differently, the thesis affirms a proposition, the antithesis denies it, the synthesis takes elements of both and this brings us one step closer to reality (Carew-Hunt, 1963:42-62). I use this method as a way of understanding and organising the issues and arguments which have emerged in South African intellectual discourse since Mbeki's first speech on the topic of African Renaissance in 1996. The dialectic may also be applied to identity formation during the apartheid era. An example of what I mean here is for instance, **Thesis:** Afrikaner (and white generally) identity which attempts to construct black identities in ways which suit the agenda of white domination. **Antithesis:** Black Consciousness Movement and associated movements and concepts (PAC, AZAPO, ANC). **Synthesis:** Mbeki's notion of identity within an 'African Renaissance' which incorporates and attempts to reconcile previously warring identities. (In tune with the ANC's emphasis on reconciliation between the races, transformation and so on). I should add that there are contradictions in the synthesis which lead to a new antithesis, and so on.

Before I conclude this introduction, a word about sources. There is an extensive literature by ethnophilosophers and about ethnophilosophy, and the same goes for Pan-Africanism. Also,

the school of 'professional philosophers' in Africa provides much interesting material. A problem in Chapter Three is that Renaissance discourse in South Africa is relatively recent and not many books have been published. Thus, I supplement a few texts with journal articles, Internet and newspaper articles.

## **Chapter One**

### **Issues of African Identity : Cultural and Philosophical Debate**

#### **1.1 Introduction : General Themes and Questions**

The aim of this chapter is to explore selected issues of a debate centred on African philosophy and African traditional cultures. Key elements and questions in this debate may be described as follows: African philosophy in the form of ethnophilosophy assumes the existence of an African essence. But is Africa a homogeneous continent or is it a highly fragmented continent along ethnic, cultural and other lines? What constitutes an African essence and what do we mean by it? What is the difference, if any, between African 'essence' and African 'personality'? These are the kinds of issues and questions I will be examining in this chapter. My focus here is on selected writings of Hountondji, Wiredu and Owomoyela, among others. I explore the differences between essentialism and non-essentialism, that is, identities as pre-given and pre-constituted and identities as socially and historically constructed. I argue, from a social constructionist perspective, that identities are constructed by socio-cultural environments and that there are no fixed essences that all Africans can be said to share. Like the social world, people are the product of their social environment and identities are constructed through everyday social interaction. I argue that categories such as African culture and African identity leave unsaid or untouched the diversity of cultures, the relativity of desires and identities in different African countries. It is this very fact that puts the whole issue of 'African essence' into doubt. What else do Africans share except historical background and shared vision of the future? Anticipating my final chapter, I wonder to what extent is the idea of 'African Renaissance' a hegemonic political project pursued by the African National Congress of South Africa? One perhaps can argue that the African Renaissance assumes an African essence in that it glosses over the

diversity of African peoples in trying to portray the interests of South Africa as the interests of all Africans.

## 1.2 **Ethnophilosophy and its Critics**

Ethnophilosophy is that type of philosophy which assumes the existence of an African essence and which tends to argue from the standpoint of a more-or-less uniform African identity and culture. To highlight the main points of difference between essentialist and non-essentialist thinking in Africa, I shall begin with Hountondji's thesis (1996, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). He differentiates between the ideological use of the word philosophy, which he regards as vulgar, and the theoretical use of the word. Hountondji's central argument is that philosophy in Africa has lost its independent and scientific character in the form of ethnophilosophy. This philosophy is believed to be collectively held by Africans. Hountondji argues that this philosophy is believed to be collectively held by Africans. Hountondji argues that this philosophy is not critical for it reflects African world-views. It is worth clarifying at this point that Hountondji makes no distinction between traditional African philosophy and contemporary or modern African philosophy while other philosophers like Gyekye make this distinction. The most important difference between traditional and contemporary African philosophy, one that is a body of thought attributed to the community rather than to individuals. To some, this amounts to philosophy without philosophers in contrast to modern philosophy authored by individuals (Sogolo, 1993:6). By contrast, advocates of ethnophilosophy argue that in order for philosophy to be 'African' it must be rooted in African traditions and experience. Put differently, modern African philosophy needs to have traditional philosophy as its source.

Arguing from the other side, Hountondji (op cit) believes that new foundations need to be created in order for genuine philosophy (in Africa) to emerge. African intellectuals have adopted the vulgar use of the word philosophy and it is not difficult to understand why. They have inherited this usage of the term from Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary who was writing about Africa for Europe. Hountondji rightly observes that the predecessors of Tempels forget that he was addressing not them but the European public (1996:45). Put differently, ethnophilosophers are nothing but the blind followers of Placide Tempels. They forget easily that Tempels was pursuing the Western agenda of civilizing the “savage”. As one author, Stephen Howe, argues,

Tempels’s motivation was - as one might expect - specifically Christian and, many would add, also specifically colonialist. He believed that by understanding the “Bantu” world-view his fellow whites in Africa, especially missionaries (for the book was clearly aimed at them rather than Africans who must presumably - by Tempels’s own arguments - already “know” its contents), would be able to build on the element it had in common with Christianity, purge it of its illogical and “magical” residues, and so lead the natives towards a more civilized, morally perfect life (1998:156-157).

Another issue that is important in the debate about philosophy is that of literacy. What is the precondition for philosophy? Does the lack of a doxographic tradition (the tradition of recorded opinions) in Africa’s historical past impede the existence of philosophy in Africa as some philosophers, Hountondji included, have argued? Is writing a precondition for philosophy or is it possible for philosophy to exist without recorded opinions? African philosophers are divided on this issue. For instance, Hountondji argues that writing or

literacy is the precondition for philosophy (1996:69) while other philosophers argue that African oral traditions made traditional African philosophy possible. Here AI shall explore the arguments of Kwame in his book, **Readings in African Philosophy** (1995) and Gyekye in his book, **An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme** (1987) in order to illuminate this argument about literacy and philosophy. Kwame makes a distinction between two views of African philosophy. One view looks back to precolonial, traditional African society for African philosophy. According to this view, “African philosophy is contained, found in, or constructed out of the proverbs, folklore, art, aphorisms, fragments, rituals, traditions and collective wisdom of the African people; and African philosophy so discovered or constructed is comparable to Western philosophy (without necessarily being, significantly, the same)” (Kwame, 1995:xvii).

Thus, according to the above argument the lack of a doxographic tradition (the tradition of recorded opinions) in large areas of traditional Africa is not adequate grounds for denying the existence of a traditional African philosophy that is comparable to Western philosophy. The general reasoning behind this traditional approach to African philosophy seems to be that postcolonial African society has been so Westernized that any genuine African philosophy must be rooted in precolonial society. This is the way Gyekye puts it:

It is indeed a mistake to maintain that the term “African philosophy” should be used to cover only the philosophy, that is, the written philosophy, that is being produced by contemporary African philosophers. For philosophy, whether in the sense of a world-view or in the sense of a discipline - that is, in the sense of systematic critical thought about the problems covered in philosophy as world-view - is discoverable in African traditional thought... As a result a



distinction must be made between traditional African philosophy and modern African philosophy : the latter, to be African, and have a basis in African culture and experience, must have a connection with the former, the traditional” (1987:18).

The second view to which Kwame (op cit) refers is one which rejects the first view on the grounds that it produces, promotes or simply enables ethnophilosophy and this is a sad state of affairs because, according to the second view, genuine philosophy in Africa consists of the postcolonial, literary works of individuals connected to the African continent. Further, it is argued that real or serious philosophy is not a collective activity by the whole society as is suggested by some who endorse an ethnophilosophical approach. Instead, philosophy is an individual and literary activity. It is also argued that until colonialists introduced writing on a mass scale in Africa, much of Black Africa lacked a tradition of writing, hence a philosophical tradition (Ibid).

Another point of difference between supporters and critics of ethnophilosophy relates to the extent to which critics believe that early ethnophilosophers, like Tempels, were not addressing an African audience. For example, Hountondji argues that:

Ethnophilosophers, like Placide Tempels, address themselves primarily to the European public. The intention is to describe African civilization for the benefit of Europe and to secure respect for African cultural originality but on Europe’s own terms. African philosophy is defined by African intellectuals as a world-view common to all Africans, past, present and future, a collective, immutable system of thought in eternal opposition to that of Europe. The

followers of Placide Tempels ignored and misunderstood his opinion that while the Bantu had a philosophy in the sense of an organized system of beliefs, it was not a “true” philosophy comparable to the Western tradition, in that they were not critical, self-aware beliefs (1996:64).

The debate about ethnophilosophy is pursued further by Masolo, a Kenyan philosopher, in his work, **African philosophy in Search of Identity** (1995). He notes that according to ethnophilosophers, the traditional past should be the object of philosophic understanding in Africa. In other words, African philosophy must be seen to be different from the philosophies of other peoples and continents. Each continent or sub-continent has and must have its own philosophy, which reflects and is rooted in its own traditions. Masolo’s criticism of this view is that it holds that people are so blinkered by their respective culturally determined experiences that perception of other experiences is impossible. In this view, the role of the philosopher cannot be other than that of the spectator who passively observes and records what is happening and what has happened, for he does not add anything new to the traditional object by his mental activity. Masolo argues that the role of the philosopher is to give his cultural values a hermeneutical interpretation. Ethnophilosophers fail to differentiate between ethnophilosophy and philosophical knowledge (1995:249).

There are interesting similarities as well as differences between Hountondji and Masolo. The most obvious similarity between them is their criticism of ethnophilosophy although in different ways and different tones. Hountondji’s argument is that ethnophilosophers have failed to come up with an adequate philosophy and he advocates the elimination of ethnophilosophy in order to lay new foundations of a valid philosophy from which the issue

of identity will be resuscitated (1996:53). What kind of philosophy does Hountondji have in mind? I think it can be argued that Hountondji has Western style philosophy in mind. This is demonstrated by his claim that real philosophy is critical in orientation and that African philosophy in the form of ethnophilosophy is vulgar philosophy. Indeed, Hountondji often compares ethnophilosophy unfavourably with Western philosophy. He remarks that “When African intellectuals are asked to defend their beliefs they resort of folk beliefs, this is what our ancestors said” or “Alleluia, our ancestors have thought, whereas a Westerner defends his thesis without resorting to folk beliefs” (Ibid:48). Thus for Hountondji the solution is the wholesale abandonment of this vulgar philosophy if Africa is to embrace modernity.

Masolo, on the other hand, differs somewhat from Hountondji in as far as ethnophilosophy is concerned. Masolo contends that, “there is no single philosophical tradition that was tailor-made and produced like an industrial product” (1995:251). He adds that:

There is no justifiable reason, therefore, why one individual or group should try to tailor-make African philosophy by prescribing what ought to be its content, method of reasoning, and standard of truth. Like other philosophical systems and traditions, African philosophy must be born out of its peculiar cultural circumstances combined with a living and constructive zeal among individual African intellectuals to understand and explain the world around them (Ibid).

Masolo concludes his argument by stating that, “while we say yes to African personality, we ought also to say yes to technological modernism, yes to the African conscience, but also yes to universal science (Ibid: 251). From Masolo’s convincing argument, one can see that even

though Hountondji started the debate about ethnophilosophy, he does not now control it, and that his critique should be carefully examined. In order to do this, I shall first take a closer look at an example of the ethnophilosophical genre.

### **1.2.1 An example of ethnophilosophy**

Négritude, which asserts the existence of a metaphysical 'African essence' may be considered a prime example of ethnophilosophy. I would like to consider Leopold Senghor's theory (as opposed to the version of Aimé Césaire) by outlining first the historical context under which it emerged. I shall begin with what Négritude is not rather than what it is. Put differently, I shall outline what it is reacting against rather than what it aims to achieve.

