THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL ORIENTATION

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The African Renaissance - and the accompanying New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU) - have become political buzzwords in South Africa. The African Renaissance is a vision aimed at uplifting Africa from its present state of widespread poverty, violent conflicts, human rights violations, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the lack of good governance. Even though the emphasis in this article will be on the African Renaissance, it must be stressed that it cannot be understood or assessed separately from the issues referred to above or from the international context in which the vision was formulated and within which the proposed Renaissance must take place.

In order to understand and evaluate the African Renaissance, it is furthermore necessary to place the concept in its historical context. The contemporary African Renaissance debate can be said to have begun with President Thabo Mbeki's "I am an African" speech on 8 May 1996.[3] Subsequently, Mbeki is often presented as the father of the idea, but the vision of an African Renaissance has roots that can in fact be traced back more than 200 years in time, namely to the origins of the idea of Pan-Africanism in the late 18th century (more about Pan-Africanism in section 6). This historical perspective is often lacking, or is presented too superficially, in the African Renaissance debate. Thus, it is the purpose of this article briefly to elucidate the development and meaning of the African Renaissance in a historical sense, as well as to consider its past and present practical implementations.

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[3]   T Mbeki, "I am an African" in G Maharaj (ed.), **Between unity and diversity: essays on nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa** (Cape Town, 1999), p. 15. See also E Maloka, "The South African 'African Renaissance' debate: a critique" in E Maloka and E le Roux (eds), **Problematising the African Renaissance** (Pretoria, 2000), pp. 2-3, and P Botha, "The challenges of an African Renaissance in the 21st century" in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), pp. 15-6.

First of all, a historical perspective will be provided with regard to the origins of the concept of 'African Renaissance'. Thereafter, a discussion of the African Renaissance vision, with special reference to the cultural, economic and political dimensions of the African Renaissance will follow; and then the development of Pan-Africanism, as well as its applications for the African Renaissance, for example, its practical expressions in the form of NEPAD and the AU, will be summarised. Finally, a few concluding perspectives will be given, in the hope that there will be more debate (also among historians and history students) in the future on the African Renaissance.

2.   THE CONCEPT OF 'AFRICAN RENAISSANCE'

Although South Africa's President Mbeki has played (and continues to play) an important role in the contemporary discourse on the African Renaissance, the roots of this particular concept hark back much further in time, and as early as 1948 the well-known West African academic, author and thinker, Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986), published on an African Renaissance. Another example is Nigerian Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996) who wrote the book **Renascent Africa** in 1937, in which he distinguished between an old and a coming new Africa, which would be based on social and economic regeneration, mental emancipation and national self-determination. In addition, Kwame Nkrumah occasionally spoke of an African Renaissance. Generally, calls for the renewal, revival, rebirth, regeneration and awakening of Africa were common in the Pan-African movement.[4] According to Maloka, there is a consistent failure in the South African debate on the African Renaissance to historicise the discourse and to recognise works such as those by Cheikh Anta Diop and Nnamde Azikiwe.[5]

It is slightly ironic that a European concept, which has been used through the ages to refer to the revival and development of Europe, is now used to inspire Africans to contribute to the revival and development of their own continent. What does the concept 'African Renaissance' denote and imply? For the purposes of this article, the African Renaissance is regarded as a political, economic and cultural vision that envisages and aims to achieve the development of the continent's material and human resources, as well as the upliftment of the continent's inhabitants. The vision emphasises that the inhabitants of Africa have to take responsibility for their own (African) Renaissance. The economic and political dimensions of the African Renaissance encompass sustainable development, the promotion of democracy and

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[4]   W van Vuuren, "African Renaissance: a monochrome or rainbow vision?", **Politeia** 19(3), 2000, pp. 63, 66-7; MB Ramose, "African Renaissance: a northbound gaze", **Politeia** 19(3), 2000, pp. 50, 52; S Nuttall and C-A Michael, "African Renaissance" in S Nuttall and C-A Michael (eds), **Senses of culture** (Cape Town, 2000), p. 120; Maloka and Le Roux (eds), preface.
[5]   Maloka in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), p. 8.

good governance, the need for peace, as well the termination of neo-colonialism and the negative consequences of the latter. The Renaissance is not only limited to Africa, but is also intended to change the contemporary world order so that this system can become more advantageous to the developing world. The new Africa that the Renaissance seeks to build is, according to Mbeki, "one of democracy, peace and stability, sustainable development and a better life for the people, nonracism and nonsexism, equality among the nations, and a just and democratic system of international governance".[6]

There is a difference in emphasis among proponents of an African Renaissance regarding whether they stress the cultural, economic or political dimensions. These three dimensions of the Renaissance vision will now be analysed in sections 3, 4 and 5 respectively, keeping in mind that although three dimensions can be distinguished they are, ultimately, interrelated.

3.   THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

At a cultural level, the African Renaissance promotes pride in Africa's history, languages, cultures and traditions. The cultural dimension is closely linked to the issue of identity and in relation to this, the question of who can be considered to be an African has been discussed relatively extensively. Although it is generally said, in a formal sense, that 'Africanness' has nothing to do with race, it is accepted, in practice, by many that an African is actually a black person.[7] This is not necessarily correct, for it excludes people who have a genuine commitment with regard to the implementation of the African Renaissance, and the development of Africa and all its peoples. For too long, decisions have been taken for people as to who and what they are or should be. In general, it could be stated that anyone who regards him- or herself as an African, should be respected as such, albeit that it is not too much to ask that a person who regards him- or herself as an African, must have a specific identification with Africa and a specific commitment to the development of the continent.

