

The necessity of a challenge to western discourses by the African renaissance

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One of the goals of the African renaissance and related projects is the transformation of the power relations between the West and Africa. This paper demonstrates the way in which western discourses on Africa perpetuate problematic power relations. The portrayal of Africa as an ailing patient in need of western assistance is scrutinised. These discourses are shown to be part of the complex structures which allow western dominance to continue. The African renaissance's response is briefly discussed, with special attention to NEPAD. Finally, the paper suggests a new response, emphasising the importance of challenging western discourses as part of the African renaissance.

Die noodsaak om westerse politieke diskoerse uit te daag deur die Afrika-renaissance

Een van die doelstellings van die Afrika-renaissance en verwante projekte is die transformasie van magsverhoudinge tussen die Weste en Afrika. Die wyse waarop westerse diskoerse oor Afrika problematiese magsverhoudinge tussen die Weste en Afrika perpetueer, word in die artikel aangetoon. Diskoerse wat Afrika as 'n kwynende pasiënt beskryf wat westerse hulp benodig, word onder die loep geneem. Daar word aangetoon dat hierdie diskoerse deel van die komplekse strukture is wat die westerse dominansie laat voortduur. Die strewe na 'n Afrika-renaissance antwoord op hierdie diskoerse word kortliks bespreek en spesiale aandag word aan die NEPAD-inisiatief verleen. Voorstelle word gemaak oor hoe die Afrika-renaissance behoort te reageer op westerse diskoerse, met spesiale klem op die belangrikheid daarvan om die westerse diskoerse uit te daag.

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African states were transformed from Cold War pawns into irrelevant international clutter.

Samuel Decalo (Wiseman 1993: 441)

The African Renaissance is [...] a renewal of our determination to be global partners rather than afterthoughts at the dinner tables of other nations.

Pitika Ntuli (1998: 17)

As suggested by these quotations, the African situation is one of marginalisation and disempowerment. In reaction, several African leaders have called for an African renaissance, hoping to inspire a transformation of the African continent from “irrelevant international clutter” to an empowered and integrated partner in the global arena. Discussions of such a renaissance have led to the development of projects aimed at bringing about the desired transformation, the most prominent being the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

An important goal of such projects is to change the power relations between the industrialised western nations and Africa. However, the question of the role of western discourses on Africa in maintaining these unequal power relations has received little attention within projects aiming at an African renaissance. Discourses on the African situation can be shown to play a role in perpetuating the kind of power relations which have brought about Africa’s marginalisation. This paper will argue that, given the role that discourses can play in the maintenance of power relations, a critical assessment of western discourses on Africa should be undertaken as part of the African renaissance movement. Several western discourses will be carefully examined in order to demonstrate the need for such an assessment.

1. Clarifying concepts

1.1 The African renaissance

In order to understand the context of the argument that an assessment of western discourses and the presentation of alternative discourses are essential if the African renaissance is to be realised some comment

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is needed on the concept of an African renaissance, how it emerged, and what it is generally taken to mean.

The idea of the revival or renewal of Africa is certainly not new; it has been articulated since the colonial era. However, since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the idea of African renewal has once again received much attention, especially in South Africa. The term "African renaissance" has been the most common recent label. The South African president Thabo Mbeki is one of its most prominent spokespersons, having given several moving speeches on its importance (cf Mbeki 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Recent calls for an African renaissance have varied in content and approach, allowing several versions to emerge. Vale & Maseko (1998) compare the globalist and Africanist versions, and Maloka (2000: 3-6) adds Pan-Africanist and culturalist versions. This indicates that the movement is by no means homogenous. Nevertheless, some broad goals of the renaissance can be identified. Broadly, it stresses the importance of rediscovering African history and culture, self-determination, African unity, Africa's empowerment in the global arena, economic development and good governance. Not all versions of the renaissance stress all of the above, and each emphasises some aspects at the expense of others.