The theory of Négritude, meaning 'blackness', emerged as a reaction against both slavery and colonialism. In order to understand this theory we need to differentiate between different kinds of colonialism and different kinds of colonialist. (This is the conclusion to which I came after reading some of Senghor's own work on Négritude). For instance, Portuguese colonialism was different in its methods from Belgian, British and French colonialism although they had the same goal of exploiting African resources for their own benefit. For example, the French argued that it is possible for Africans to become culturally French through a process of cultural and linguistic engineering. It is for this reason that the French enforced the policy of assimilation. Simply put, in order to become French, the colonized need to master the French language. From there, they should begin the process of assimilating French culture. The British, on the other hand, did not (as a matter of official policy) try to culturally assimilate the colonized. Instead they instituted the method of 'indirect rule' which made a clear distinction between British and African cultures.

In the light of these differences between French and British methods, it is important to note that the theory of Negritude as advanced by Senghor emerged from conditions of attempted cultural assimilation. Negritude takes as its reason for existence the cultural rehabilitation of the black man. Hence, the Negritude movement was both a product of French policy of assimilation and a reaction against it. It aimed to prove that the policy of assimilation was a failure because “one can speak and learn French but one can hardly run away from one’s black skin” (Senghor in Mutiso and Rohio, 1975:83).

Senghor’s central argument is that cultural independence is the prerequisite for other independences - political, social and economic. Culture is expressed in one’s language. The enforcement of the policy of assimilation was a complete negation of African culture. Put differently, a foreign language enforces alien values whether social, economic or political for all these are expressed through language which is a component of culture. Senghor contends that,

Negritude is the consciousness of being black, the simple recognition of the fact, implying acceptance and responsibility for one’s destiny as a black man, one’s history and one’s culture. It is the refusal to assimilate, to see oneself in the “Other”. Refusal of the Other is affirmation of the Self (quoted in Finn, 1988:38).

Negritude attacked the argument that progress and civilization could only be European. Senghor defined Negritude as, “the whole complex of civilized values-cultural, economic, social and political - which characterize the black peoples, or, more precisely, the Negro African world” (in Mutiso and Rohio, 1975:83). The movement takes as its *raison d’etre* the

retrieval of lost traditional values. Its purpose is to encourage black people to be proud of being black for black is the colour of beauty. According to Alex Sackey,

What negritude does, and does brilliantly, is the psychological gathering together of all black people in order to make a moral affirmation of themselves as black peoples who are achieving a profound spiritual understanding, whatever their conditions, wherever their homelands - from Martinique to mali, from Chicago to Zanzibar - of the bonds of brotherhood (Ibid:78).

A final point to mention is that a key notion in Senghor's theory of Negritude is that of emotion. It is on this notion that Hountondji builds his critique.

### **1.2.2 Hountondji's critique**

According to Hountondji, Senghor takes the concept of emotions as central to the question of African essence, and he "virtually erects emotion into a function of knowledge and attributes to the African as a cardinal principle of his racial predisposition" (1996:18). Commenting further on Senghor's theory of Negritude, Hountondji notes his argument that,

Each race, each civilization, has its characteristic manner of envisaging the world. This African manner, founded upon the values of emotion rather than upon the logical categories signposted by Western philosophy, is as valid in its own terms as the Western one inherited from ancient Greece, hence his celebrated and controversial assertion that emotion is African, as reason is Hellenic (Ibid).

With regard this founding of an African manner on values of emotion, Appiah extends Hountondji's critique. To use Appiah's phrase, it is a "reverse discourse" (1992:95). A reverse discourse, according to Appiah, is a discourse that takes as its *raison d'être* the elimination of the existing discourse. Put differently, ethnophilosophy (which Appiah calls 'nativism') is an African discourse which aims to eliminate or to counteract the existing Western discourse (Ibid: 93-96). It can be noted that Appiah agrees with Hountondji that ethnophilosophy plays into the hands of imperialist (and neo-imperialist) discourse in as much as it is still the prisoner of the past. According to Hountondji, the way forward is for African intellectuals to get out from the Africanist ghetto and intellectual prison to which they have been confined. Furthermore, African intellectuals should stop focusing on themselves, preoccupied with their beauty instead of preparing Africa for the future (1996:21). It seems that the defensive dialogue between Africa and Europe is not progressive, and that it is about time that African intellectuals address themselves to the African public as opposed to the European public.

To sum up, the argument against ethnophilosophy signifies changing African attitudes to the general issue of African identity as posed by the proponents of nationalism (or 'nativism') which is now being given redefinition in the postcolonial era (Ibid). It is notable that while the critics of Senghor's theory of Negritude regard as a necessity the rehabilitation of African peoples and cultures, they are opposed to his formulation of Negritude as a unified, collective conception of black people in general.

Hountondji does not confine his critique to ethnophilosophy. He also criticizes the discipline of African Studies and its practitioners along similar lines. His argument is that Africans do

not need African Studies for the discipline was invented by Europe to perpetuate the domination of Africans. Therefore 'African Studies' is part and parcel of European tradition. He contends that,

The teaching of African subjects in order to preserve African cultural authenticity amounts to folklorism, and a sort of collective cultural exhibitionism which compels the Third World intellectual to defend and illustrate the peculiarities of his tradition for the benefit of the Western public. As a result African intellectuals remain the prisoners of Europe, trying as ever, to force her to respect us (Ibid).

Still on the case of African Studies, Hountondji informs his African readers that Europe has never expected anything from us, in cultural terms, except that we should offer her our civilizations as showpieces and alienate ourselves in a fictitious dialogue with her, over the heads of our own people. (This is a comment on intellectuals in Africa which is developed below).

According to Hountondji this is what we Africans are invited to do whenever we are asked to pursue African Studies and preserve our cultural authenticity. The proliferation of Institutes for African Studies takes as its reason for existence the preservation of African cultural authenticity. To reiterate, Hountondji thinks that the way forward is for Africans to relearn how to think and stop focusing on 'blackness' which he calls "a collective narcissism induced by colonialism" (Ibid:54).



### 1.2.3 Wiredu's critique

The argument against ethnophilosophy and cultures of 'essence' is also asserted by Kwasi Wiredu in his book, **Philosophy and an African Culture** (1980). Whereas Hountondji is expressing a rather harsh criticism of ethnophilosophy, to some extent Wiredu takes a more moderate stand. However, what has earned him the label of anti-African (see below) is his concern about those aspects of African culture which he perceives as backward and as needing to be stamped out root and branch.

Like Hountondji, Wiredu is a universalist in the sense that he believes genuine philosophy has a universal flavour but unlike Hountondji, he argues that philosophy should be culture bound in which case genuine African philosophy should be rooted in African culture (the positive aspects of it) and African experience. He recognizes an urgent need in Africa to identify and separate the retrogressive aspects of African culture from those aspects worth keeping. Some African traditional cultures are based on superstition and therefore irrational (1980:59-60). According to Masolo, Wiredu is a strong believer in the Western foundationalist model of rationality and although he believes that there are differences between Africa and Europe he does not believe that they are irreconcilable (1994:204).

Expanding his argument, Wiredu maintains that aspects of African traditional cultures are impediments to development and for Africa to develop she needs to distance herself from the old uncritical habits of thought. Simply put, Africa needs to pass the stage of traditional thinking and move on. Wiredu differentiates between the aesthetic and the pragmatic aspects of African culture. His argument is that when Africans look at the pragmatic aspects of their culture they have every reason to be proud of their inheritance. The pragmatic aspect of

African culture, or any other culture for that matter, requires that Africans ask themselves why it came about that everywhere in Africa foreign invaders were able to put Africans in bondage. Wiredu argues that this can be attributed to certain aspects of African culture (1980:61).

Hountondji and Wiredu both seem to believe that the conquest of Africa by Europeans can largely be attributed to certain aspects of African culture which are not conducive to scientific progress (including weapons technology). Therefore, according to these philosophers, the subjugation of Africa by the imperialist powers demonstrates the West's superiority in certain respects. For instance, Wiredu's emphasis is on science. He argues that, "for my part, I take science to be the crucial factor in the transition from the traditional to the modern world" (Ibid:32). He also contends that all developing countries are endeavouring to improve their living standards through the application of science, and any philosophy not thoroughly imbued with the spirit of science cannot hope to reflect this. Another example he cites as anachronistic is the institution of funerals in Ghana where the mourning of the dead takes the form of elaborate and expensive and time consuming social ceremonies. He also criticizes the belief of Africans in the spirits of the ancestors. He points out that traditional African beliefs in ancestor spirits have never been defended rationally. He argues that "if one were to ask a traditional elder, unspoilt by scientific orientation, for the rational justification of such a belief, one's curiosity would promptly be put down to intellectual arrogance acquired through Western Education" (Ibid).

#### 1.2.4 Owomoyela's synthesis of the arguments relating to ethnophilosophy

I would like now to focus on Owomoyela's work, **The African Difference** (1996) which contains a response to the arguments of Hountondji and Wiredu. Owomoyela administers a sharp reprimand to both Hountondji and Wiredu. Regarding Wiredu's charge that African traditional cultures are inadequate if Africa is to advance past the stage of traditional thought to modern thinking. Owomoyela's response is that African traditional cultures have nothing to do with underdevelopment in Africa. Instead, the roots of underdevelopment can be traced to the history of imperialism in Africa. Owomoyela's line of reasoning is that imperialism and colonialism were not conducive to African development because it was in Europe's interests to exploit its overseas colonies rather than encourage their equal access to the means of technological advancement. Thus, first the slave trade and later, colonialism disrupted and distorted African economies and retarded rather than promoted African development (1996:58). This telling point, drawn from dependency theory, is ignored by Wiredu. Thus, he leaves himself open to Owomoyela's criticisms.

Owomoyela can be said to belong to the 'nationalist' or 'nativist' school which argues that African philosophy should be reflected and rooted in African culture and traditions, whereas Wiredu makes an assumption that it is possible for philosophy to be universal. This is in conflict with the nationalist school's belief that there can be no universal philosophy given the diversity of cultures and traditions. Owomoyela also challenges Hountondji's argument that African philosophy in the form of ethnophilosophy is vulgar philosophy and needs to be replaced with rational or critical philosophy reminiscent of that of the Western world. Owomoyela's counter argument is that it is possible for philosophy to be collectively held in as much as it represents the collective wisdom of African societies (Ibid:28). He also

challenges the claim that Africa needs to adopt Western style philosophy in order to achieve development. On the contrary, he asserts that the function of African philosophy must be reconcile Africans to their Africanness. For him, one cannot be anything else but Eurocentric to assert that Africans need to pursue Western style philosophy and distance themselves from their cultures and traditions (Ibid:37).

According to Owomoyela, there is nothing wrong with being different and hence he speaks of the “African difference”. To elaborate on this he uses the “horse metaphor”. He argues that even though a horse is a good and valuable animal, it would be wrong to wish a zebra to be a horse. This metaphor, he argues, can be applied to Europe’s attempt to eradicate African difference. The metaphor leads into Owomoyela’s explanation that Africa does not need to follow the Western path to development. It is possible for Africa to develop using the indigenous African cultures and traditions at her disposal. Owomoyela’s argument when put in a simple way is: let there be difference and let us respect and tolerate difference. It is noteworthy that Owomoyela is careful not to allow his argument to degenerate into anti Europeanism for he is not advocating the isolation of Africa from the world. Rather, he is rejecting the assimilation of Africa in the now dominant Western complex by arguing that Africans have a singular contribution to make to the world. He concludes that there is much to be gained from an equal dialogue between African and Western thought (Ibid:41).

