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**Author**

Cossa, José

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# African Renaissance and Globalization: A Conceptual Analysis and a Way Forward

José Cossa

## Introduction

After colonialism and subsequent independences of African states, the current wave of *Globalization* has been compelling Africans to rethink their position in the world. One key aspect of Africa's redefinition and response to Globalization is the *African Renaissance*; a concept that has been subject to debate among African academia, with some African scholars arguing that it is borrowed from experiences unique to Europe and thus rendering it irrelevant to Africa. This paper is a conceptual analysis of the term *African Renaissance* and an assessment of its relevance within the context of globalization.

Thabo Mbeki formally introduced the term *African Renaissance* in an address to the Corporate Council on Africa in Chantilly, VA, USA, in April 1997; then, addressed an audience of 470 people from academia, business, and politics, in a meeting held on September 28 and 29 of 1998, in Johannesburg, South Africa.<sup>1</sup> The main objectives of the meeting in Johannesburg were to define "who we are and where we are going in the global community, and to formulate practical strategies and solutions for future action that would benefit the African masses";<sup>2</sup> through Mbeki's key note speech and a series of presentations in the meeting, participants were provided with the necessary social, political, and intellectual tools such as definitions, objectives, and the historical, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, that would equip them to react against the overwhelming influence of globalization and to advocate for national systems in various sectors of African life.<sup>3</sup>

President Mbeki's speech in Johannesburg provided a motto of an African vision embraced by the participants in the conference. Mbeki's speech is characterized by an emphasis on the need to advance developmental agendas that would bring Africa to a position of competitor in the global world economy. His objectives

included economic growth, social and human resource development, the building of a modern economic and social infrastructure, the cancellation of Africa's debt, improvement in trade, increase in domestic and foreign investment, expansion of development assistance, and better access of African products into the markets of the developed world. To map the strategy to achieve these objectives Mbeki posits,

I am convinced that a great burden rests on the shoulders of Africa's intelligentsia to help us to achieve these objectives. . . we have arrived at the point where the enormous brain power which our continent possesses must become a vital instrument in helping us to secure our equitable space within a world affected by a rapid process of globalization and from which we cannot escape.<sup>4</sup>

The above statement reflects Mbeki's concern for the effects of globalization and his conviction that educated elite is the necessary condition for Africa's development. For Mbeki, educated Africans are primarily responsible for helping Africa to restore her dignity, to define her future, and to develop to a level of competitor in today's world economy. Despite some African scholars' argument that the term *African Renaissance* is borrowed from experiences unique to Europe, thus rendering it irrelevant to Africa,<sup>5</sup> it is essential for African scholars to help reflect on how to position Africa equitably with the other continents in the world; thus, the indispensability of a call for an African Renaissance of sorts, i.e., a call to reclaim a Pan-African identity or multiple identities. In such a call lies a challenge that needs careful consideration—the adequacy, or inadequacy, of the concept of *African Renaissance* as a descriptor of the Africans' attempt to redefine their future; therefore, in this paper, I engage the concept as a means to contribute towards further reflection of whether the concept is adequate to describe these attempts or not. In this paper, I briefly discuss connections between language, education, and freedom; perform a conceptual analysis of *African Renaissance*; and, suggest a response that Africans might engage as a step towards a new Africa envisioned in the African Renaissance.

## Language, Education, and Freedom

Some scholars advocate for a complete freedom from the languages of the oppressors and others see in those languages a means to unify the individual countries and the distinct people and language groups cohabiting territories once divided by the imperial powers.<sup>6</sup>

African attempts to obtain complete freedom from exploitation have been characterized by the perception (of freedom) held by those who interpreted and represented the desire for such freedom—more specifically, the African elite educated in the Western system within Africa or in the Diaspora. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o has called these men and women interpreters, naming them after the role played by the philosophers of Socrates’ *allegory of the cave*.<sup>7</sup> In the allegory, Plato describes how Socrates viewed the role of the philosopher as one who illuminated the residents of the cave by interpreting the reality of the shadows they saw in the cave, which reflected what was actually happening in the world outside.<sup>8</sup> Wa Thiong’o argues that the interpreter needs to be sensitive to the reality of those in the cave when attempting to interpret the reality found outside the cave. He states the following:

What is needed is a revolt by all those trained in the traditions of the Macaulay system to reconnect with the dwellers of the colonial and neo-colonial caves and together develop strategies and tactics for breaking free. Such intellectuals, writing and talking in the languages that the people can speak and understand, could then bring all the wealth of their contacts with the language of the world to enrich theirs.<sup>9</sup>

The level of freedom advocated by Wa Thiong’o is one in which the interpreter engages with other interpreters to construct a meaning of freedom that is understandable to the disadvantaged, oppressed, or neo-colonized (e.g., peasants, lower classes, and all those who are not well-versed in the languages of the West) because such construction of freedom is communicated in a commonly familiar language.<sup>10</sup> I argue, though, that there is a deeper dimension of freedom demanding that its meaning be interpreted by the oppressed in a way that the oppressed auto-conceives its nature. This auto-conceived meaning is beyond one

that is communicated (even if consensually) to the oppressed; that is, beyond what a class of educated and concerned people think freedom means. Therefore, it is imperative that those who interpret freedom and progress do so in view of, not only the audience's languages but also, their cognitive processes and abilities. The African interpreter needs to understand that to aim at converting the oppressed to one's conceptions of reality is to disregard the human attributes and values of the audience.