Thus it can be said that the African renaissance is a multi-faceted project aimed at bringing about conditions more favourable to Africa and reshaping relations between Africa and the rest of the world.

1.2 "The West" and "Africa"

Before undertaking an examination and discussion of western discourses on Africa, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the terms "the West" and "Africa". "The West" is a convenient shorthand term usually used to refer to Western Europe, North America and regions predominantly populated by European settlers. It refers not only to a particular geographic region, but also to certain attributes. The rule of law, representative government, a capitalist economy and the guarantee of certain rights and liberties are considered to be characteristic of the West, as are certain values, such as consumerism, economism, liberalism and individualism. Thus "the West" refers to a geo-

graphical region as well as to the characteristics and values that are seen to predominate there. Related terms, such as “western” and “westernisation” are frequently used to refer to the characteristics and values, rather than the region. Thus it is possible to speak of the westernisation of African cities, or to say that a particular ideology endorses western values.

It must be stressed that the West is not homogenous. There is great variety in the values and characteristics of the various western nations, as well as variety within them. Consequently, western discourses on Africa are diverse. This article will therefore refer to discourses which are relatively common and have considerable influence — as “prevalent western discourses” without suggesting that no alternative discourses are articulated in the West, or that the discourses identified are necessarily substantially different from discourses originating elsewhere. While the discourses under discussion in the article are western, their views and assumptions may not be exclusively western. The term “prevalent western discourse” must be understood as referring to a discourse produced by a citizen of a western state, having relative influence in the West and expressing a perspective not uncommon in the West. In order to avoid confusion, discourses apparently endorsing western values but produced by non-western writers will be excluded from the analysis.

The term “Africa” usually refers to a geographical region (the African continent) and the term “African” to anything emerging from that region. The former term may conjure up different images and emotions in various people, but nevertheless consistently refers to a common region. A discourse on Africa is thus a discourse whose focus is on the African continent or any sub-region. The latter term has been used to refer to people whose ancestry can be traced to the African continent (such as black Americans), but in this article “African” will mean “of the African continent”, and discourses on people of African descent living outside Africa will be excluded.

1.3 Discourse: the juncture of power and knowledge

The term “discourse” also requires clarification. Broadly defined, discourse refers to a stretch of language consisting of more than a single sentence (Blackburn 1994: 107). However, discourses are not simply

strings of words describing some reality or other. Several authors¹ show that discourses must be perceived as more than written or spoken reflections of external realities. They form part of reality. No discourse can be said to be neutral; each emanates from a particular social structure and contributes to the maintenance or disruption of a particular social structure.

The idea that discourses can function to constitute reality is related to the idea that power and knowledge are intertwined. This is not a new thought, having been expressed as long ago as the Elizabethan era by Francis Bacon (Nola 1994: 22), but has recently been given prominence by Foucault (1972; 1980). Foucault describes discourse as the juncture at which power and knowledge meet, arguing that discourses do not stand outside reality and thus cannot be said to provide an impartial account of reality (Lemert & Gillan 1982: 40). The Foucauldian relation of power to knowledge can be contrasted with prevalent western notions which view knowledge as being the product of science (McHoul & Grace 1993: 58). According to these notions knowledge is only deemed true if it is acquired via scientific method. Such knowledge is purportedly neutral. Methods of inquiry based on this understanding of knowledge first developed in the natural sciences, but were later viewed as being appropriate to the study of human beings and human society, leading to the establishment of the "human sciences". Foucault calls these methods into question and disputes the idea that the knowledge they produce is neutral and therefore unassailable. Rather than being neutral, knowledge is related to power. Foucault (McHoul & Grace 1993: 59) declares: "We should admit [that] power produces knowledge [...] power and knowledge directly imply one another". On the one hand, power produces fields of knowledge; on the other, knowledge constitutes power relations.