Extending his argument, Owomoyela maintains that it is possible for Africa to achieve development and at the same time maintain traditional beliefs and practices. He cites the examples of China and Japan and claims that these countries gives Africans proof that the retention of traditional beliefs and practices are not incompatible with industrialization and

technological advancement (Ibid:11). He also challenges the claim that the colonization of Africa by Europe demonstrates the superiority of Europe over Africa, whether scientific or otherwise. Referring to universalist critiques of ethnophilosophy, he suggests that some professional philosophers need cultural rehabilitation in order to look at African philosophy and African traditional cultures through decolonized eyes. The discipline of African Studies, although some philosophers do not think it is necessary, can help to facilitate this process (Ibid:37).

To conclude this section on ethnophilosophy, its critics and supporters, it is worth repeating that there is no philosophy that was tailor made like an industrial product (Masolo op cit). The view of Hountondji and Wiredu that a true philosophy ought to be critical is an insufficient criterion. In her current state of underdevelopment, Africa has urgent need of constructive and not critical philosophy. Added to this, I would argue that Hountondji is guilty of replacing a myth (the “rightness” of ethnophilosophy) with another myth (the “rightness” of critical thinking). I believe that African intellectuals have a duty to debate what should count as African philosophy : its nature and methods of reasoning. Even Hountondji argues that, “African philosophy is a set of texts written by Africans and designated by them as such” (1996:1). The problem with Hountondji and Wiredu is that they seem not interested in the development of a tradition of philosophy in Africa which is authentically African, but in clothing “Western philosophy in African robes” (Oladipo, 1996:10). However, to keep the balance, philosophy should not focus on Africa and Africans in an exclusionary way. I argue, following Masolo (op cit) that it is possible to locate a philosophy in African culture while not losing sight of a global context.

### 1.3 Culture and the Role of Intellectuals

I include this section on culture and the role of intellectuals in order to demonstrate the significance of intellectuals in contemporary African societies. In Hountondji's comment about African intellectuals (op cit) there is a suggestion that it is all too easy to become and remain prisoners of Europe. I think it is reasonable to conclude that Western educated intellectuals may play a problematic role in African societies. I infer from Owoyomela's argument (op cit) that there are at least two issues which define the African project today. Firstly, the issue of development and secondly, the issue of self-definition. It is my contention, following Gramsci, (see below) that intellectuals have a role to play in identity formation in every society. However, in this section I want to demonstrate the fact that the way intellectuals play their role depends on their location with regards their own culture. The problematic role played by African intellectuals comes into it if they have lost touch with the culture of their people and have lost their roots, and in this way become irrelevant as intellectuals who can drive African civilization forwards. Put simply, most African intellectuals are located in the West culturally speaking, and they have difficulty identifying themselves with the culture of their people. Some of the arguments I cited in the preceding section bear testimony to this problematic. I now extend the debate about intellectuals by referring to some of the points raised by Antonio Gramsci, particularly his distinction between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals.

I shall then examine Edward Said's Reith Lectures on the **Representations of the Intellectual**. Using these arguments as a baseline, I shall try to determine what the role of intellectuals should be in African societies.

According to Gramsci, intellectuals are not characterised by the intrinsic activity of thinking which is common to all people, but by the function which they perform. Gramsci wrote in **The Prison Notebooks** that, “all men are intellectuals but not all men have the function of intellectuals” (quoted in Said, 1998:92). Intellectuals do not form a class as such, but each class has its own intellectuals. The capitalists create alongside themselves the industrial managers and technicians, economists, civil servants and the organizers of a new culture and a new legal system. This is what Gramsci means by organic intellectuals as distinct from traditional intellectuals. He further argues that people who perform an intellectual function in society can be divided into two types: first, traditional intellectuals such as teachers, priests, and administrators who continue to do the same thing from generation to generation, and second, organic intellectuals. Gramsci saw the organic intellectuals as directly connected to classes that used intellectuals to organize interests, gain more power and get more control. Thus, Gramsci says about the organic intellectual, “the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture and a new legal system etc” (Ibid:4). Under the concept of organic intellectuals one can put the advertising or public relations manager who devises techniques for winning a detergent or air lines company a larger share of the market. An advertising or public relations manager is someone in a democratic society who tries to gain the consent of potential customers, win approval, marshal consumer or voter opinion. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals are actively involved in society. They constantly struggle to change minds and expand markets. Unlike the traditional intellectuals, teachers, priests who are doing the same kind of work year in and year out, organic intellectuals are always on the move, on the make (Ibid).

Following Gramsci, Said argues that there is a need to redefine the intellectual and his/her role in society. Who, then, qualifies as an intellectual? An intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot simply be reduced to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about her or his business. Said goes on to say that,

The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. This role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot be easily co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual operates on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violation of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously (Ibid:9).

Said further argues that:

As an intellectual I present my concerns before an audience or constituency, but this is not just a matter of how I articulate them, but also of what I myself, as someone who is trying to advance the cause of freedom and justice, also represent. I say or write these things because after much reflection they are what I believe, and I also want to persuade others of this view (Ibid).



He contends that there is no such a thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered the public world. He also argues that nor is there a public intellectual who exists just as a figurehead or spokesperson or symbol of a cause, movement, or position. There is always a personal inflection and a private sensibility, and those give meaning to what is being said or written. Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his or her audiences feel good: the whole point, argues Said, is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant (Ibid:10). Furthermore, the role of the intellectuals is supposed to be that of helping a national community feel more of a sense of common identity. For this reason, Said challenges the argument advanced by Julien Benda in his book, **The Treason of the Intellectuals**. According to Benda, being interested in intellectuals means being concerned with Europeans. Benda argues that intellectuals exist in a sort of universal space, bound neither by national boundaries nor by ethnic identity. In refuting this argument, Said maintains that things have changed a great deal since Benda's time of writing (that is, the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). In the first place, Europe and the West are no longer the unchallenged standard-setters for the rest of the world. He points out that the dismantling of the great colonial empires after World War Two diminished Europe's capacity for intellectually and politically irradiating what used to be called the dark places of the earth (1993:19).

### 1.3.1 The role of intellectuals in African societies

Following Gramsci and Said, I argue that African intellectuals should not inhabit "ivory towers" for in this century, African intellectuals have a significant task to perform. As I see it, their role is to help Africans to face the challenges of a new millennium. Some commentators have argued that in the twenty-first century, the greatest danger to the African

continent might not be the millennium bug but the question of survival itself. The fundamental question of whether the continent will hold as one entity has been posed by African scholars, journalists, policy makers and interested watchers and observers. Foreign commentators have argued that the future of Africa is “extraordinarily gloomy”. For instance, Robert Kaplan, an American journalist, in his controversial book, **The Coming Anarchy**, “painted a mosaic picture of overpopulation, resource scarcity, drug infested slums, rampant crime and thug-like leaders”. He further predicted “an increasing demographic, environmental and social stress and the emergence of the criminal anarchy” (Review article in *The Sunday Nation*, 10 October 1999).

The task of African intellectuals as we approach the next century, I argue, is among other things, to deal with the stubborn conventional wisdom held by Europe and the West that preaches Afro-pessimism and is convinced that nothing good will ever come out of Africa. This wholesale prejudice needs to be addressed in an incisive and pro-active manner so as to avoid the repetitive and circular dialogue between African intellectuals and European intellectuals, as Hountondji (op cit) rightly sees it. However, one should bear in mind that intellectuals do not exist in a sort of universal vacuum. I agree with Edward Said that intellectual production has its own specific challenges to deal with, its own pathologies to address in a language that is intelligible to the masses or ordinary people in a particular cultural and historical context. Thus one reasonably can argue that intellectuals and intellectual production are culture-specific. Moving on from there, one may point to a division of labour between Western and African intellectuals. Referring again to a global climate of Afro-pessimism, it seems there is a need for intellectuals in Africa to identify with the culture of the people they aim to represent, and act on their behalf and on behalf of the

society as a whole with the aim of freeing African peoples from the shackles of neo-imperialism. Said (op cit) emphasizes the fact that it is impossible for intellectuals to use the language that people use and understand. This is because knowledge has become specialized, leaving many people outside in the dark, so to speak. As I see it, a problematic function of intellectuals in Africa is to withhold light from their people in order to entrench and savour their own privileged positions. This is a situation especially applicable in African societies in which many people are poor and semi-literate, and I believe that a positive function of intellectuals would include accepting such African specificities and adjusting their values and priorities in order to better address it.

#### **1.4 Conclusion: Looking Ahead to an “African Renaissance”**

I have tried to establish that in the formation of positive and inclusive African identities, intellectuals have a crucial role to play, not least in combatting the fragmentation of cultures and conflicts between peoples which occur too often in Africa. I think the role of intellectuals in this regard is to fight corruption and ethnic flare-ups that still characterize the African continent. I also think that this is or should be the function of an ‘African Renaissance’ advocated by Thabo Mbeki, the current President of South Africa. What is the significance of an African Renaissance if its function is not to promote responsible and accountable government in African states by eliminating dictatorships and wars in order adequately to address the issue of poverty? What good is the African Renaissance if its objective is to promote democracy for its own sake, that is, as a universal ethic irrespective of context? In this conclusion, I argue that democracy should not be seen as an end in itself but it should be seen and promoted as a means to an end, not least the elimination of poverty in order to ensure a better life for all. Thus it is for this reason that we need to make a

distinction between procedural democracy (structure ignored) and substantial democracy (structure transformed). In order to achieve the real empowerment of the people in Africa, I believe, following Ake (1995) that substantial democracy is more appropriate. The role of African intellectuals is to denounce ineffective and corrupt governments just as they fought against racism induced by colonialism and neocolonialism. They also need to address the issue of transformation of gender relations and act towards the elimination of subjugation of women. Finally, I argue that ethnophilosophies such as Negritude are of less relevance in contemporary Africa as they emerged from a past context. However, this is not to deny that they were instrumental in achieving independence, nor that some aspects are of continuing relevance.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Issues of African Identity: Pan Africanist Debate**

#### **2.1 Introduction: The Place of Pan-Africanist Themes in 'African Identity'**

Having examined in Chapter One some of the philosophical and cultural issues within which discourse about African identity is located, I now turn to the Pan-Africanist debate. I do so not least because it is axiomatic that a creed of pan-nationalism has as its pre-requisite a concept of identity which crosses national boundaries. I shall begin with broad issues of African identity within the narratives of Pan-Africanism. It should be noted at the outset that some Pan-Africanist thinkers assume the existence of a Pan Africa-identity both necessary and sufficient for the task of building African unity, while others do not. In this regard, I identify below two schools of thought within the intellectual discourse of Pan-Africanism. Very briefly they may be represented as follows:

- Africans share an 'essence' which is cultural and metaphysical.
- Africans share a history. More specifically, a history of resistance to oppression.

It should be noted that in the first school, African identity tends to be conceptualized as exclusive. In the second school, it is inclusive in as much as identity discourse is extended to cover the experience of imperialist oppression and resistance to it common to all peoples who have been subjected to it in one form or another. It should also be noted in anticipation of Chapter Three that some thinkers (see below) have attempted to combine the two perspectives.

The first school is defined by the second as 'nationalist' or 'nativist' and tends to be regarded by the second school as a necessary but insufficient 'first wave' of resistance to oppression. As the second school infers a critique of essentialist discourse I shall focus my attention on it

and in this way extend the arguments contained in the previous chapter. In this chapter I use few foundational texts on which to base my discussion including Edward Said's **Culture and Imperialism** (1993). According to said, "... the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings" (Ibid:261). By this Said means "not borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors" (Ibid:262), he means experiences common to many people and interdependency among many cultures.