To ensure that the cultures, traditions, languages and literatures of the African continent come into their own, Africans themselves must do something about the matter - and thus, they have to take responsibility for realising the ideals of the

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6   T Mbeki, "Prologue" in MW Makgoba (ed.), **African Renaissance: the new struggle** (Cape Town, 1999), p. xviii.

7   See, for example, KK Prah, "African Renaissance or warlordism?" in Makgoba (ed.), pp. 38-41; T Mbeki, **Africa: the time has come** (Cape Town, 1998), **passim**; M du Preez, "Afrikane en Patagoniese eende", **Aambeeld/Anvil** 30(2), 2002, pp. 33-6; Nuttall and Michael, pp. 105-6; SP Guèye, "African Renaissance as an historical challenge" in Makgoba (ed.), p. 247; Van Vuuren, pp. 71, 73.

African Renaissance. This is one of the reasons why a sustainable Renaissance has to include psychological and cultural changes. Africans must believe in themselves and in their ability to change their lives for the better.[8] Africans must decolonise their thinking - this is a prerequisite for the African Renaissance to begin. The Renaissance will not be possible if Africans suffer from an inferiority complex and from a low self-esteem. The people of Africa must regain their human dignity. Without dignity, there is no freedom, and without freedom, there is no dignity.[9]

In accordance with the above-mentioned attempt to restore people's self-esteem, it is common to find references to Africa's glorious past within the Renaissance discourse. In addition, African history and culture are often presented as homogenous and are, to a large extent, romanticised.[10] However, the past must be studied **critically**, and should not be romanticised. According to Guèye, there is also a tendency in Africa to close one's eyes to one's own responsibility and to blame everything on the (colonial) past.[11] A critical study of the past is necessary in order to learn from the mistakes that were made in the past, so as to be able to create a better future.

Another problematic aspect related to the tendency to romanticise the past and to the frequent calls for a 'return-to-the-roots' in the African Renaissance discourse is that everything that can be considered to be traditional is not desirable, one of the most obvious examples being the traditional treatment and position of women in Africa. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge that, on the one hand, everything that can be seen as traditionally African is not automatically desirable and, on the other hand, everything that can be seen as 'imported' (for example 'European') is not automatically undesirable. It is impossible to achieve an African Renaissance without leaning relatively heavily on imported ideas such as liberal democracy, gender equality and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

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8   It can, for example, be argued that the development that took place in Europe, especially from the Enlightenment onwards, owed much to a widespread perception that people can in fact change societies. See, for example, S-E Liedman, **I skuggan av framtiden: modernitetens idéhistoria** (Stockholm, 1997) and GH von Wright, **Vetenskapen och förnuftet: ett försök till orientering** (Stockholm, 1986).

9   W Burger, "Afrika-Renaissance: 'n nuwe menswaardigheid?", **Aambeeld/Anvil** 26(2), 1998, pp. 40-1; WJ Botha, "Redaksioneel", **Aambeeld/Anvil** 26(2), 1998, p. 8; Guèye, pp. 244-5; DJ Louw, "A practical theological ecclesiology of relocalisation and globalisation from below: towards a viable African Renaissance", **Journal of Theology for Southern Africa** 112, 2002, pp. 75, 80; SNW Kiguwa, "African Renaissance: what does it mean?" in A Venter (ed.), **Towards an African Renaissance? Papers delivered at the Fifth Pan African conference of the PWPA** (Johannesburg, 1999), pp. 66-7; H Melber, **The New Africa Initiative and the African Union: a preliminary assessment and documentation** (Current African Issues 25, Uppsala, 2001), p. 4.

10 See, for example, Mbeki, **Africa: the time has come**, pp. 240-3, 299; T Mazwai, "Epilogue: bricks and mortar for the African Renaissance" in Makgoba (ed.), p. 419; Van Vuuren, pp. 71, 77; MW Makgoba, T Shope and T Mazwai, "Introduction" in Makgoba (ed.), pp. i, iv, viii, x.

11 Guèye, pp. 245-6.

There is basically nothing new in the calls for a cultural revival and for increased self-esteem, and these ideas have always been present in the Pan-African movement, especially in négritude (see section 6 for more in this regard).

4.   THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

The dire economic situation of Africa is often presented as the main issue motivating an African Renaissance, since there will be no practical change in the life of the great majority without economic development. In the economic domain, the African Renaissance may be viewed as a second liberation struggle for Africa. Franklin D Roosevelt once said that "(h)uman dignity cannot exist without economic security and independence".[12] Poverty is the single greatest problem facing Africans and must be attacked with programmes, not with ideologies. People cannot develop their self-esteem if they are destitute.

In contrast to the European Renaissance, which took place in a world with relatively few international connections, the proposed African Renaissance has to take account of the deeply interconnected (globalised) world in which we live today, as well as of Africa's current marginalised position within that system. There are, however, conflicting views with regard to which school of development thinking should be pursued.[13]

Two main strategies can be found in the African Renaissance discourse with regard to economic policies. Some 'Africanists' reject globalisation and the current neo-liberal economic system, and by means of the African Renaissance they would like to detach Africa from the world's main economic systems, and establish a self-sustaining and largely closed economic unity in Africa. However, the majority of the proponents of the African Renaissance do not agree with this view, and they believe that Africa's economic salvation is seated in African countries pursuing the best possible position for the continent within the current globalised capitalist system. To them, the following are some of the most important goals of an economic Renaissance in Africa: sustainable economic growth, the expansion of trade, more foreign investment in Africa, and the reduction of Africa's foreign debt. And

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12   J Bester and K Bell, **Real people power: your path to economic freedom** (Parktown, 1997), p. 56, as quoted by FL Membe, **Africa's troubled political disorder: a case on Zambia. What Renaissance? Whose Renaissance?** (Ficksburg, 2001), p. 1.