Discourses cannot then be considered to be uninfluenced by existing power relations, or to have no influence on such relations. Discourses emerge from existing power relations and can serve to maintain them or to constitute new relations. Foucault (1980: 93) argues that in any society the relations of power "permeate, characterise and

1 This section refers to the works of Ball 1987 & 1988, Fairclough 1989, Laclau 1993, Macdonnel 1986 and Foucault 1972 & 1980, as well as to discussions of Foucault's work by McHoul & Grace 1993 and Lemert & Gillan 1982.

constitute the social body” and that they “cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse”. Thus it can be argued that western discourses on Africa are intricately related to power relations between the West and Africa. It follows then that if one is committed to transforming power relations between the West and Africa, discourses on Africa produced in the West should be scrutinised to reveal ways in which they perpetuate current power relations.

In order to make such an analysis of western discourses on Africa feasible, this article will limit its discussion to written academic and journalistic discourses articulated from the early 1990s until the present day. Discourses on Africa may consist of written or spoken words, pictures, graphs and other representations, and may appear in academic works, newspapers, films, music, daily conversation, on the internet and in several other sources (Jaworski & Coupland 1999: 709). It would be impossible to analyse all of these types and sources of discourse, hence the limitation of this analysis to discourses in western academic books, articles and papers, as well as western newspapers.

2. An overview of some western discourses on the African situation

Many western discourses on Africa consist of an identification of Africa’s problems, a diagnosis of their possible cause, and suggested solutions. The tone of such discourses brings to mind that of a doctor visiting an ailing patient and, from a position of authority and superior knowledge, diagnosing an illness and recommending a cure.

2.1 Ailing Africa

Metaphorical language depicting Africa as a diseased patient in need of medical assistance is frequently used by western writers. The *Chicago Tribune* recently ran a series entitled “Plagues of old reclaim continent”. In the first article Salopek (2000) describes Africa as the “ailing continent” and speaks of its “sickening”. This kind of imagery is also used by Baker (2000: 9) who writes that many young democracies in Africa “show signs of ill-health” with some “hav[ing] been wounded, perhaps fatally”. Simon (1995: 319) identifies “diagnoses

and prescriptions for Africa's ills", and Minney (1996) refers to Africa as a "patient" whose "economic health" is "grim". Similarly, Sada (2000) speaks of "cette Afrique qui meurt" [this dying Africa], and Anderson (1997) describes Africa as a continent that seems to be "dying from a combination of disease, ethnic hatred and corruption". Further examples of such imagery include descriptions of Africa as suffering from "economic malaise" (May 2000: 178) and being the victim of a "continent-wide plague of economic crisis, political decay and incipient 'anarchy'" (Green 1998: 185).

The description of Africa as a "basket case" has featured in several recent western discourses on the African situation. For example, Morrow (1992: 26) calls Africa "the basket case of the planet", Russel (1996) speaks of Africa as "a basket case of civil wars and sufferings" and DeYoung (1999) warns that Africa's basket cases must not "be allowed to fester". The term "basket case" is a slang term originally used to describe someone who had lost all four limbs (Simpson & Weiner 1989: 987). It developed the connotation of someone unable to function as a result of stress or anxiety (Random House 1983: 174) or in a state of emotional or mental ill-health (Simpson & Weiner 1989: 987). The use of the term to describe Africa depicts the continent as being in a debilitating state of mental and physical incapacitation.

There are a number of related western discourses on Africa which also imply that the continent is stricken with some terrible disorder requiring skilful doctoring to restore it to health. Consider, for example, descriptions of Africa as "Job's continent" (Michaels 1993: 94), a voracious sinkhole (Callaghy 1994: 209), the "festering ghetto" of the global village (Shillinger 2000) and undergoing "a sort of neo-post-colonial breakdown" (Morrow 1992: 26). According to western discourses Africa is a "continent ravagé" [ravaged continent] (Marin & Rekacewicz 2000) and a "shattered continent" (Apter & Rosberg 1994: 43) with "battered states" (Clapham 1993: 434). Still more discourses describe Africa as an "unhappy continent" (Hoar 1992: 48), "the most miserable continent" (Morrow 1992: 25) and a continent descending into "hell and squalor" (Fatton 1990: 455) or sinking into an abyss (Dynes 2000). Like the descriptions which call Africa an ailing patient, these discourses create the impression of a continent stricken with some terrible debility.