### 2.1.1 Imperialism and decolonization

As Pan-Africanism is partly although not exclusively a reaction against imperialism, it seems appropriate to begin this debate by defining imperialism and asking how it differs from its cousin, colonialism. In this regard I use two texts by Azikiwe and Said respectively.

According to Azikiwe in his work, **Renascent Africa** (1969),

The word 'imperialism' is borrowed from the Latin word *impero*, and is interpreted to mean: to command, to rule, to govern, to hold in trust, to civilize, to educate, to Christianize. Furthermore, imperialism was the by-product of nationalism without which the idea of conquering 'others' would not have materialized among the European nations (1969:50).

It follows from this that nationalism was instrumental in the colonization of Africa by the West and on the other hand it was also used as an instrument by the dominated people everywhere in the Third World to resist further colonial encroachment. It is not the purpose of this chapter to take a closer look at the concept of imperialism and it is not my intention to reduce the entire project of imperialism to definitions.

Returning to Said: he argues that 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism' which is a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory (1993:8).

He refers to Michael Doyle's argument that,

Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. This control can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining the empire (Ibid).

History suggests that resistance outweighed collaboration in the balance sheet of colonized peoples and their activities. Put differently, there have been more 'Calibans' as compared to 'Ariels', as Césaire signifies different types of reactions to colonialism in his play **A.**

**Tempest** (1992). It is a contention in this chapter or at least in this section on imperialism that the way imperialism defined itself is radically different from the way it operated. It follows from this that through coercion and violence, as a distinctive political logic of European imperialism and also as a political mechanism, people in the colonized parts of the world were forced to depend culturally on their colonizers as if they did not have their own culture.

History suggests to us that people cannot divest themselves of culture. Either they participate in their own culture or in other people's culture. It is argued by liberation theorists that oppressed people all over the world need to divest themselves of 'undue' Western cultural influences which are the products of colonial domination and exploitation. The word 'undue'

here is important in the sense that I am not suggesting that Africans and other culturally oppressed peoples should eradicate Western cultural influences wholesale for I believe that African cultures should borrow from Western cultures that which is beneficial for the development of African cultures. In other words, I am not here advocating the indiscriminate abandonment of Western culture for I believe, following Said's argument (op cit) that cultures not only do but also should borrow from each other if it makes an improvement in existing conditions.

If what can be said of African cultures can also be said of Western cultures, it seems to me that there is nothing essential about any particular or a given culture but rather that all cultures borrow from each other in a process of interactiveness. To lay the foundations for the argument in this chapter, I suggest that the struggle against colonialism did not end with the attainment of political independence, and indeed that the attainment of political independence was no more than the beginning of the end of colonialism. In support of this suggestion I refer to Said's distinction between physical or geographical decolonization which he regards as the primary area of resistance, and on the other hand, ideological decolonization which he regards as the primary area of resistance, and on the other hand, ideological decolonization has to do with the land and the elimination of the colonizers with the purpose of regaining the land. It is about the recovery of a geographical territory. Ideological resistance is the "charting of a cultural territory" as Said puts it (1993:252). Ideological or mental resistance, or so I argue, is part of the discourse of an African Renaissance, examined in Chapter Three of my dissertation. I believe that 'ideological or mental resistance' is what African scholars mean whenever they talk about divesting African



philosophical thinking of undue influences, decolonizing African literature and decolonizing the African mind.

Following on from this idea of 'ideological or mental resistance', the idea of Pan-Africanism may be regarded as a mental abstraction which has given rise to other abstractions such as an 'African Personality' (Nkrumah, 1961; Ki-Zerbo, 1962; Diop, 1962; Quaiison Sackey, 1963; Senghor, 1961; all in Mutiso, G. and Rohio S. (eds.), 1975:57-84), and an 'African mind' (Abraham, 1962). To expand on the latter concept: while there is some evidence to support, for instance, Abraham's contention that Akan and Zulu cultures share some fundamental characteristics (Ibid:112), this does not necessarily support the notion of an African 'essence'. I believe the main significance of Pan-Africanism lies in its more practical or concrete underpinning, that is, the idea of African unity. As an aspect of Pan-Africanist thought, a notion of African unity has a dual role in this regard. Initially it served as an inspiration to Africans seeking to resist colonialism and now in contemporary Africa it serves as a unifying symbol for all Africans to work together to shape their future.

### 2.1.2 Imperialist domination and cultural resistance

Said's theme of cultural and ideological imperialism which continues in spite of the defeat of geographical or physical imperialism is also to be found in two works of non-fiction by Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, namely **Decolonizing The Mind** (1986), and **Writers in Politics** (revised edition, 1997). Said's concept of a 'shattered community' (op cit) which refers to the effect of cultural imperialism on traditional societies, may be linked with Ngugi's thoughts on the subject. Said explains one of the tasks of resistance discourse as "to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial

system” (1993:252-253). In two chapters of his book, **Writers in Politics**, that is, ‘Culture in Crisis’ and ‘Learning from our ancestors: the intellectual legacy of Pan-Africanism’, Ngugi defines culture, examines culture in context of imperialism, and then goes on to discuss the ideas of some Pan-Africanist writers (such as George Padmore and William Du Bois) and how the ideas of these ancestors should be used by modern Africans to the best advantage of African peoples. I now shall explain on Ngugi’s argument.

In the above mentioned chapters, particularly in ‘Culture in Crisis’, Ngugi argues that culture is the product of a people’s history. According to my reading of this chapter, Ngugi argues that imperialist domination (which was also political and economic exploitation) was made possible by the domination of a people’s culture. When he talks about culture in a crisis he is referring to both colonial culture and resistance culture it provoked (1997:127). It seems to me that if one looks at this from a dialectical progression then colonial domination and hence cultural domination which followed, is ‘thesis’ and cultural resistance on the part of the oppressed is ‘antithesis’, while political independence from colonialism is ‘synthesis’. Then, as the dialectical method would have it, the process starts again. In this regard, the problem, according to Ngugi, is that Africa has emerged from colonialism into neo-colonialism with its economies and cultures still dominated by the West. As a result the African people are demanding a second independence from their internal dictators who are spokesmen for neo-imperialism (Ibid:128).

In ‘Learning from our ancestors, The intellectual legacy of Pan-Africanism’, Ngugi takes this argument further when he says that modern Africans have tended to turn a blind eye to the achievements and the gifts of their ancestors. Here he is referring to African unity at the

continental level and to Pan-Africanism at an international level (Ibid:142). He also argues that the emancipation of African people and its diasporic 'other half' was possible through unity because in unity there is strength. This unity was between continental Africans as well as Africans from the diaspora. Among these great intellectuals who had the dignity of Africans in mind were Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Nhamdi Azikiwe (Ibid).

Pan-Africanism came to the African continent through the liberation leaders who attended the Manchester Congress in 1945 (Ibid:142). Ngugi argues that the liberation of the continent from colonialism was made possible by the unity of these great African intellectual ancestors. He sees the idea of African unity as a gift to all African peoples. Yet he also believes that modern Africans have made a mockery of this gift. He argues that what we see in post-independence Africa is "the devaluation of these ideals of African unity and Pan Africanism, the devaluation of intellect and intellectual achievement and most all the devaluation of African lives and the devaluation of the gift of independence" (Ibid:144). Ngugi concludes his chapter by arguing that "I believe what was true then is even more true today. The historic about-turn can only come as the combined work of the African masses and their intellectual. And for this the question of African languages is primary" (Ibid:152).

Before this discussion can go forward, it is useful to outline the political content of the ideal of Pan Africanism as this assists an understanding of the two schools of thought mentioned above. Marable argues that behind the idea of Pan-Africanism is the idea that people of African descent all over the world share a common destiny. Their forced dispersal through the slave trade, their common oppression under colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean, and under Jim Crow segregation in the United States, through the exploitation of their labour

power under capitalism, and the denial of political rights, all created the same struggle. Their kinship was also cultural, social and historical, and “they found within themselves the genius and the grace of being which was denied them by the racist standards of the white world” (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/iraas/acl/html>). As one may readily see from this argument, it is tempting for Pan-Africanist thinkers to combine experience and ‘essence’ in order to try and reinforce African unity.

The perspective of Pan-Africanism was first advanced in the international context by Henry Sylvester Williams to Trinidad in the London conference of 1900. It is at this conference that William Du Bois made his prediction that “the problem of the twentieth century is going to be the problem of the color line”(Ibid). It was Du Bois who continued with the Pan-Africanist Congresses after the death of Sylvester Williams. The main objective of these gatherings was to create the context for black intellectuals, political leaders and reformers to challenge the prerogative and power of white colonialism (Ibid).

Thus, pan Africanism is not only a collection of resistance themes. It is also rooted in history and it has an instrumental dimension as a grand or meta-narrative in opposition to the meta-narrative of imperialism.

## **2.2 Themes Within the Grand Narrative of Pan-Africanism**

### **2.2.1 Pan Africanism and Nationalism**

I should start off by saying that these themes are many and varied, and that I have selected only those themes appropriate to the general trend of my dissertation. Much of the resistance against foreign domination was inspired by the ideal of Pan Africanism. Many Africans

sought Pan Africanism as their strategy of liberation and each nationalist struggle was part of a Pan African struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed people. In his article, 'Pan Africanism: Yesterday and Today', Dr. Manning Marable describes some of the issues raised by the 1945 Pan-Africanist Congress in Manchester. Black leaders from Africa and from all over the world came together in pursuit of the liberation of black peoples. In their manifesto, 'Challenge to the Colonial Powers', they declared:

We are determined to be free. We want the right to earn a decent living, the right to express our thoughts and emotions, to adopt and create forms of beauty. We demand for black African autonomy and independence.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/iraas/acl/html>

In his book, **The African Experience in Literature and Ideology** (1990), Abiola Irele makes a distinction and a link between Pan-Africanism and African nationalism. He argues that both Pan-Africanism and African nationalism have a common source in the historical and sociological context of colonial domination. Pan-Africanism was a global manifestation of localized struggles against colonialism and it was also a global expression of African nationalism. Pan-Africanism became associated with the concept of African unity which can be regarded as its ideological formulation (1990:117). It is not the purpose of this chapter to evaluate the successes and failures of the Pan-Africanist movement but I think it is worth mentioning that, as Irele puts it,

The emergence of territorial units having as their overall model the European nation-state, and equipped with such political and legal institutions as would enable them to function as such, represents the measure of success of nationalist agitation in Africa. This has been complicated by the fact that each

African state is a multinational state and African leaders have been more concerned with the political problems of ethnic relations in their countries and their efforts towards the promotion of unity at a territorial level. This has led to a situation where the question of realizing an effective form of continental unity has been marginalized by the new leaders (Ibid:117-118).

From this argument it seems that whereas nationalism and Pan-Africanism worked well together during the liberation struggle, the combination proved incompatible with the ambitions of post-independence African leaders. Therefore, Pan-Africanism has had to evolve to a new level in order to survive as an ideology of African liberation.

### **2.2.2 The new Pan-Africanism**

The new Pan-Africanism which has evolved from the Pan-Africanism of the early liberation struggles has a new context within to evolve. This context contains pressures not really known to earlier Pan-Africanists. From these pressures, I believe, new concepts of African unity and identity have also evolved.