13   With regard to various schools of development thinking see, for example, V Desai and RB Potter (eds), **The companion to development studies** (London, 2002) and B Hettne, **Development theory and the three worlds: towards an international political economy of development** (Burnt Mill, 1995).

then, of course, corruption must also be eradicated.[14] This economic strategy is also pursued in the NEPAD programme, about which more will be said in section 6.

Calls for African solutions are often made regarding the African Renaissance, but what exactly is practically meant by 'African solutions' is often not so clear. Connected to this is the conviction that it is up to Africans themselves to improve their continent, and that they can and should no longer be dependent on others to achieve this.[15] However, the Renaissance also includes an aspiration to change the international system in favour of the developing countries, with the main focus on reforming the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.[16]

The quality of life of all Africans must be improved, in particular that of the most poverty-stricken and marginalised sections of society. People must be empowered, they must be given the opportunity to have control over their own lives, thereby increasing their ability to mobilise and utilise the resources that are available to them. And these processes must go hand in hand with a process of democratisation. After all, it is difficult for democracy to take root as long as the majority of the people are hungry.

5.   THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

One could contend that institutionalised political chaos is one of the main causes of many of Africa's problems. It is self-evident that political stability is a basic precondition for economic and social development.

At a political level, the African Renaissance aims to increase the number of stable democracies on a continent that has, over the past 40 years, been plagued by coups d'état, military dictatorships, one-party states, and a variety of intra- and

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[14]   See, for example, P Vale and S Maseko, "South Africa and the African Renaissance", **International Affairs** 74(2), 1998, p. 282; R Louw, "Democracy and economic development is key to Mbeki's non-racist, non-sexist African Renaissance", **Southern Africa Report** 16(39), 2 October 1998, p. 2; Botha in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), pp. 17, 22-4; H Melber, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): scope and perspectives" in H Melber **et al.**, **The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): African perspectives** (Uppsala, 2002), p. 10; F Cheru, **African Renaissance: roadmaps to the challenge of globalization** (London and New York, 2002), pp. xii-xiii, 1-33.

[15]   S Vil-Nkomo and J Myburgh, "The political economy of an African Renaissance: understanding the structural conditions and forms" in Makgoba (ed.), p. 273; C Chimutengwende, "Pan-Africanism and the second liberation of Africa", **Race & Class** 38(3), 1997, p. 30; Mbeki, **Africa: the time has come**, p. 203 **et seq.**; "Another message lurks in Mbeki's Mao quote", **The Star**, 8 August 2003, p. 12.

[16]   Vil-Nkomo and Myburgh, p. 273; J Stremlau, "African Renaissance and international relations" in Makgoba (ed.), p. 106.

interstate conflicts. The vision also includes good governance as well as respect for the rule of law and human rights.[17]

With regard to conflict resolution, the African Renaissance vision contains a call for African solutions to African conflicts, establishing a **Pax Africana**. The negotiation processes in Burundi and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been hailed as successful examples of African conflict resolution, as has the resignation on 11 August 2003 of Charles Taylor in Liberia.[18] Only time will tell whether these events will have lasting positive results.

It is important that African countries are able to defend themselves adequately. They must be able to secure their borders, and littoral states must be able to patrol their coastal waters. Africa's defence forces are, generally speaking, in a poor state, and they are often used (or misused) by politicians for all the wrong reasons. African countries need small but disciplined, well-trained, professional and well-equipped defence forces, and it is important for defence forces to take part in legitimate peace-keeping and peace-enforcing operations in an effort to ensure peace and stability on the continent - a prerequisite for the African Renaissance to be successful.

6.   FROM PAN-AFRICANISM VIA THE OAU, NEPAD AND THE AU TO THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

Before NEPAD and the establishment of the AU, there was the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but the OAU was the child of Pan-Africanism. In an effort to indicate - once again - that the ideal of an African Renaissance dates back far in history, and to place what has thus far been said about the African Renaissance in historical perspective, it is necessary to review the history of Pan-Africanism briefly.

Pan-Africanism can be regarded as the intellectual and political idea that holds that all Africans and people of African descent should be regarded as a unity. As a political movement, it strives to ensure Africa's political and economic independence and to achieve unity across (the artificial colonial) boundaries. At a

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17   See, for example, H Barrell, "Back to the future: Renaissance and South African domestic policy", **Politeia** 19(3), 2000, p. 12; A Pritvorov and V Shubin, "Problems, pitfalls and potential for an African revival: a view from Russia", **Politeia** 19(3), 2000, p. 84; Botha in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), p. 16.