2.2 A sickly, weak continent

In addition to seeing Africa as diseased, several western writers suggest that the continent is weak and sickly by nature. According to such writers, Africa has not simply had the misfortune of falling ill, but tends to become diseased easily; it has some kind of weakness which makes it prone to various debilitating conditions. *The Economist* (2000: 23) asks: “Does Africa have some inherent flaw that keeps it backward and incapable of development? Some think so”. The article comments that “Africa was weak before the Europeans touched its coasts” and that African societies are “distrustful and bad at organisation”. Another article in *The Economist* (2000b: 17) makes a similar suggestion saying “brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere — but African societies, for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to them”. Retief (2000: 13) describes Africa as having “always been the unfortunate victim of *its own* excesses” [our emphasis]. Simpson (2000) admits:

[W]e [westerners] are often tempted to assume [...] that Africa is inherently incapable of running its own affairs in peace and prosperity, that it is a continent-wide basket case; and that the only answer to its problems is for us to dig deeper into our pockets and bail it out yet again.

The depiction of Africa as inherently weak and sickly is usually implicit rather than clearly stated, possibly because the idea is not considered politically correct today. Recent pessimism regarding South Africa's prospects can be considered an example of the inference that Africa is inherently prone to debilitation. Western writers appear to consider South Africa as a “true” African state now that it is ruled by black Africans, and to have begun wondering whether the country will not become “just like the rest of Africa”. Discourses speculating about South Africa's imminent degeneration imply that, now that it is “truly African”, the country is likely to go the same way as other African states, due to common inherent weaknesses. Thompson (1999: 94) warns that South Africa “may be following the downward trajectory of tropical Africa” and *The Economist* (1996: 21) wonders if certain South African problems “represent the first skid down the slippery African slope, one which has oiled the failure of so many other countries”. In a similar vein, Kenny (1996) speaks about

South Africa “going down the drain like the rest of Africa”. These pessimistic predictions concerning South Africa’s future seem to be informed by a suspicion that African states are inherently inclined towards debilitation.

2.3 Dr West reluctantly to the rescue

If Africa is inclined towards infirmity, can the continent heal itself? Western discourses suggest that it cannot, and that external intervention is necessary to cure Africa’s ills. Several western discourses propose the West as the doctor, and western prescriptions as the necessary medicine.

Discourses discussing Africa’s need for external help, and especially from the West, are numerous and various. Consider Westlake (1989: 10), who insists “Help will be needed [in Africa] from the international community on a large scale”; Jaycox (1992: 94), who says that Africa “needs increased support from the international community”, and Spence (1997: 7), who asserts that western governments “have a role to play in helping Africa”. Wright (1996) says that “with some help, Africa looks to a better future” and discusses the role of international institutions in efforts to “aid Africa on the long journey to peace and prosperity”. Morrow (1992: 28) asks:

What are we to do with black Africa [...]. Should the industrialized, moneyed nations allow Africa to drift further and further into the margins, into poverty, starvation, disease, war [...],

suggesting that Africa will indeed drift further into poverty, starvation and all sorts of other predicaments, if the West does not step in to help.

A common theme in western discourses on Africa is that of the continent’s being “worse off” than it was under colonial rule. In such discourses, the suggestion that Africa is at its most healthy when under the supervision of the West is unavoidable. Jensen (1999) says that “black Africa is worse off today than it was under colonial rule” and Dynes (2000) warns that if Africa continues its “downward spiral” it will soon be poorer than it was “in David Livingstone’s time”. Kenny (1999) implies the idea of Africa being “worse off” now than during colonial times when he writes that “African countries go

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through three phases after white rule: euphoria, silence, destitution". By claiming that Africa would be better off if under western rule, such discourses suggest that the ailing continent is incapable of taking care of itself, and therefore requires the intervention of the capable and knowledgeable Dr West.