#### **2.2.2.1 Pressures of 'globalization'**

What is the relevance of Pan Africanism in the present age of globalization? In order to argue the case of Pan-Africanism in the modern world, I argue following Marable that Pan-Africanism needs to revise its role in order to cope and address the challenges posed by globalization. It is argued that the future of Pan-Africanism as a strategy for postcolonial liberation depends upon the extent to which people from a wide spectrum of social categories - such as youth, workers, political organizers, trade unionists, women activists and

intellectuals - can be brought together to stand behind a common vision of black empowerment at a global level (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/iraas/acl/html>). Accordingly, a new Pan-Africanism should play a role in transforming gender relations and eliminating sexism in the world in all its forms, benign and malignant. Malignant sexism should be addressed urgently because it subjects women to social, economic and political exploitation as well as sexual manipulation. It must do this by challenging the structures of patriarchy within black communities and black organizations, creating a more egalitarian relationship between women and men. So long as the oppression of women is tolerated within the black world, the liberation of black people will never be a success (Ibid). Extending the argument, Marable also asserts that Pan-Africanism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must take a progressive stand on environmental issues and the state of the world's ecology. It must address the utilization of natural resources of the world, reliance on petro-chemicals and carbon based technologies which foul the air and pollute water, and the storage of toxic wastes which shorten the lives of children. He notes that in the United States, three fifths of all toxic waste dumps are found within a twenty five mile radius of Black or Hispanic communities. (I would add that this status of toxic dustbin of the West can be seen also in a number of African states whose leaders seem willing to endanger people's health by neglecting anti-pollution measures and therefore cutting costs of multi-national companies, for example, Shell in Nigeria and the battle of the Ogoni people to survive their polluted environment). The new pan-Africanism, Marable argues, must try to address the injustices of the present by devising coalition strategies and creating a dialogue with environmental organizations and green political parties thereby linking the struggle against racism to a safe, clean environment. There is a need for a new and fully inclusive Pan-Africanism which defines itself in terms of its politics and social

vision not in biological, genetic, or racial categories. At the same time, the struggle against racism must be fought on a global, international level (Ibid).

#### **2.2.2.2 Pressures of neo-imperialism**

The end of imperialism in areas of the world which once were colonized has led to a situation in many cases where these countries depend financially or economically on their erstwhile colonizers. African countries have jumped from imperialism to neo-colonialism given the fact that their economies and even cultures are still dominated by the West. It seems appropriate to argue that what these countries have achieved so far is political independence but not economic and culture independence. How does neo-imperialism manifest itself? I would argue that the discourse of development is one of the ways in which the countries of the Third World experience neo-imperialism. I would take South Africa as a test case of neo-imperialism by looking at its macroeconomic strategy. Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). This shall be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). I would argue that through international development agencies like the World bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United States and donor countries in Europe have been able to control former colonies imposing certain political packages as conditionalities for development aid. Implementing procedures of liberal democracy is an aspect of conditionality, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Yet it seems as if political conditionalities are being imposed without necessarily taking into account objective realities of poverty and underdevelopment, not to mention priorities and values of African cultures. In its relative lack of consideration for objective realities in Africa and other former colonized territories, neocolonialism is very much like its ancestor, colonialism. I would argue that it is for this reason that many people in Africa are calling for new democratic dispensations



which, while protecting their fundamental human and civil rights, will also put bread on the table thanks to emphasis on economic and social rights. It follows from this that the failure of liberal democracy in Africa to deliver what a majority of people need, that is, relief from conditions of chronic poverty and disempowerment, is not least due to the failure of the United States and the West to take into account African socio-economic and cultural contexts. It is for these reasons that unity among African states is more necessary than ever before. Without unity, African leaders and peoples make easy pickings for neo-imperialist exploiters.

### 2.2.3 African languages and cultures

Having looked at some of the pressures which a new Pan-Africanism urgently needs to address in order to provide more impetus to the imperative of African unity, I now want to enlarge on another theme within the grand narrative of Pan-Africanism. I should mention that this theme also doubles as an on-going solution to the problematic of African disunity. It is convincingly argued by Ngugi, who, as mentioned above, believes that the development of indigenous African languages is central to the cultural rebirth of Africa, in **Decolonizing the Mind** (1986) a book in which he registers his farewell to English as a vehicle for writing.

When writing about the central importance of language within culture, Ngugi argues that,

The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief, in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves

from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own (1986:3).

Having reiterated the linguistic emphasis in Pan-Africanist cultural discourse, I now turn to the contribution made by leaders of progressive national cultures to the forward looking aspects of Pan-Africanism.

#### **2.2.4 Armed resistance and national cultures**

Both Franz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, famous theorists and practitioners of liberation, assert that it is necessary to have a progressive revolutionary culture to form an inclusive, dynamic African identity. Fanon in particular was not an admirer of ethnophilosophies like Negritude which he regarded as static, backward looking, or in the final analysis the resort of collaborators with imperialism. Instead he gave arguments in support of national culture, and the violence which he believed necessary to liberate colonized minds.

It so happens that when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife- or at least he makes sure that it is within reach. The violence with which white values are affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him. In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period

of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up (1963:33-34).

This quotation was taken from Fanon's chapter, 'Concerning violence' in his book **The Wretched of the Earth**, in which he aims to show that violence begets violence and that violence has cathartic effects. In affirming his values the native does not have to adopt a begging, compromising or hat-in-hand approach for that is not what the white man did when imposing his values on the native. Fanon takes this argument further in his chapter, 'On National Culture'. He argues that, "to fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation" (Ibid:187). According to Fanon, the struggle for liberation or revolution is a cultural phenomenon. When the people take up arms to liberate themselves they do not leave culture behind during the conflict. In short, the national struggle is an expression of culture (Ibid).

Amilcar Cabral in his address, **National Liberation and Culture**, describes how foreign domination is imposed and maintained. He also defines the value of culture as a factor of resistance to foreign domination. Culture, according to Cabral is a valuable asset in resisting foreign domination. He asserts that it is not possible to reconcile foreign domination in its economic as well as political form with the cultural personality of the dominated people. He asserts that, "To take up arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize, to paralyze, its cultural life" (in Langley, 1979:703). When people take up arms to fight against foreign intrusion they want to show that they have their own history and culture which was denied by the imperialists. In Cabral's words:

National liberation is the phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected (Ibid:694).

In summing up the ideas of Ngugi and Fanon and Cabral regarding the place of culture (in Ngugi's case, emphasizing language) within resistance to imperialism, it may be said that what links the three writers is an idea of culture as dynamic and progressive. Fanon rejects Leopold Senghor's theory of Negritude on the grounds that it looks backward instead of forward.

To reiterate, at the beginning of this chapter, I distinguished between two schools of thought within the intellectual discourse of Pan Africanism, that is, essentialist and non-essentialist (experience) schools. The former argues that Africans share an essence, that there is something inherently essentialist about Africans. The latter argues that Africans share with each other and other people on other continents a history of oppression and of resistance to oppression. Fanon, Cabral and Ngugi can be said to belong to this school of thought because if culture is dynamic, changing and influenced by other cultures, so are identities. For instance, I think the important argument in the **Wretched of the Earth** which supports this view is when Fanon argues that the African struggle against oppression should be part of a universal struggle of the oppressed people around the world.

As we have seen, Fanon believes that culture should look forwards, not backwards. In other words, a national culture should be progressive, not regressive. It would seem, I argue, that the notion of a fixed and enduring African 'essence' is not compatible with ideas of vigorous, dynamic, evolving national cultures. I argue that if Pan Africanism is to adapt to rapidly changing global context, it probably should ally itself with inclusive, experience based concept of identity.

It is worth noting that William Abraham who argues for the existence of an 'African mind' nevertheless states, "I wish to put forward culture as that knock-down rhetoric by which political objectives are sold" (1962:37). This infers that Abraham (whose sponsor at the time was President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah) sees the notion of 'essence' in a political rather than in a metaphysical way. Put in another way, 'essence' is not so much the 'truth' of Pan Africanism but it is an instrument to build African unity. Or so Abraham, according to my reading of him, seems to suggest. I think it is relevant to pursue this line of inquiry, that is, by locating Pan Africanism in its historical context and looking at its function as a counter-narrative to what Said calls "imperialism's regime of truth" (1993:324). I shall revisit this argument later on when I discuss the notion of 'strategic essentialism'.

### 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter about Pan-Africanism has been preoccupied with issues of pedigree or lineage of 'African identity'. I have attempted to trace the historical roots of the idea of Pan-Africanism in order to connect it with 'an African renaissance' which, according to my argument, is nothing but the most recent of many discourses about African identity. I have argued that the intellectual development of the idea of Pan-Africanism was made possible and necessary, and

still is, by the political circumstances in which oppressed people find themselves. In the next chapter (on the African renaissance) my intention is to demonstrate the current significance of Pan-Africanism discourse as it relates to post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in identity construction. Although I have argued in this chapter that Pan-Africanism is an abstraction which has given rise to other abstractions like 'African personality' and 'African mind' and 'Negritude', I also want to argue that there is a sense in which pan-Africanism and hence aspects of African unity is a grounded reality. The existence of regional organizations like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Corporation (SADAC) and other organizations of this nature, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) bears testimony to this fact. But I also want to argue that as long as Pan-Africanist discourse is made by intellectuals who do not take the trouble to spread the message of African unity among the people, it cannot and will not be a grounded reality. I also think that the same criticism can be made of the notion of 'an African renaissance' which is driven by political and intellectual elites.

## Chapter Three

### African Identity and 'an African Renaissance': South African Issues

#### 3.1 Introduction: A 'Rainbow Nation'?

South Africa's transition from a white minority regime, justifying exclusive and oppressive rule in the name of apartheid or "separate development", to a majority democracy which contains a constitution arguably the most liberal of constitutions worldwide, has been accompanied by a quest for a new national identity, symbolised by the phrase (originally coined in this context by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) 'rainbow nation'. The national euphoria which accompanied the phrase proved, however, short-lived. South Africans are having to face the hard and divisive realities of the apartheid legacy. As Baines puts it:

The construction of a white South African identity was predicated on the control of the apparatus of state and privileged access to resources by the white minority. This white minority consists of two ethnic groups of European origin (English and Afrikaans) both of whom defined themselves primarily in contradistinction to the "other", the indigenous population. But they also distinguished themselves from each other through adopting a different standpoint to the "other". The narrative of "whiteness" which informed the construction of white identity meant that race became a salient social category in South Africa.

<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP798gb.html>

Since the creation of the South African 'separate development' state, there have been numerous efforts at 'whites only' nation-building. In the apartheid era successive nationalist governments promoted an exclusive Afrikaner ethnic nationalism, as well as broader white

nationalism. As Baines argues, the ideologies of the nationalist party propagated a particular vision of South Africa as a multi-racial society.

They justified separate development policies in terms of primordially-conceived ethnic differences. This had the effect of collapsing individual ethnicities into white and black, us and them. This promoting of racial consciousness over other significant cultural markers was clearly a narrowly defined form of nation building. Apartheid effectively created two nations; one white, the other black. South Africa became two political communities in a single national territory (Ibid).

This colourful 'rainbow' had a counterpart in the notion of 'renaissance' developed by Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President of South Africa (at that time). Unlike 'rainbow', the notion of an 'African renaissance' has persisted, at any rate among academics and other intellectuals and writers. Incorporated in Renaissance discourse as articulated by Mbeki are ideas about what it means to be African. His speech 'I am an African' (8 May 1996) touches on issues of identity and culture which have long informed other African debates. I shall now examine Mbeki's speech in terms of its identity and culture content.

### **3.2 Thabo Mbeki: 'I am an African'**

It is worth stating from the outset that Mbeki's conceptualization of what it means to be African is in line with the African National Congress's policy of non-racialism and a non-sexist society. This is implied in his argument when he proclaims that,

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our



race, colour, gender or historical origins. It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white (1998:34).