18   See, for example, N Nkosi, "The African Union: problems and prospects", **Africa Insight** 32(3), 2002, p. 61; C Landsberg and F Kornegay, "The African Renaissance: a quest for Pax Africana and Pan-Africanism" in **South Africa and Africa: reflections on the African Renaissance**, FGD Occasional Paper No. 17, 1998, pp. 16, 18; "Wat maak Afrika nou met Taylor?", **Beeld**, 16 August 2003, p. 10.

cultural level, Pan-Africanism has promoted African art, traditions and languages, and aimed at enhancing self-esteem and pride for Africa's history and cultures. The term has both a narrow and a broad meaning. The former is mainly limited to the African continent, while the latter includes people of African descent living elsewhere.[19]

The roots of Pan-Africanism reach far back into history. As early as 1787, Pan-Africanism was given its first organised form when the Free African Society was founded in the United States of America (USA). This movement resulted in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, which promoted Pan-Africanist ideas and was the first independent African-American denomination in the USA.[20]

Religion played an important role in the early development of Pan-Africanism. Other important characteristics were that it was an élite movement, that Africa was seen as a unity, that the continent's past was romanticised, and that the idea of a unique African personality was founded. These aspects continued to be of importance in the second phase of the development of Pan-Africanism, the main characteristic of which was the Pan-African congresses. From 23-25 July 1900, the first Pan-Africanist conference was held in London. Among the 32 people who were present was well-known African-American WEB du Bois (1868-1963) who, in the course of time, played an important role in the movement. The goals of the conference were to encourage unity, to facilitate meetings between black people and to promote their interests.[21]

The First World War (1914-1918) led to more significant contact between Pan-Africanists, and began to undermine the position of the colonial powers, albeit that it would take a second, and more comprehensive world war to prompt them to reconsider, in serious terms, their colonial position. Shortly after the end of the First World War, a Pan-Africanist congress was held from 19-21 February 1919 in the French capital, Paris. During this congress, Du Bois made an urgent plea to the

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[19]   For various perspectives with regard to the definition of Pan-Africanism see, for example, I Geiss, **The Pan-African movement** (London, 1974), p. 4; PO Esedebe, **Pan-Africanism: the idea and the movement, 1776-1991** (Washington, 1994), p. 5; WB Ackah, **Pan-Africanism: exploring the contradictions: politics, identity and development in Africa and the African diaspora** (Aldershot, 1999), p. 12; B Davidson, **Modern Africa: a social and political history** (London and New York, 1994), p. 327.

[20]   Geiss, pp. 8-9, 34; JA Langley, **Pan-Africanism and nationalism in West Africa 1900-1945** (London, 1973), p. 18; K Smith and FJ Nöthling, **Africa north of the Limpopo: the imperial experience since 1800** (Pretoria, 1985), pp. 413-4.

[21]   Geiss, pp. 176-92; Langley, pp. 27-9; B Davidson, **The search for Africa: a history in the making** (London, 1994), pp. 79, 83; WEB du Bois, "The Pan-African movement" in E Kedourie (ed.), **Nationalism in Asia and Africa** (London, 1970), p. 372.

colonial powers to terminate their oppression of Africans, to assign political rights to the local inhabitants and to improve education in the colonies.[22]

Pan-African congresses were also held in 1921 (in London, Brussels and Paris), in 1923 (in London and Lisbon), and in 1927 (in New York), but the congress movement came to a standstill in the 1930s due to the depression and to a shortage of funding.[23] Du Bois, who was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1910, was not able to secure much support for his ideas in the USA at any time. On the other hand, his opponent in the Pan-Africanist movement, the militant and flamboyant Marcus Aurelius Garvey (1887-1940), achieved greater success. Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914, preached 'Africa for the Africans' and wanted to throw all non-black people off the continent.[24]

Pan-Africanism took root up to and including the Second World War, in countries such as the USA, Britain and France, and in West Africa. Several, usually relatively short-lived, organisations with Pan-African goals were established. One example of such an organisation was the West African Students' Union (WASU), which was founded in London in 1924, under the guidance of Lapido Solanke (1884-1958). In 1931, Harold Moody (1882-1947) founded the League of Coloured People (LCP) in London. Another prominent Pan-Africanist in Britain was George Padmore (1902-1959).[25] In West Africa, JE Casey Hayford (1866-1930) established the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in Accra in 1920, of which the British West African colonies were members. It was a movement of students and intellectuals and its goal was to promote co-operation in British West Africa, as a prelude to greater unity. The unity of Africa was stressed and the NCBWA emphasised that black people in Africa had to stop quarrelling among themselves. Langley states that the main goal for the members of this élitist organisation was in fact to protect their own socio-economic interests and to enhance their opportunities in society. In 1930 Hayford died, after which the NCBWA faded.[26]

In France the négritude movement made an important contribution to Pan-Africanism. Two important thinkers who promoted négritude from the 1930s were Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) and Aime Césaire (born 1913). The proponents of the négritude movement stressed that it was important for Africans to be proud of their history and culture. It was a counter-movement to the common (European) view that Africa did not have any culture or history of value. The basis of négritude

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22   Geiss, pp. 233-40; Langley, pp. 63-7; Du Bois, p. 375.
23   Geiss, pp. 240-8, 252-8; Du Bois, pp. 377-85.
24   T Draper, **The rediscovery of black nationalism** (London, 1970), pp. 51-3; Geiss, pp. 263-71.
25   Geiss, pp. 297-304, 341-56.
26   **Ibid**., pp. 117-8, 285-92; Langley, p. 105 **et seq**.

was a celebration of 'blackness' and it emphasised that true freedom meant more than just political independence.[27] So, some 70 years ago, there were African leaders who preached an African Renaissance, without necessarily calling it by that name.