This dichotomy of auto-conceived versus interpreted freedom is a paradox faced by the educated African and I am in no way promising a solution through this paper. However, by acknowledging the semi-perpetual struggle of the oppressed African who—even when dealing with other Africans such as I whose education is markedly foreign—remains at a position of disadvantage, I desire to present a challenge to my own epistemological propensity to impose models of critique, deconstruction, and construction of meanings to concepts that do not originate from me. Notice that I have used constructs that as far as current global discourse is concerned are not typically African, but reflect the paradoxical global impact of postmodernism (here used as the accommodation of diverse epistemologies as valid paths to knowledge acquisition and of multiple knowledges as valid).

As evidenced in Wa Thiong'o and his discourse on African interpreters, Mbeki's call for an African Renaissance is not essentially new; historically, the desire to shrug off colonialism has been characterized as Pan-Africanism, negritude, liberation, freedom fight, etc.. A prominent philosophy reflective of anti-colonial sentiment and closely linked to the *African Renaissance* is Pan-Africanism, an attempt to mobilize Africans to unite against the tyranny of colonialism by redefining an African identity and freedom independent of colonial influence. In many ways, thus, the *African Renaissance* is a reigniting of the spirit of Pan-Africanism. The continuity between Pan-Africanism and the *African Renaissance* is evident also in the arena of formal education, a phenomenon inherited from colonialism that divides Africans when posed with questions surrounding its value in the anti-colonial and anti-globalization fight—that is, for example, some Africans view formal education as indispensable to African development while others view it as a neo-colonial instrument. For instance, despite Mbeki's *great* commission that the intelligentsia,

i.e., the educated elite, should engage in an *African Renaissance*, some advocates for an *African Renaissance* argue that education is a major area of concern because the education that is present in African institutions serves the function of reproducing the existing unequal societal structures. Rodney states the following about the role of education:

Education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure . . . The most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans in sharp contrast with that which was later introduced (that is, under colonialism). . . . [T]he main purpose of colonial school system was to train Africans to participate in the domination and exploitation of the continent as a whole . . . Colonial education was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the role of education as observed by Rodney, social reproduction theorists, and dependency theorists as a whole, hold the view that language is used in education as an instrument to reproduce and perpetuate the views of the dominant culture. Often these theorists adhere to Freire's view of "conscientização" (conscientization or process of making one conscious) in which false consciousness can be eliminated through implementing a counter-system;<sup>12</sup> in this case, one that would promote national languages into an equal stand with foreign capitalist ones. Mazrui argues the following:

No country has ascended to a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization. Korea has approximately scientified the Korean language and made it the medium of its own technological take-off. Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it retains so overwhelmingly European languages for discourse on advanced learning?<sup>13</sup>

And further states that,

In secondary schools in Africa the literature taught to many African children is sometimes still European literature. But what is more to the point is that the African literature taught to African school children is almost never in indigenous languages. The European Other haunts the African Self from a young age in a post-colonial school. Have we been witnessing a clash of civilizations in African schools? Or does literature provide a cover for dependency?<sup>14</sup>

The conceptual analysis that follows tackles the questions of the adequacy, or inadequacy, of the term *African Renaissance*—a concern that is closely linked to the role of education in Africa and the use of European languages in African education in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

It is in view of the perspectives of those opposing the continual dependency on European languages in education, and other areas of African life, that this paper emerges. One question comes into play in this discussion: Can Africans legitimately use the term *African Renaissance* without being accused of lack of originality?

Although this question seems to call for a clear-cut answer and for a matter of definition of terms, it is a complex question that demands a careful analysis, which may not necessarily lead to a conclusion but will foster reflection on the term *African Renaissance*. In this journey of reflection, two more questions can be asked at this point: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a trend to be described as African? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions to legitimize the use of the term *African Renaissance*? These two questions are in no way exhaustive, I purposely employ them as a basic tool for conceptual analysis and a vehicle to contribute to the perpetual discourse on African affairs.

The African Renaissance Institute defines African Renaissance as,

A shift in the consciousness of the individual to reestablish our diverse traditional African values, so as to embrace the individual's responsibility to the community and the fact that he or

she, in community with others, together are in charge of their own destiny.<sup>15</sup>

One way to address these conceptual questions is to deal with the individual terms, i.e., *African* and *Renaissance*, within the main concept *African Renaissance*. The term *African* has been used to define those things<sup>16</sup> that are Native to Africa. Terms such as *traditional African values* and *return to aspects of Africa's Native civilization* imply that there are such things as *traditional values* and *Indigenous civilizations* that are unique to Africa.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that *traditional* stands for things that related to Africa prior to imperial occupation, it follows that African values (past and present) are distinct from other continents.