Mbeki's perspective on identity formation reflects the earlier concern (Fanon and Azikiwe, op cit) with human agency, that is, the power of the human will to throw off a colonially imposed identity and reclaim one's Africanness, as Mbeki puts it, with pride. However, the objective realities of the South African context, that is, cleavages between races, religions, genders and cultures, mean that he then must adopt a kind of cross-cutting cleavage. This I believe to be the primary social purpose of an idea of 'African renaissance' in a South African context. I see it as an attempt to create a sense of social unity and purpose in the hopes that it will overcome the fixed and pre-given identities and identity conflict which previously characterized South African political and cultural discourse. Like the 'rainbow nation', it is an abstraction which, it is hoped, will help to create a society which is both more united and more tolerant (of differences). Therefore, I argue that the social purpose of an African renaissance is to come up with an inclusive identity, in that it includes all races, cultures and religions.

In the debate which has developed since Mbeki first came up with his notion of an 'African renaissance', many points of view on the question of 'who is an African?' have been put forward and argued, hence it is my contention that if Mbeki's idea is to be accepted by 'Africans' it must take into account competing views on what it means to be an African. Some scholars and journalists applaud Mbeki's ideas about what constitutes a Renaissance identity in Africa, others criticise him for vagueness and over-inclusiveness. For instance, as

Professor Prah argues, if everyone can be an African, then no-one is an African (in Makgoba, 1999:40).

### 3.3 Shared Identities: Essences or Experiences?

While Mbeki's understanding of what it is to be an African seems abstract, metaphysical, even obscure, there are no intimations of 'essence' to be found in his speech (op cit). Put differently, one may ask: how useful is an abstract definition if Africans are caught up in hard realities like poverty, land hunger and so forth? - but one cannot really call him an essentialist or an ethnophilosopher. However, this is not true of all the people who have adopted some of his notions which they have related to the apartheid struggle. For instance, Dr. Xolela Mangcu, Director of the Steve Biko Foundation, discusses the question of African identity as follows:

We should challenge the dictionary based, and therefore static, definitions of who is an African that have come from some black scholars. Each need a definition that evolves and expresses our changing circumstances, aspirations and position in the world. It is that improvisational approach to identity that made it possible for Biko and his Black Consciousness comrades to redefine blackness to include coloureds and Indians. That is why Malcom X came back from Mecca a changed man - less essentialistic about the white man as the "devil". Just as we speak of Arabian Africans like Colonel Moamar Gadaffi, we should be able to talk of Jewish-Africans or Italian Africans, or whatever. Improvisation, adaptation, hospitality, generosity and inclusion are at the heart of the African personality: ubuntu (in the Mail and Guardian, October 1999).

In the text of the newspaper article quoted above, there is a logical anomaly in as much as Dr. Mangcu first gives a non-essentialist analysis of identity, that is, he suggests that definitions should evolve and express changing circumstances. This clearly infers that African identity is not a frozen entity, it is not pre-constituted and pre-given, and as a result it is subject to change. However, he subsequently implies that to be African is to have certain fixed qualities (hospitality, generosity and so on) and he rounds it off by referring to 'an African personality'. One may notice a conceptual contradiction in as much as his argument in both essentialist and non-essentialist.

I argue that it is difficult for supporter of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) to completely give up on the idea of an African essence, for it was the idea which informed much of the apartheid struggle in its role as antithesis to the thesis of Afrikaner (white in general) identity. In order to grasp the essentialist implications in some of the current discourse about 'African Renaissance' and 'African identity', it is necessary to go back to 'deep structure', that is, roots of liberation struggle specific to South Africans.

### **3.4 Culture and Identity Discourse in Apartheid South Africa**

I shall now discuss the cultural and political movements which originated in the apartheid state during resistance to white domination and oppression. Like other parts of Africa, an aspect of resistance was redefining questions of identity and culture in terms that were African, not European. The movements which I discuss below played a big part in 'decolonizing the mind'. I believe that these movements constitute the South African ancestry of an 'African Renaissance'. I shall begin with the broad movement known as Black Consciousness and led by Steve Biko. It was Biko's intention that the Black Consciousness

Movement should express the broad consensus between and within the various liberation movements, about what it means to be African. As the discussion goes forward, it should become evident that the South African resistance and liberation scenario, including contradictions and tensions between notions of 'essence' and notions of 'experience' in identity construction, has much in common with resistance and liberation scenarios in other parts of Africa.

#### **3.4.1 The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)**

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) can be regarded as the parent of the African Renaissance project in South Africa. To understand this we need to ask ourselves one significant question: What was the Black Consciousness Movement and what were its ideological underpinnings? It is also my contention that the context from which the BCM emerged is important. It is arguable that the Black Consciousness Movement was the product of apartheid and a reaction against it, for instance much like Negritude which was the product of the French assimilationist doctrine and a reaction against it. The 1972 Policy Manifesto of the South African Students Organization (SASO) defines Black Consciousness as an attitude of mind, a way of life whose basic tenet is that the black people must reject all value systems that seek to make them a foreigner in their country of birth and reduce their basic human dignity. The concept of Black Consciousness therefore implies an awareness of and pride in their blackness by black people and implies that black people should and must appreciate their value as human beings. Black Consciousness also means that black people should be aware of the significance and importance of their own value systems, that is, their socio-economic, political and cultural values. Implied in this appreciation of their value systems is the need to reject those foreign, alien values that were forced down black people's throats as

part of the oppressor's logic of maintaining and perpetrating his brutal system of exploitation and emasculation (Nengwekhulu in Cohen and Daniel, 1981:198).

According to Nengwekhulu, the essence of this search for indigenous value systems is the need to redefine ourselves and our value systems which are today engulfed in the foreign, alien, exploitative and oppressive values which have been imposed upon black people, both physically and psychologically, by our oppressors in order to make us malleable to subjugation. Another significant aspect of Black Consciousness is the call for cohesive group solidarity, that is, black solidarity. The philosophy of Black Consciousness therefore means group pride and determination by black people in South Africa to rise together from the death-bed of oppression and exploitation. At the heart of Black Consciousness is also the realization by blacks that the most potent and effective weapon of oppression and exploitation in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. In South Africa the oppressor has attempted to twist and manipulate our minds to make us mentally and psychologically pliable to his exploitation and manipulation (Ibid:198).

Black Consciousness therefore calls for a psychological revolution in the black community; this will be the revolution which is directed towards the elimination of all stereotypes by blacks about themselves, and one which is directed towards the complete eradication of the slave mentality and feelings of inadequacy characteristic of an oppressed and exploited society. The basic logic inherent in black consciousness is that no people can wage a meaningful war of liberation unless and until they have effectively eradicated their slave mentality and accepted themselves as full human beings who have a role to play in their own

salvation. Black Consciousness therefore forces black people to see themselves as full human beings, complete, full and total in themselves, and not as extensions of others (Ibid).

What is the connection between BCM conceptions of liberated African identity and a notion of 'essence'? Biko himself was much given to using essentialist terms such as 'the African culture', 'the African', 'the Westerner's culture', 'the African society', 'the African heritage' (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1996:40-47). It is noteworthy that he also talks of "the contempt that the 'superior' culture shows towards the indigenous culture' (Ibid:41). It is for this reason that I argue that a degree of essentialism may seem inevitable if one is battling against hostile identity construction which is itself essentialist, speaking of inherent racial and genetic characteristics, and so on. Taking a dialectical view, thesis and antithesis, I argue, construct each other in this essentialist way. If the synthesis ('African Renaissance') contains an essentialist element, it is not to be wondered at.

#### **3.4.2 The Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO)**

The origins of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) can be traced to the formation of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) in 1944. The ANCYL felt that Africans should reject foreign leadership and it was opposed to discrimination against any minority, but argued that Africans should not rely on others to help them. It also rejected the class analysis of South African society. According to ANCYL Africans were oppressed as a people not as a class. The ANCYL argued that only African nationalism or Africanism can save the African people (Lodge in Hill and Warwick, 1977:95). The ANCYL can be regarded as a radical branch of the African National Congress. It was the adoption of the

Freedom Charter by the ANC leadership which led to the secession of Africanists from the organization. The Freedom Charter was adopted after the formation of the Congress alliance which included Indians and Coloureds.

The Africanists regarded this act as a betrayal of the principle of Nationalism and self-reliance which the ANCYL advanced. The Charter was attacked by the Africanists who felt that it over-emphasized the interests of other groups in a future South Africa. The Africanists questioned the 'multiracialism' of the Freedom Charter. One of the popular claims of the Freedom Charter is that South Africa belongs to all who live in it black or white.

Although the Pan Africanist Congress has been criticized and portrayed as racist and prejudiced against other groups in South African society even in a post-apartheid South Africa, I want to argue here that it was the first organization to advocate the policy of non-racialism in South African politics long before the African National Congress embraced non-racialism. Where does the PAC stand on the issue of non-racialism and what does Africanism mean to these people? In its manifesto, the PAC defines Africanism as referring to the people who are born and live in Africa, people who have their roots in Africa and, most importantly, people who have a proud sense of belonging to South Africa. Africanism and non-racialism have always been central to PAC ideology. Some might find a contradiction and an irony that a party which until recently was associated with such slogans as 'One settler, one bullet' could suddenly advocate non-racialism. The fact of the matter, or so spokes people say, is that the PAC was the original author of non-racialism. When other organizations were still preaching multi-racialism, the PAC rejected the concept outright because of its racial overtones and the beliefs of the PAC in one human race. The PAC believes that language and cultural diversity

are a blessing and a rich gift to celebrate within a non-racial state ([www.paca.org.za/stand/nonrace.htm](http://www.paca.org.za/stand/nonrace.htm)). Thus, it seems that to the PAC, African identity is somewhat inclusive and 'essence' does not play a big part. The Azanian People's organization, on the other hand, is a race oriented political organization which represents the interests of black people in South Africa. The Azanian People's organization was formed after the apartheid government banned the liberation movements, the African National Congress (ANC); Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). It was formed to carry on the work of the liberation after the government banned a host of Black Consciousness organizations in 1977. The philosophy of Black Consciousness Movement is associated with AZAPO and with Steve Bantu Biko in particular. It was started in 1978 with Steve Biko as its proponent after the ANC and the PAC were banned in 1960. It is important to explain the political circumstances which led to the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement. Through apartheid white Western culture was presented as good and that of the oppressed people as barbaric. History became relevant in as much as it reflected white people. These were the political circumstances under which the Black Consciousness Movement was formed ([www.azapo.org.za/biko.htm](http://www.azapo.org.za/biko.htm)).

### **3.4.3 The African National Congress (ANC) and 'non-racialism'**

In her article, "The Rainbow Against the African Sky or African Hegemony in a Multi-cultural Context?" Filatova examines the African National Congress's discussion document, 'Nation-Formation and Nation-Building' which deals with such crucial issues for South Africa as the nationality question and the nature of the nation. According to Filatova,

The document re-affirms the ANC's non-racial stance and its allegiance to the policy of deracialising South African society. At the same time it reiterates and stresses the party's adherence to its thesis that "the liberation of black



people in general and Africans in particular should be the main content of the National Democratic Revolution - which according to the ANC thinking, South Africa is going through now (1997:47).

The commitment of the African National Congress to the policy of non-racialism can also be traced to the adoption of the Freedom Charter in the 1950s. The Freedom Charter included a clause pertaining to nationhood in which it was stipulated that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White" and "all people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs" - stress cultural diversity under the future democratic political dispensation (Ibid).