The third phase in the development of Pan-Africanism started with the Second World War (1939-1945) which heralded a new era in the history of the world, eventually resulting in dramatic changes in Africa. From 15-17 October 1945, a most important Pan-African congress was held in Manchester, England. The tone of this congress was significantly different from those that had been held earlier. More than ever before, the conference was anti-imperialistic and radical. A plea was made to establish a United States of Africa - if necessary, by means of violence. The men who attended were more inclined to action than those who had taken part in the previous congresses. The congress was also attended by future leaders of Africa, such as Jomo Kenyatta (ca 1889-1978) and Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972).[28]

From 1945, the Pan-African movement shifted to Africa in a larger measure than before, and a number of Pan-Africanist organisations were established in West Africa, such as the West African National Secretariat (WANS), which was established in 1946, with Kwame Nkrumah as one of its leaders. Its aim was to foster co-operation in West Africa, and to present a united front in order to gain independence. Its ultimate goal was a United States of Africa.[29] Consistently, Pan-Africanism was, to a large extent, a vision that was promoted by the black élite.

However, nationalist leaders increasingly placed the independence of their own territories first, and for as long as the process of independence was active (and gained momentum with the independence of Ghana in 1957), division rather than unity was prevalent. Excessive nationalism did not leave much scope for unity across territorial borders. Still, leaders used (or abused) Pan-Africanism when this suited their purposes.[30] Even though there were several attempts to form federations and unions between various African countries, and even though there were a number of conferences under Pan-African auspices, none of these can be said to have had any success with regard to promoting Pan-Africanism. Nationalism and Pan-Africanism clashed and the former usually won the battle.

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[27]   Geiss, pp. 313, 319-21.
[28]   **Ibid.**, p. 363 **et seq.**; Langley, pp. 354-65; Ackah, p. xvi.
[29]   Geiss, pp. 411-2; Langley, p. 358.
[30]   Geiss, pp. 418-9; R Oliver and A Atmore, **Africa since 1800** (London, 1972), p. 282.

It is interesting to note that six years after Ghana became independent, and only three years after seventeen African states gained independence - in what became known as 'The Year of Africa' - the OAU was established in Addis Ababa on 25 May 1963, an event that can be regarded as the first major practical expression of Pan-Africanism.

The goals of the OAU were, among others, to improve the living conditions of Africans and to promote solidarity among Africans. Co-operation in the fields of economy, education, health, science, technology and defence was to be promoted, and the ideals of peace, security and human rights were to be pursued by all member states. It is clear that although the term 'African Renaissance' was not necessarily used, the OAU wanted to foster a revival, a rebirth, a Renaissance in Africa. In practice, however, the organisation could not succeed in achieving these ideals and it turned out to be mainly a talk-shop, accomplishing little of real value. Instead of transcending colonial borders, the OAU assisted in consolidating them. Only when members attacked apartheid in South Africa was there a large measure of unanimity. Otherwise, human rights abuses were ignored, democratic government was not really promoted, and coups d'état and armed conflict within and between OAU member states were rife from the 1960s onwards - and continue to dog 21st-century Africa.[31] More than forty years after most African states gained independence, it was clear that all was not well in Africa - in that 'ghetto of the world', as a Dutch journalist once labelled the continent.[32] For some of the new leaders in Africa, including South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, it became clear that a genuine rebirth, a Renaissance, was needed if Africa was to survive in an ever-increasingly competitive world.

At an OAU conference in Sirte, Libya, in March 2001, it was announced that the OAU would be replaced in 2002 by a new organisation, known as the African Union (AU). In conjunction with the AU, we find NEPAD, which was initially called the New Africa Initiative (NAI), and is associated with the Millennium Africa Recovery (or Renaissance) Programme (MAP) of Thabo Mbeki, Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, and Algeria's President Abedelaziz Bouteflika, as well as the Omega Plan of Senegal's President Abdoulage Wade, which merged on 3 July 2001 to form the NAI.[33] More than 50 years after the Marshall Plan

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31   "The charter of the Organisation of African Unity" in AA Mazrui, **Towards a Pax Africana: a study of ideology and ambition** (Chicago, 1965), p. 119 **et seq.**; Davidson, **The search for Africa**, pp. 253-4; D Lamb, **The Africans** (New York, 1987), pp. 96-103; W Tordoff, **Government and politics in Africa** (Houndmills and London, 1995), pp. 278, 280-5.

32   R van Rijckevorsel, "Africa: getto van de wereld", **Elsevier**, 16 July 1994, p. 29.

33   "NAI aiming high and must shed past shades", **The Star**, 20 July 2001, p. 12; "What's the plan?", **Mail & Guardian**, 20-26 July 2001, p. 19; "G8 opens doors to poor nations", **The Sunday Times**, 22 July 2001, p. 1; A de Waal, "What's new in the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development'?", **International Affairs** 78(3), 2002, p. 466.

resurrected a war-torn Western Europe, the hope is expressed that a similar initiative would also assist Africa to take its rightful place in the world order.