The assumption that western intervention is desirable and necessary to rehabilitate the "diseased continent" informs western discourses which argue that the West should use Official Development Assistance (ODA) in order to exert influence in Africa. The decision of many western donors to tie ODA to certain political and economic conditions has received much support in western academic and journalistic discourses. Simpson (2000) advises western leaders to put pressure on African autocrats "to make them fall into line with the dictates of good government" and Diamond (1999: 277) proposes that aid should be conditional on "economic liberalization, political freedom and accountability, and redirection of budgetary priorities". Mair (1996: 185) speaks of the international community continuing "to play an important role in Africa's search for its own identity" and says that it should discourage non-democratic regimes through "discontinuation of development aid, diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, and the freezing of foreign assets". The idea appears to be that Africa should be helped to find its own identity by being pressured in a particular direction by western donors. Tying aid to conditions suggests that those giving the aid know what is best for its recipients. Western donors are portrayed as wise doctors compelling a recalcitrant patient to take the medicine necessary for recovery.

While western discourses see aid as necessary for Africa's healing, they also recognise that such aid is decreasing. Van de Walle (1996: 232) blames this decline on the end of the Cold War and economic recession. DeYoung (1999) reports:

While America has enjoyed one of its most prosperous decades ever in the 1990s, it also has set a record for stinginess. For as long as people have kept track, never has the United States given a smaller share of its money to the world's poorest.

Shearer (1999: 98) speaks of "the West's growing indifference to Africa" and Wright (1996) speaks about African countries as having

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“dropped off the map” and of Africa as being the “forgotten continent” because the international community no longer has any interest in it.

Thus while western discourses insist that Africa needs the West’s help, they also acknowledge that the West is increasingly reluctant to be involved in the continent. Collating the various western discourses above, one is faced with a disturbing picture: of a continent diseased, despairing and desperate which cannot be saved without a group of countries which give hardly any of the much needed help, and which attach many conditions to the little assistance they do give. This is the African situation according to western discourses. The following passage from an article by Randolph Kent (1999: 8) in *The World Today* sums up the picture:

[...] the policy assumptions that underlie the prescriptions of many major governments spell one grim message: international disengagement. There is growing concern that [...] non-African governments and international organisations [may] abandon any commitment to the seemingly perpetual turmoil and uncertainties that are Africa. To that extent, some suggest, Africa will be abandoned to its forlorn fate, and with the decline of international interest, millions will have only emergency assistance to define their futures.

Western writers see little hope for the ailing continent of Africa if the West “abandons” it — and abandonment is seen as a likely scenario.

3. A closer look at western discourses on the African situation

The previous section provided a brief overview of several prevalent western discourses on the African situation, revealing the way in which Africa is frequently depicted as a sickly continent afflicted with various debilitating conditions. Africa’s illnesses are not portrayed as unfortunate, temporary fevers which will abate with time, but rather as afflictions visited upon a continent with an inherent propensity to illness and an inability to heal itself. Furthermore, western discourses describe the West as capable of healing Africa by providing aid linked to certain conditions, thereby pressuring African states to introduce changes understood by the West to be necessary for the continent’s long-term health. In this way such discourses depict the West as an adroit doctor with a medicine bag containing

remedies for Africa's afflictions. What can be said about such discourses? What is suggested by the depiction of Africa as an ailing continent reliant upon being "doctored" to health by the West? What effect does this image have upon power relations between Africa and the West?