Robert Price looks at South Africa's political transition from an international perspective arguing that South Africa political transition from an apartheid based authoritarian system to democracy has been a misnomer in this time and age when so many political transitions have been marked by intense strife over ascriptive identities. He argues that the emphasis on racial reconciliation that has characterized the South Africa political transition has surprised many observers. He cites a quite widely made prediction that post-apartheid South African politics would be marked by a deep racial political cleavage. This prediction was supported by an argument that South Africa's long history of white supremacy and racial oppression seemed to make inevitable a politics of race mobilization, antagonism, and violent conflict, once the political system was open to participation by the African majority. According to Price, "the examples of Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and Bosnia were frequently advanced as a kind of glimpse into South Africa's likely future" (1997:149).

Price also asserts that the African National Congress had nothing to lose by putting more emphasis on race as opposed to non-racialism. Therefore, he asks what motivated the African National Congress to adopt the principle of non-racialism? He argues that the African National Congress, which he describes as the leading element of the movement for African liberation in South Africa, eschewed a strategy that would have built electoral support on the basis of racial solidarity among the country's 75% black (African) population, and instead defined itself explicitly in universalistic terms, vociferously espousing a non-racial political orientation. According to Price,

Since the election of 1994, the political ethos pushed by the ANC, the country's dominant political organization, has been non-ethnic and non-racial. Its leadership has missed few opportunities to project in its speech, symbols, and political ritual the idea of an inclusive and universalistic South African identity; an identity which encompasses but, in the political arena, eclipses ethnically and racially defined memberships (Ibid:150).

Price goes on to point out that the ANC's emphasis on non-racialism does not preclude the existence of racial animosities. Obviously, asserts Price, many whites continue to hold racist attitudes, and the history of white minority rule in South Africa has undoubtedly left a legacy of deep anger and racial resentment among many black South Africans. He concludes that it seems Mamphela Ramphele was right when she observed that, "there is a lot of tension, anger and bewilderment underneath the multi-racial ethos which characterizes many of the organs of civil society" (Ibid).

From the above discussion, it seems as if the ANC's decision not to play the race card surprised many observers and put a new spin on identity discourse in South Africa. This helps to explain why Mbeki's Renaissance discourse posits an inclusive African identity.

### **3.5 Post-apartheid Identity Discourse**

Here I shall briefly introduce the topic by referring to some general themes. Then I shall narrow it down to sub-topics within the discourse.

Prah seems to agree with non-racialism, that African identity could not be defined in terms of race, citizenship or commitment to the continent but he puts more emphasis on culture as an important yardstick in defining who is African. He refers to a school of thought in South Africa which argues that commitment should be used as a yardstick when defining who is African. Questioning commitment as the yardstick, Prah asks: what is the commitment and how is it to be measured? For Prah, culture and history and attachment to these two concepts as well as consciousness of identity are criteria for defining an African. He sums up by saying that Africans are people whose origins, cultures and history derive from the African continent (in Makgoba, 1999:38-39). I think it is also important to examine Prah's conceptualisation of culture because it informs his views on the issue of African identity. In line with non-essentialism, he argues that culture is not static but it is dynamic and changing. Cultures are not stagnant or fixed entities but cultural change is an abiding feature of all societies and cultures. Each culture is not immune from influence of other cultures. Diffusion, infusion and mixing is the substance of the historical process. African culture like all other cultures is influenced by other cultures. The same can be said of African identity that it is not static but changing and dynamic. He points out that the fact that most South

Africans or people of African historical and cultural descent are black is only one characteristic, a bonus which generalizes and typifies Africans. Most Africans are black but not all blacks have African cultural and historical roots (Ibid).

Referring to Prah's criticism of citizenship as a yardstick of identity definition: he argues that there are many people in Africa who are not Africans and who do not regard themselves as Africans. His argument against an over-inclusive definition is (as mentioned above) that if anybody is an African, then nobody is an African. Being African should not be equated with citizenship. The mere fact that one is a citizen of a state in Africa does not make one an African. Interestingly, another point he emphasizes is being African is not simply a reaction to the history of oppression. He concedes that this is part of the equation but argues that there is more to African identity than a reaction to oppression (Ibid:40-41).

In reviewing Prah's argument on the issue of African identity it is evident that he does not allow for an African 'essence'. On the other hand, he stipulates that shared experience (here he means oppression) is a necessary but not sufficient condition of African-ness. In Prah's thesis, then, some light is thrown on the question of identity, but the question is not resolved. Nor can it be, given his definition of culture and identity formation as on-going and dynamic. It seems that identities, like the cultures which shape them, are always growing and changing.

I now move on to the role of intellectuals, bearing in mind Mamdani's assertion that intellectual production is crucial in the process of forming and changing identities (1998:6).

### 3.5.1 African renaissance and the role of intellectuals

Are there African intellectuals capable of driving an African renaissance forward? Is there an intellectual environment conducive to the production of such intellectuals? Can African intellectuals be trusted to drive the rebirth of Africa? These are a few of the questions asked by Mahmood Mamdani in a paper entitled 'There can be no African renaissance without an Africa focused intelligentsia' (in Makgoba, 1999). For this section I draw on Mamdani's highly relevant comments.

Mamdani argues that every Renaissance is first and foremost a reawakening of thought which, in Africa's case, means decolonizing the mind. This is the reason why the driving force of every renaissance is the intelligentsia for they have the right tools available to them. He defines the term 'intelligentsia' as including "all those who drive forward creative thought and frame debate, whether in the arts or culture, whether in philosophical or social thought" (Ibid:130). While recognizing and acknowledging the fact that intellectuals are central to the process of identity formation, Mamdani notes that the number of intellectuals in South Africa is very limited. He attributes this fact to the system of education under apartheid. He argues that academic institutions like universities and technikons played a significant role in the distortion of intellectual production. White universities were hostile to Africa focused thought and the universities which were established to accommodate black students were not conducive to intellectual development. On the contrary, black universities coming out of apartheid were "the intellectual counterparts of Bantustans. They were meant to contain creativity rather than to promote it. They were designed to function more as detention centers for black intellectuals rather than as centers that would nourish intellectual thought" (Ibid:131).

Mamdani sums up by making four key points:

- There can be no renaissance without an intelligentsia to drive it.
- An African renaissance requires an African focused intelligentsia to drive it.
- South Africa lacks an Africa focused intelligentsia in critical numbers. It lacks them because the institutional apparatus of learning in South Africa continues to be hostile to Africa focused thought. The critical barrier to de-racialization in social thought is institutional.
- There is need to underline the key lesson of the postcolonial academy in equatorial Africa: it is possible to change the institutional context of knowledge production through state action (Ibid:134).

To round off, Mamdani makes the point that in the above, South Africa has much to learn from the rest of Africa. I think the most important point he makes in regards identity is that I was struck by the link between negative images of self amongst the black intellectuals I met and their negative notion of Africa” (Ibid:127). He seems to suggest that South African intellectuals need to construct for themselves a positive idea of ‘Africa’ and ‘African’ in order to advance forward from apartheid constructed definitions.

### **3.5.2 Ethnic conflicts and civil wars**

While Mamdani looks at positive ideas of what it is to be African, Prah is concerned about negative effects of civil wars and ethnic conflicts in Africa. These are postcolonial realities which endanger, even negate the viability of Renaissance discourse. He believes that it is futile to hope for a renaissance in the absence of peaceful coexistence between groups on the continent. He argues that modern wars in Africa began as resistance to colonialism, of these,

the worst and most disruptive took place in settler colonies. A tragic irony of the fight to expel colonialism from Africa is the extent to which liberation wars accustomed Africans to violent solutions. Prah notes this as a particularly persistent colonial legacy, that is, how easily states and opposition movements resort to violence instead of seeking legal, constitutional and peaceful methods of resolving disputes or changing leaders and governments. Another factor Prah notes which contributes to postcolonial disorder and is directly attributable to colonialism is the artificial nature of modern state boundaries. Among the numerous cases he cites are ethnic conflicts and civil wars in Congo, Somalia and Sudan. Yet even though many postcolonial conflicts can be attributed to the legacy of colonialism, Prah argues it is counter-productive for Africans to constantly look at their colonial past. While it is true that the colonial past is the source of many postcolonial problems, it is unrealistic to expect altruism and recompense from former imperial powers. Africans themselves must take responsibility or 'grasp the nettle'. By taking responsibility for wars or violent conflict Africans will enable and own a renaissance. To Prah it is very important that Africans create and sustain their own forward movement without looking back to the past (in Makgoba, 1999:46-47).

### **3.5.3 Race identity?**

An aspect of identity discourse in post-apartheid South Africa is the question of if whites are Africans or if they are white settlers or their descendants who have South African citizenship. The implication of the second argument is that skin-colour and therefore race - defines Africanness. But it is not only skin colour which defines race, it is also facial features. Let us remember that there are at least three so-called 'black' race groups in Africa. Arabs are in race terms Hamitic, not Bantu, and are therefore excluded. This rules out most of North

Africa. It also places a question mark about the Horn of Africa, many of whose inhabitants are of Nilotic racial origin. It should also be born in mind that the Tutsi people of Rwanda and Burundi are deemed to be more Nilotic than Bantu in physical appearance, and that the alleged racial differences were added to the genocidal conflagration. The question arises: is it not dangerous to define African-ness in terms of racial characteristics which include not only skin colour but also facial features, especially if one thinks back to Prah's argument that there can be no renaissance without peaceful co-existence?

Following the arguments described above, it is clear that the identity issues is an important aspect of African unity, and thus ties in with Pan Africanist discourse. The Pan Africanist ideal is premised on the notion that the emancipation, development and prosperity of people of African descent can be achieved only through the unity of the people. I conclude that a united Africa in spite of the poverty and other problems that Africans face today would immediately be a force in world affairs to be treated with respect and equality. An Africa that is divided along ethnic and other lines would forever be at the mercy of external power and influence.

### **3.6 African Renaissance?**

In a journal article entitled, 'An African Renaissance: Could it be realised?' another argument which directly addresses the nature and content of obstacles in the path of Renaissance can be found. The author, Teffo asks,

Is there an African Renaissance (rebirth) in the making? Has Africa experienced a recrudescence and efflorescence of culture? (Culture in this



context includes the economic, political and social components of society as a whole)” (1997:19).

In answering the question he argues that many would say no. They would point to the current crisis in Africa which manifests itself in civil wars, ethnic cleansing (Rwanda and Burundi), refugees, famine, unemployment, poverty and so forth. He further contends that attempts made by the current leadership to reverse the situation seem to have deepened the crisis. The IMF and the World bank ‘structural adjustment’ programmes which aim at resolving the crisis have entrenched imperialist control of Africa. The Bretton Woods institutions are controlled by the United States and its Western allies. He also argues that the current leadership has inadvertently largely collaborated with United States and European ruling circles in the re-colonization of Africa. It would seem that the African renaissance amounts to copying the United States and her allies. The African Renaissance, he argues, should be Afrocentric in its focus, scope and operation. “Its main objective, as a movement, should be the creation of an awareness or consciousness, or a concept of Africa as a center and the starting point of reference, research and study in Afro-humanisation of the African world and its resources” (Ibid:19-20).

Expanding this argument, Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko distinguish between two interpretations of the African Renaissance: the globalist versus the Africanist approach. They explain that the globalist interpretation links South Africa’s economic interests to Africa through the logic of globalization. According to this school of thought, economic globalization will erode the power of authoritarian governments to ‘free’ bedevilled polities from the restrictions of ideologically based control and the resulting conflict. On this

reading, South Africa's African renaissance is anchored in a chain of economies which, with time, might become the African equivalent of the Asian Tigers. According to Vale and Maseko, Mbeki's aides have favoured this interpretation by suggesting that the advent of the East Asia economic miracle is one of the most important socio-economic developments of the twentieth century. They further argue that,

The globalist interpretation of the African renaissance has been enthusiastically embraced by monied elites (from across the racial spectrum) in South Africa who understand modernization in terms of the generation of wealth, and who look towards a world in which trade and global competitiveness are as important as the political dimensions of diplomacy (Vale and Maseko, 1998).