At a conference of some African leaders, held on 23 October 2001, the decision was taken to rename NAI as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).[34] NEPAD was subsequently adopted as a programme of action by the then OAU at the Lusaka summit in 2001, and remained so after the AU was officially launched on 9 July 2002. NEPAD sets as its goals, among others, an economic growth rate for Africa of 7% or more per annum for the next fifteen years, halving poverty by 2015, and increasing economic integration and techno-logical progress. In return for aid (or as it is more commonly called today, 'development assistance'), for the reduction or the removal of trade barriers and agricultural subsidies by the developed world, and for the transformation of the international financial institutions, African countries will commit themselves to democracy and good governance. NEPAD has been relatively positively welcomed internationally, especially by the G8,[35] even if serious doubts exist in the developed world with regard to the possibilities of its success.[36]

On 11 July 2000 the Constitutional Act of the AU[37] was adopted at Lomé in Togo, and at the OAU summit in Durban in July 2002 the OAU was disbanded and the AU created, with Mbeki as its first president. At the second AU summit in Maputo in July 2003, Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano was elected president of the organisation. The aim of the AU is to assist the people of Africa to achieve unity, peace, safety, stability and economic progress, among others, by means of respect for democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance, and to pursue international co-operation.[38] By emphasising the need for democracy and respect for human rights it is, at least on paper, different from the OAU.[39]

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[34]   With regard to NEPAD's programme as well as other policy documents see ‹www.nepad.org›.
[35]   The G8 are the major industrial democracies (the USA, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Canada and the Russian Federation), whose leaders meet once a year to discuss economic and political issues facing their domestic societies as well as the international community as a whole.
[36]   P Beinart, "Wait time", **New Republic** 228(2), 20 January 2003, p. 6; "Old ideas, new commitment?", **Economist** 360(8229), 7 July 2001, p. 15; De Waal, pp. 464-71; S Maxwell and K Christiansen, "Negotiation as simultaneous equation: building a new partnership with Africa", **International Affairs** 78(3), 2002, pp. 477, 483-4; E Maloka, "Nepad and Africa's future", **Africa Insight** 32(2), 2002, pp. 65-7; Melber, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): scope and perspectives", pp. 7-9.
[37]   For the constitutional act of the AU as well as other policy documents see ‹www.africa-union.org›.
[38]   "Transformation of the OAU into AU", **New Era**, 29 July 2002, p. 20; "Can new African Union sweep clean?", **Sunday Independent**, 15 July 2001, p. 7; "OAE uitgedien: AU sal wa deur die drif moet trek", **Die Volksblad**, 12 July 2001, p. 15; "Africa stands united", **Mail & Guardian**, 13-19 July 2001, p. 13; "Dis 'n moeilike pad na Afrika-eenheid", **Rapport**, 15 July 2001, p. 15; V Shubin, "African Renaissance and African unity in the era of globalisation" in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), p. 73; "Dis onvanpas dat Mugabe hoë AU-pos beklee", **Beeld**, 15 July 2003, p. 2.
[39]   "May OAU birthday candles fan change's flame", **The Star**, 23 May 2003, p. 14.

The AU is envisaged to function much in the same way as the European Union (EU), and the plan of action includes an African parliament, an executive authority, a central bank and monetary unit, and a communal legal system. Following the ideals of the old Pan-Africanists, the national states will have to give up part of their sovereignty since, even if one of the AU's principles is non-interference in each other's affairs, it will have the power to intervene in grave circumstances – such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.[40]

From the above-mentioned goals of the AU, it is clear that it can be regarded as the engine for an African Renaissance. Historically, the AU also links up closely with the ideals of Pan-Africanism, where the latter's origins can (as has been indicated) be traced back more than 200 years.

7.   CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

The roots of the African Renaissance vision can clearly be found in Pan-Africanism and the two visions are in fact very similar to each other. Thus, one can argue that little has changed with regard to the vision being proposed, except for a difference in emphasis on issues such as democracy and good governance. The African Renaissance and NEPAD also repeat, to a large extent, the aims and policies that many individuals and organisations worldwide have been urging Africa to pursue for a long time.

In the NEPAD programme it is recognised that there have been attempts in the past to set out continent-wide development programmes, for example, the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos of 1980, the Treaty of Abuja of 1991, the Kampala Document of 1991, and the Cairo Agenda for Action of 1995,[41] but that these all failed. However, it is argued that today there is a new set of circumstances in which the NEPAD ideas lend themselves to practical implementation.[42] But is this really the case? While keeping in mind that internal and external factors and processes cannot strictly be separated since they are interrelated, some of the important internal factors will now first be evaluated.

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40   Melber, **The New Africa Initiative and the African Union: a preliminary assessment and documentation**, pp. 7-8; "Constitutive Act of the African Union", ‹www.africa-union.org›.
41   Botha in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), pp. 25-30; C Legum, "Renaissance: romantic realism?" in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), p. 85.
42   "The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)" (paragraph 42), ‹www.nepad.org›.

It is often emphasised that there is today a new generation of leaders in Africa, committed to democracy and good governance.[43] A difference between Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance is that the latter partly assigns the blame for Africa's problems to Africa's past and present leaders, and does not solely blame external actors (especially the colonial powers), as was often the case in Pan-Africanism. The African Renaissance will not succeed unless there is the political will for it to do so among Africa's leaders. At the same time that African leaders established the AU, some of them were involved in conflicts, some restricted press freedom in their own states, several presidents changed their country's constitution in order to be able to be elected for a third term, and some of the leaders have come to power through devious methods.[44] The events in Zimbabwe since about 2000 have also cast doubts on the sincerity of the promises of democracy and good governance that have been made; so too the way in which many African leaders have dealt with the situation there - an inaction that is in many places described as completely undermining and discrediting the entire Renaissance vision, as well as the possibility of making a success of NEPAD.[45] The fact that President Robert Mugabe was elected to be one of five regional vice-chairmen at the AU summit in Maputo in July 2003 did not contribute positively to the image of the AU.[46]

In contrast to the European Renaissance, which evolved and developed spontaneously, the African Renaissance is consciously planned, and driven almost exclusively by politicians.[47] Perhaps a basic condition for the successful implementation of the African Renaissance is that it must be depoliticised, and should therefore no longer be exploited by politicians for their own purposes. For example, the Renaissance may not be used to draw attention away from burning internal issues in specific countries or merely to ensure the continued transfer of

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[43]   See, for example, P Chabal, "The quest for good government and development in Africa: is NEPAD the answer?", **International Affairs** 78(3), 2002, pp. 447-62; P Chabal, **Power in Africa: an essay in political interpretation** (London, 1994), **passim**, and R Joseph (ed.), **State, conflict and democracy in Africa** (Boulder, 1999), **passim**.