These discourses are problematic for several reasons. First, by presenting Africa as an ailing continent, they evoke a dichotomy of illness and health which associates Africa with illness and the West with health. Illness cannot be understood without considering its opposite, health. To be ill is to lack health, and to be healthy involves, at the very least, the absence of illness. When the depiction of Africa as ill is accompanied by the depiction of the West as the doctor who can bring healing, there is a suggestion that whereas the African continent is characterised by infirmity, the West is characterised by health. Surely a doctor must be in possession of health, and of the knowledge of how to maintain that health, before he or she can begin to assist patients. Implicit in this medical metaphor is, therefore, the suggestion that in becoming healthy Africa will become more like the West, as the West is shown to characterise and dispense health. Such discourses thus advocate Africa's increased assimilation to the West, and do not consider the possibility that African health may be fundamentally different from western health, or that both the African and the western situations may be characterised by illness. Furthermore, these discourses exclude the possibility of Africa's healing itself, or of Africa defining its own ideal of health.

A second problem with such discourses concerns the power relations suggested by the use of a doctor-patient metaphor. Such relationship is not one of equals. The doctor has something that the patient needs, which places the doctor in a powerful position in relation to the patient. The doctor's refusal to see the patient would be detrimental to the patient but not to the doctor. Imagery portraying Africa as an ailing patient requiring the help of Dr West suggests a similar asymmetry in power relations. Africa is shown as requiring the West to bestow upon it much-needed assistance and expertise, while the West is under no obligation to do so. This kind of discourse both emerges from a particular worldview (one that perceives Africa as in need of assistance and the West as the source thereof) and per-

petuates this worldview by predicting doom and disaster for Africa in the absence of western assistance.

A further reason for considering such western discourses as problematic relates to the idea of helping. Helping can be a charitable response to a stated need, but it can also be an exercise of power. Gronemeyer (1992: 53-69) draws attention to how helping can sometimes act as what she calls "elegant power". It is inconspicuous and unrecognisable, making it the perfect exercise of power. The help given by the West to Africa is not an unconditional response to a need articulated by the recipient. Rather, western help is tied to many conditions and is often a result of Western, rather than African, identification of a particular deficit. This kind of help becomes a strategy rather than a charitable response. It involves the knowledgeable and capable doctor assisting in bringing the humble patient, who is reliant upon him or her, to a position of health that the doctor already enjoys. Both the health aspired to and the medicine required to attain this health are determined by the doctor.

The earlier discussion on discourse demonstrates how it can be the juncture of power and knowledge. Discourses are part of the complex structures which allow certain power relations to exist. Western discourses on the African situation are thus part of the elaborate web of power relations between the West and Africa, rather than simply mirroring them. Consider the influence which the discourses discussed earlier could have on their western and African readers. The former may have their prejudices about Africa reinforced; while the latter may be led to wonder if they, as children of this defective continent, have any ability to develop medicine for Africa's maladies. But if discourses can disempower, they can also empower. Thus any attempt to change power relations needs to examine the role played by discourse in maintaining them, and also to consider it as a potential tool for change.

4. Responding to western discourses

The desire for an African renaissance has led to the development of strategies like the Millennium African Renaissance Programme (MAP) and the Omega Plan, which merged to form the New Part-

nership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Dept of Foreign Affairs 2001). NEPAD's architects hope to end "centuries of unequal relations" by establishing "a new relationship of partnership between Africa and the international community, especially the industrialised countries".

Calls for an African renaissance and the development of strategies such as NEPAD reflect a belief that power relations between Africa and the West are not as they should be. The renaissance and its related initiatives seek to make these relations more favourable to Africa. The preceding analysis of western discourses on the African situation illustrates that discourses can play a part in perpetuating power relations detrimental to Africa. The necessity of providing a response to such discourses as part of the African renaissance must therefore be stressed.

NEPAD currently dominates discussions about how to transform relations between Africa and the West. NEPAD is a practical strategy rather than an inspiring vision. It is full of statistics, targets and expected outcomes, but is short on vision and analysis. Most of the document is taken up by the lengthy "Programme of action" comprising specific objectives and "actions". NEPAD does not include, or even emphasise the importance of discussions and debates which could lead to the articulation of alternative discourses on the African situation.