The Africanist interpretation on the other hand perceives globalist outcomes as amounting to nothing more than an externally driven consumerist movement that will diminish Africans, perpetuating a scenario in which Africans continue to be valued only for an ability to absorb and popularize foreign ideas, trinkets and junk. Africanist's primary aim is to lay to rest the image of the perpetually dancing, skin-clad African who is always smiling through ridicule and pain. They are intent on developing conditions that will help Africans contribute meaningfully to rescuing the world from barbarism that masquerades as civilization. From the text of Vale and Maseko's depiction of the Africanist position, one can draw an ironic similarity with the early colonial era of missionaries and traders, offering Africans baubles and trinkets in exchange for land. This reinforces a degrading perception of Africa by Europe, or so Africanists argue.

A recent publication by the Africa Institution of South Africa, **Problematising the African Renaissance** (2000) seems to shed a new light on some of the issues discussed above. In the chapter, 'The South African African Renaissance Debate', Maloka revises and expands the two schools described by Vale and Maseko. He argues in favour of defining three perspectives, that is, globalist, Pan Africanist and culturalist, while acknowledging the link across these perspectives. According to Maloka, the globalist perspective is associated with Mbeki and the African National Congress (ANC). The emphasis is here two-fold. On the one hand, the emphasis is on the need for economic and political renewal on the continent, and on the other hand, on the need for the transformation of the world political and economic order, including its institutions. The ANC's 'Developing Strategic Perspectives on South African Foreign Policy' discussion document of 1997 bears testimony to this, and so does the ANC's 'Strategy and Tactics' document (Maloka and le Roux, 2000:3-4). Maloka goes on to detail the ANC's 'Developing Strategic Perspectives on South African Foreign Policy' discussion of 1997 which identified the following as the key elements of an 'African Renaissance':

- The recovery of the African continent as a whole.
- The establishment of political democracy on the continent.
- The need to break neo-colonial relations between Africa and the world's economic powers.
- The mobilisation of the peoples of Africa to take their own destiny into their own hands thus preventing the continent from being seen as a place for the attainment of the geo-political and strategic interests of the world's most powerful countries.
- The need for fast development of people-driven and people-centred economic growth and development aimed at meeting the basic needs of the people (Ibid:4).

Maloka then provides details of ANC's 'Strategy and Tactics' document which argues for an 'African Renaissance' while emphasizing the difficulties imposed on the African continent by years of colonialism and the unjust practice of international relations, including debt crisis, underdevelopment, social dislocation, and untenable political relations underpinned by forms of government that imperialism encouraged for its own selfish interests. In this case, Maloka argues, the African renaissance is being conceptualized as part of a broad anti-imperialist movement (Ibid).

Moving on to the culturalist perspective, Maloka argues that it sees the 'African Renaissance' as a movement calling for a return to 'roots',

The Culturalist perspective is arguably the most dominant perspective in the popular discourse about the concept. There is more and more interest in the public sphere in what are believed to be traditional African practices and beliefs. One element of this perspective is the notion of *Ubuntu* (Ibid:4-5).

Kwesi Kwaa Prah believes that language is a critical factor in the realization of the Renaissance. Prah argues that:

When we say that African development and revival are impossible without unity, that development must be based on respect for cultural usages indigenous to the African mind. This does not mean a wholesale return to cultural practices of the past, or an atavistic revivalism which has no place in the contemporary world. What we need is a judicious Afrocentric approach which selectively builds on our cultural and historical belongings. African

languages need to be rehabilitated and developed to carry science and technology in their most advanced form. To do this there is a need to standardize and harmonize cognate language structures (in Maloka and le Roux, Ibid:5).

As already discussed (see chapter two) Ngugi is another strong advocate of rescuing African languages from their place in the shadow of the language of the former colonizer, whether that language be English, French or Portuguese. He sees it as contradictory to use a neo-colonial language enlighten and African renaissance and bring it home to all the people of Africa, not just the intellectuals. This can only be done in a language the masses can understand.

According to Maloka, the culturalist perspective on an African renaissance argues that Africans are in the first instance products of culture. How they define their culture determines how they define themselves.

If Africans are to avoid defining themselves in the shadow of the West, then they must have the courage to consider discarding some of the ineffective and culturally irrelevant institutions and structures that have been promiscuously copied from the West (Ibid:4-5).

Finally, I shall sum up the main issues and arguments covered in this chapter. It should be noted that African renaissance discourse in South Africa is informed by economic as well as political and cultural considerations. As Vale and Maseko have demonstrated, the dominant discourse is globalist in orientation. The idea is to make South Africa (and Africa)

competitive in the global economy. This becomes more apparent when one looks at the macroeconomic policies adopted by African governments, especially the macroeconomic strategy of GEAR in the South African context. The objective here is to appease the United States and its Western allies in order to attract aid and investment. The intention is to modernize along Western lines. The problematic of Westernization is addressed by Teffo when he asserts that there is an urgent need to make the African Renaissance Afrocentric in its scope and intentions. It should also be noted that in political terms the concept of an African renaissance has been preoccupied with issues of democracy. The reasoning is that democratization opens a political space in which issues of poverty alleviation and good economic performance can materialize. Implied is the argument that authoritarianism is not conducive to good economic performance. Again, the United States and its allies are supporting the liberal model of democratization in Africa, forsaking all other models of democracy, whether socialist or traditional models. In this case I argue that in order for democracy to be meaningful and relevant for Africa it must take into account the objective realities of each African country and the African continent as a whole including the requirements and priorities of non-intellectuals and non-elites.

I have also explored the issue of African identity, linking it with cultural issues and arguing that it is at the forefront of Renaissance discourse. This is necessary in a country which is just emerging from the shadow of apartheid, given that South Africa is racially segmented as well as ethnically fragmented owing to this legacy. Gender relations and the treatment of women in South Africa also leaves much to be desired. It is for these reasons that I believe there is an urgent need to create a 'cross-cutting cleavage' which transcends race and ethnicity and is gender inclusive. Thus, I believe that a practical as well as ethical function of

an African Renaissance in general or particularly in South Africa, is to construct and develop a cross-cutting identity, flexible and incorporative, yet based in objective realities of the mass of South African people. I have argued following Dr. Mangcu, that African identity should be inclusive. We need to challenge static definitions of who is African by advocating a sense of identity which reflects our changing circumstances and aspirations.

## Conclusion

The questions I have addressed in this dissertation concern:

- Issues of African identities and cultures.
- Problematics of the call for an 'African renaissance'.

In this regard, I have discussed how issues of African identity have been conceptualized within the discourse of the African renaissance. Further to this,

- The central question around which the dissertation is written is: 'What does it mean to be African?'

I have argued that in a democratizing country like South Africa which is also in search of peace and reconciliation between races, ethnicities and genders, there is an urgent need for a 'cross-cutting cleavage'. By this I mean a definition of what it means to be African which transcends race, ethnicity and gender. On the positive side, I have argued that when (if) this happens, it will contribute materially to the process of reconciliation and nation-building in South Africa. On a more negative note, I have argued that the concept of an 'African renaissance' is still contested terrain in South African political, economic, social and cultural discourse. Like Pan Africanism which came before it and runs parallel with it, it means different things to different people.

In the first two chapters I have focused on broad issues of African identity, looking at cultural, philosophical and Pan-Africanist debates. I have tried to demonstrate how the history of slavery and colonialism both in Africa and in other areas of the so-called 'third world' where the indigenous population were oppressed and their resources were exploited,



have shaped the formation of identities. Race in the past has been an important tool of identity formation. The imposition of white supremacy and the way it was concretized provoked a racial response - a kind of 'reverse discourse' - among Africans, given that the philosophical and ideological presupposition of colonialism was that Africans do not have a culture of their own, hence by definition they are assumed to be primitive and barbaric. I have touched on the argument that cultures are the sources of identities, and examined in some detail how the 'deep structure' of African cultural and identity discourse may be traced in two responses in particular, namely:

- Ethnophilosophies or philosophies of 'African essence' such as Negritude.
- African solidarity in the form of Pan Africanism the intention of which was to confront the discourse of denial, that is, denial that Africans have identities or cultures worth defending. The idea of African unity is central to 'Pan Africanism'. This idea of unity is argued from both an essentialist and non-essentialist perspective.

In the first chapter, I have deployed a dialectical method, moving from Eurocentric cultural perspectives to Afrocentric cultural perspectives, and then suggesting a possible synthesis. The better to address the debate I have detailed some of the theories found in the works of Hountondji, Wiredu, Masolo and Owomoyela. I have noted the arguments both for and against essentialism, and while I argue that identities, like cultures, are construction, not inherent, I touch on the notion of political essentialism as it appears in the work of William Abraham, and note that essentialism has its uses. I have also distinguished between two schools of thought within the discourse of African philosophy, the nationalist and the universalist school. The nationalists argue that philosophy should be culture specific, and are keen to demonstrate that Western philosophy is particular to Europe and not universally

applicable, whereas universalists argue that philosophy is a universal discipline and discourse. Finally, the overall intention of the chapter is adequately to demonstrate that debates and arguments between philosophers in Africa have been useful in (1) clarifying definitions, concepts and contexts; (2) added an interesting spin on identity discourse in general.

In the second chapter, I continue to explore the debate around essentialist and non-essentialist concepts of identity, this time in the context of Pan-Africanist discourse. I have centred the discussion on two primary questions:

- are Africans united by an 'essence'?
- are Africans united, along with other peoples in the formerly colonised areas of the world, by shared experiences.

I have also expanded cultural arguments with reference to the work of Edward Said, as well as touching on his understanding (following Gramsci) of the role of intellectuals in postcolonial worlds.

Having traced the 'deep structure' of an 'African Renaissance', the third chapter narrows the focus to the South African case. My discussion of the South African case is greatly informed and organized by the arguments and points of departure of the previous chapters. I believe that when it comes to issues of culture and identity, South Africa has much to learn from African experiences, and that we, as South Africans, should turn to Africa for our lessons, rather than to the West. On the other hand, I have looked at South African society, many of

which are legacies of apartheid, and as a way of trying to give some reality to the notion of a 'rainbow nation'. Here, I would note that 'the future is not yet written'.

It is difficult to come to definite conclusions in a dissertation mainly dealing with abstract issues of philosophical and cultural identity discourse. Rather, I conclude with some general and tentative discoveries. On the matter of 'essence': here William Abraham's arguments in **The Mind of Africa** (1962) have been very influential on my thinking. When comparing his ideas about Akan and Zulu culture, I found that as a Zulu, I could relate to his findings and could understand that two cultures, one in West Africa and the other in South Africa, have some key similarities. This inclines me to argue that there is both 'an African culture' and a diversity of cultures. By 'African culture' I understand the commonality of cultures among Africans. A second point is the connection one can make between Abraham's notion of political essentialism and a notion of 'strategic essentialism' which appears in a few of the arguments about identity discourse in South Africa. As this notion of 'strategic essentialism' is still undeveloped and is vague at best, I have not really discussed it in my thesis, except to note that there is this connection, a general idea that Pan-African identity is vested in broad African culture which transcends ethnicity and national culture and is used to achieve a common goal. On the other hand, one must remember that Africa is not alone in the universe, and that ideas about 'an African Renaissance' have a global dimension. One cannot meaningfully separate developments in Africa, ideas or policies, from global power structures and discourses

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