[44]   "Africa stands united", **Mail & Guardian**, 13-19 July 2001, p. 13; "Battle for soul of Africa is far from won", **The Cape Times**, 16 July 2001, p. 8; "Is AU not just another name?", **Business Day**, 16 July 2001, p. 8.

[45]   See, for example, Beinart, p. 6; "Old ideas, new commitment?", **Economist** 360(8229), 7 July 2001, p. 15; S Coetzee, "Afrika en kapasiteitsontwikkeling: kan Nepad slaag?", **Word and Action** 382, 2002, p. 23; G Mills, **The wired model: South Africa, foreign policy and globalisation** (Cape Town, 2000), pp. 166, 168, 180; J Gathaka and S Wanjala, "NEPAD and Kenya" in Melber **et al**., pp. 18-9; R Cornwell, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development: last chance for Africa?" in Melber **et al**., p. 31; "Afrika sal fyn moet trap vir groot G8-hulp", **Rapport**, 7 June 2003, p. 7; "Afrika-unie 'n jaar later - dit sukkel, te veel van die ou weë te bespeur in Addis Abeba", **Beeld**, 8 February 2003, p. 10.

[46]   "Zimbabwe nou meer bewonder, sê Robert", **Beeld**, 14 July 2003, p. 4; "Mugabe se AU verkiesing gekap", **Beeld**, 14 July 2003, p. 4; "Dis onvanpas dat Mugabe hoë AU-pos beklee", **Beeld**, 15 July 2003, p. 2.

[47]   See, for example, V Mavimbela, "The African Renaissance: a workable dream" in **South Africa and Africa: reflections on the African Renaissance**, FGD Occasional Paper No 17, 1998, p. 32.

resources from the developed world. The **real** emancipation of women in Africa is another basic condition that has to be met before the African Renaissance can be implemented successfully. It is also a concept that will have to be embraced on a much larger scale by the masses than is currently the case.[48]

Another issue that has to be dealt with urgently and forcefully is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, an issue that is unfortunately, to a large extent, lacking in the African Renaissance debate. NEPAD does, for example, not give HIV/AIDS any greater status than that of an ordinary health problem.[49]

Another basic obstacle in the way of the successful implementation of the African Renaissance is the prevalence of violence and conflicts in so many parts of Africa.[50] Several countries in Africa are still engaged in a struggle to achieve internal unity, let alone co-operate with other countries. Contradictions between unity, sovereignty, co-operation and nationalism existed in Pan-Africanism and also pose a problem for the African Renaissance. Calls for unity and co-operation have often been nothing but empty words since the countries and their leaders have placed their own interests first and have not been prepared to sacrifice any of their sovereignty. The AU's Constitutive Act does include statements regarding taking steps against countries where, for instance, crimes against humanity take place. This is a positive development, but it is not worth much without the political will being there to do something in practice, especially since the system is based on voluntary peer reviews.

Without basic unity, the AU will struggle to have a positive effect with regard to the resolution of conflicts. One example of the lack of unity within the organisation, and of the hesitancy to 'interfere' in another country's internal affairs is that, at the time of the second AU summit in July 2003, only 15 countries had ratified the Peace and Security Council Protocol (at least 27 countries must ratify it in order for the institution to become operational) and only 17 countries had volunteered to be reviewed by the African Peer Review Mechanism.[51] Another division within the AU is that between Muammar Ghaddafi (who played a leading

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48   For gender issues and the African Renaissance see S Msimang, "African Renaissance: where are the women?", **Agenda** 44, 2000, pp. 67-8; "Renaissance or Menaissance", **Agenda** 44, 2000, pp. 84-9, and L Wadley, "South African archaeology, gender, and the African Renaissance", **South African Historical Journal** 43, 2000, pp. 81-95.

49   De Waal, p. 475.

50   In the years 1945 to 1994 there were at least 25 conflicts in Africa south of the Sahara in which more than 1 000 people died; in fact, the total number of dead in these conflicts is estimated at no less than 4 164 000 - and then the civil wars in Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC, which have occurred since 1994, have not yet been taken into account. See the fold-up chart in **The military balance 2001-2002** (Oxford, 2001).

51   "African states resistant to ceding power to AU", **The Star**, 18 July 2003, p. 14.

role in initiating the AU, but who is negative towards NEPAD) and the fathers of NEPAD.[52]

Another issue is whether the African Renaissance is a truly African vision or whether it is mainly South African? Many leaders and intellectuals in other African countries also support the idea of an African Renaissance, but it is predominantly driven by South Africans. Although some think that South Africa should lead the continent in the Renaissance, there are also those who are sceptical, and even those who think South Africa is arrogant, and who doubt South Africa's intentions.[53]

The African Renaissance, as well as the AU and NEPAD, have been criticised for being top-driven with very little contact with the grass-roots. It is, just as Pan-Africanism was in the past, a movement driven by the political and intellectual élite.[54] Will ordinary people identify with the African Renaissance vision or will the AU be an élite club of leaders largely cut off from their people just as the OAU was? This depends, to a large extent, on whether the AU will be able to deliver what it promises, but effective implementation will, on the other hand, not be possible without the co-operation of the majority of Africans.