Before we can change relations, perceptions need to be changed. Policies and programmes may contribute to transformation, but if they are not accompanied by attempts to reshape knowledge and imagination about Africa, they are likely to bring about only superficial change. Furthermore, the absence of reflection and debate on how Africa is depicted in western discourses could result in the development of poor policies and strategies, as the problematic assumptions embedded in such discourses may be uncritically adopted. An example of this may be seen in NEPAD's assumption that Africa's development can only come about with assistance from the West. NEPAD says that "the bulk of the needed resources [for Africa's development] will have to be obtained from outside the continent". Without this financial assistance, to be obtained mainly from the western nations, NEPAD cannot succeed in reaching its targets.

Thus NEPAD assumes Africa's renewal to be dependent upon western assistance, uncritically accepting the western discourses which portray Africa as unable to be healed without western help. Rather than reflecting upon, debating and then possibly challenging this portrait of Africa, NEPAD formulates a strategy for Africa's development which cannot succeed without considerable western assistance, hence perpetuating the problematic assumption that western assistance is a prerequisite for African renewal.

How should the African renaissance respond to western discourses on Africa? First, the role of discourse in perpetuating problematic relations between Africa and the West should be acknowledged by proponents of an African renaissance. The African renaissance should consequently scrutinise western discourses on Africa in order to reveal the ways in which they perpetuate problematic relations. Secondly, the African renaissance should encourage the challenging of disempowering western discourses and the cultivation of alternative discourses on the African situation. Of course, discourses produced as part of the renaissance will not necessarily be innocent of perpetuating problematic power relations. The African renaissance cannot hope to produce discourses which are "correct" and "accurate" beyond challenge. Rather, it should aim to encourage the kind of mindset which allows for the development, discussion and questioning of various discourses on the African situation. Alternative discourses emerging from such a mindset will be diverse in nature, not simply inversions of western discourses, denying what those discourses assert, and asserting what they deny. Thirdly, the African renaissance should not encourage only alternative portrayals of Africa's situation, but also alternative solutions to Africa's problems. Such solutions should not uncritically accept western perceptions, but work to develop an African vision of what would constitute a "healthy" Africa, and to create African "medicine" for bringing about such health. Finally, policies and strategies aiming to bring about the renaissance should emerge from rather than precede debate and discussion about the nature of a "healthy" Africa. NEPAD seems to have stimulated critical discussion in several sectors, but unfortunately, little critical discussion appears to have occurred before its launch. NEPAD did not grow out of lengthy consultation with various groups and debate

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among various perspectives. A strategy emerging out of such debate would have offered a more robust initiative for Africa's renewal.

6. Conclusion

Calls for an African renaissance proclaim that Africa will rise up and be reborn. Powerful speeches given by proponents of the renaissance have declared the end of African capitulation to the will of non-Africans. Strategies such as NEPAD claim to be able to bring about this renaissance and to transform Africans from "wards of benevolent guardians" to "architects of their own sustained upliftment".

The analysis above indicates how prevalent western discourses on the African situation perpetuate a particular way of perceiving Africa — as an ailing, struggling continent, reliant on others to assist it to achieve a state of health. If, as it was argued earlier, discourses may act to perpetuate certain situations or limit the development of alternative situations, then discourses such as those described above must be seen as part of the relations of power which allow western dominance, rather than as merely a reflection of such relations. This means that to challenge western dominance, as those calling for African renewal wish to do, involves confronting such discourses with alternative discourses presenting different interpretations of Africa's situation and alternative solutions to Africa's problems.

Initiatives aiming at African renewal cannot aim simply to change policies, but also to change perceptions and knowledge. Alternative discourses on Africa are necessary as part of an attempt to transform the African situation. As long as Africa is presented as an ailing victim crying out for external assistance, it will be difficult to transform Africa into a healthy, empowered agent of its own upliftment. The idea of an African renaissance has spawned detailed practical strategies like the New Partnership for Africa's Development, but has it inspired an empowering portrayal of Africa? This remains to be seen.

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