With regard to the external international circumstances that (can) influence the African Renaissance, it must be borne in mind that in the post-Cold War era the possibility for a partnership of the nature suggested by NEPAD is more likely to succeed than would have been the case in the Cold War context, where the superpower rivalry would have made it very difficult, if not impossible. Also, the end of the Cold War did not lead to a more peaceful world; instead there has been a proliferation of internal conflicts, especially in Africa, and the international community has not been able to solve this problem. In this context a window of opportunity might be open for initiatives such as the African Renaissance and NEPAD.

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[52]   See, for example, Nkosi, p. 59; "Bush se besoek skep verwarring, sê Libië", **Beeld**, 9 July 2003, p. 4; "Mbeki gekant teen idee van Afrika-weermag", **Beeld**, 20 September 2002, p. 4; "Verskille na vore by OAE-graf in Durban, Mbeki wil saamwerk met 1ste wêreld; Ghaddafi skop vas", **Beeld**, 9 July 2002, p. 2; "Langasem Ghaddafi vra Afrika-vasteland sonder landsgrense", **Beeld**, 9 July 2002, p. 2.

[53]   Vale and Maseko, p. 283; Nuttall and Michael, p. 110 **et seq.**; Landsberg and Kornegay, pp. 16, 18-9, 22; Maloka in Maloka and Le Roux (eds), pp. 3, 7.

[54]   Nkosi, pp. 58-9; Maloka, "Nepad and Africa's future", **Africa Insight** 32(2), 2002, p. 65; MC Musambachime, "African Renaissance? What are the solutions to the unequal and unfair distribution of wealth in Africa?" in Venter (ed.), p. 203; Melber, "What's new in the New Partnership for Africa's Development?" in Melber **et al.**, pp. 33-5.

Other external factors that must be taken into account are the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath.[55] On the one hand, 'the war on terrorism' has steered the attention (and probably also the resources) away from Africa. On the other hand, it might also lead to an increased sense of urgency with regard to developing the poor and conflict-stricken parts of the globe, in order to prevent them from becoming a basis for terrorism.

Within the context of globalisation, it might be more necessary than ever before for Africa to form some kind of united front. Economically, Africa is being increasingly marginalised and there is a great need to prevent the perpetuation or deterioration of its present position in the international economic system. Attempts at closer regional co-operation[56] are common worldwide today, and are usually partly motivated by a desire to achieve some degree of control over how the forces of globalisation affect a particular territory. Hettne differentiates between an old and a new regionalism. The old one was often imposed from the outside, or from above, for geopolitical reasons. Therefore, it included few incentives for economic co-operation, and did not normally go far beyond the signing of free trade treaties. The new regionalism is broader based and aims at promoting the region as a viable economic, cultural and ecological unit. It can be seen as a response to, and protection against, globalisation, or as a different route to globalisation, with an improved balance between the regions of the world.[57] It is possible to characterise the long-term aims of NEPAD as being, to a large extent, in line with the new regionalism.

By standing together, the countries of Africa might have a better chance of being heard in the international community. Furthermore, economic co-operation might stimulate development by integrating the states' economies, reducing trade barriers, and making the African economy more efficient. Regionalisation can also have positive effects for micro-states that are too small to be viable on their own, for example, countries such as Rwanda and Burundi. Problems with regard to violent conflicts and environmental degradation also often have to be dealt with on a regional level.[58]

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[55]   For various analyses with regard to these issues see, for example, K Booth and T Dunne (eds), **Worlds in collision: terror and the future of global order** (Houndmills, 2002).

[56]   With regard to regionalism see, for example, B Hettne, A Inotai and O Sunkel, **Globalism and the new regionalism** (New York, 1999); B Hettne, A Inotai and O Sunkel, **The new regionalism and the future of security and development** (New York, 2000); B Hettne, A Inotai, and O Sunkel, **National perspectives on the new regionalism in the South** (New York, 2000), and M Schulz, F Söderbaum and J Öjendal, **Regionalization in a globalizing world** (London and New York, 2001).

[57]   Hettne, pp. 157-9, 267-9.

[58]   **Ibid.**; L Fawcett, "Regionalism in historical perspective" in L Fawcett and A Hurrell (eds), **Regionalism in world politics: regional organization and international order** (New York, 1995), pp. 22-3.

In the light of the many problems that beset Africa, one might ask whether it makes any sense still to speak of an African Renaissance, but one should not give up and see Africa as a lost cause. If the economic, political and cultural plans of the African Renaissance and NEPAD are indeed carried out, there is a good chance that they will have a positive developmental impact on the continent. In order to be able to change a society, a vision is needed, and visions often appear idealistic. While acknowledging this fact, it is still necessary to avoid aiming unrealistically high since this could raise people's expectations to the same heights and when the leaders fail to deliver, they will lose legitimacy. There have to be practical results, otherwise the ideas do not have much value, as was the case with the Pan-African ideals.

From a historical point of view, it is necessary to continue the debate on the African Renaissance. Historians have a responsibility to take stock of developments and to indicate what progress (if any) has been made regarding the African Renaissance, and what the reasons are for these developments - either the positive and/or the negative. Historians can also assist in developing a higher level of historical consciousness among African people and politicians.