However, in certain arenas such as naturalization, some argue that to accept such conceptualization of *African* prompts segregation and discrimination of those who were born in the continent during and after colonialism and who have no familial links to Europe for at least a few generations.<sup>18</sup> Others, however, disregard this argument as inconsistent with definitions of people from other continents such as the case of the concept *American* which fully applies only to Americans of European descent and all others are excluded from full identity by the qualifying prefix preceding American (e.g., African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American and even Native-American<sup>19</sup>).<sup>20</sup> While the latter argument has a proclivity towards exclusivism by advocating an exclusion of the non-European for being in the minority, the former has a proclivity towards inclusivism by advocating for an inclusion of the European despite being in the minority. This, one could argue, is revealing of how the West exerts higher influence in defining people groups and what is politically correct when labeling such groups.

In my attempt to analyze the concept *African*, I take into consideration how other continents define their experiences and the things that relate to them (i.e., the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be considered European). Europe has benefited from a great amount of slave trade and, consequently, there are, in Europe, numerous children of African slaves that have made it their home and adopted a European life-style. However, these people who have a dark skin and trace their ancestry to Africa, are still considered second class European and are



often referred to as African, *Africain*, *Africanos*, etc. Unlike in the USA and Caribbean where blacks or those of African ancestry are called African-American, in Europe they often carry only the identity of their ancestors.

One of the difficulties that Africans face in terms of identifying themselves with Europe and claiming Europeanness might be the fact that Africans' exodus to Europe during and after colonialism has been out of a disadvantageous position—initially, Africans went to Europe as slaves and now they go mostly as refugees, exiles, students, and immigrants seeking better-paid jobs. In contrast, Europeans come to Africa as experts, entrepreneurs, business gurus, etc. According to Uchem, this position of Africans in relation to Europeans has led to the views of white or European supremacy.<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that characteristics such as color of the skin, nationality, and relationship to such characteristics are crucial for Europeans definitions of 'who a European really is.' Adoption or acquisition of European citizenship does not make one a true European, even though constitutionally one may share the enjoyment of most benefits with those of typical European ancestry.

Having set the conditions for European, we need to set boundaries for whom can be considered a true African, and it is these necessary and sufficient conditions that will assist us in describing what *African* means within the concept *African Renaissance*.

Based on this brief discussion of the necessary and sufficient conditions for European, the term *African* will describe those individuals, and things associated to them, who are native to Africa and can (in one way or another, but not necessarily in terms of genealogy) trace their ancestry to native African people-groups. Thus, those individuals, and things associated to them, whose ancestry is not a part of the native African people-groups do not qualify as African. When used in the context of the African Renaissance this definition of African needs to be taken into account. In regards to legitimacy of use, and in view of our argument, the term *African* poses no problems. Africans are entitled to use African to describe, exclusively, their national experiences and past traditions and civilizations just like their European counterparts do. This is crucial not only to Africa's affirmation of their identity, but also to the delimitations of the influence exerted,

directly or indirectly, by globalization on the autonomy of the developing world to (re)construct its own identity.

The term that poses greater difficulties is the term *Renaissance*, because it is so widely associated with events that took place in Europe, which have a bearing upon European worldviews, practices, and systems (e.g., capitalism, humanism, imperialism, colonialism, etc.). If Africans are attempting or calling for a return to national languages, cultures, traditions, etc., as a means to emancipate themselves from colonial domination in all spheres of life and to assert Africa's uniqueness in the world, a question of originality and legitimacy comes into play. Why would Africans call this movement and philosophy a Renaissance? Are there no other terms to use?

Again, my argument hinges on the *model case* of what constitutes a Renaissance in Europe, and then assesses the legitimacy of using such a term in Africa. The following paragraphs provide a brief background on the nature of the European Renaissance that will serve as a foundation for the *model case*.<sup>22</sup>

The European Renaissance was triggered by social and political conditions during Europe's dark ages. Peasants, subjected to the rule of aristocrats, lived throughout Europe. Pillage, high and random taxation, and terrorism found its epitome in the role of the Catholic popes who not only supported the aristocracy, but also "had long ceased being servants of God. The Popes had become aristocrats living in a charmed existence barely distinguishable from that of the aristocracy. . ." <sup>23</sup>

New provides a vivid description of the Renaissance's background. Aspects such as wars, pestilence, and famine in northern Europe between 1315-1317; economic depression and the Black Death plague that took over Europe in the period between 1347-1350; and discussed the shortage of work force and loss of clergymen in order to shed light on the events of the following centuries. New recognizes positive events during the Dark Ages in Europe, in spite of the negative forces that foreran the European Renaissance. These events included the rationalization and centralization of commerce due to depression, and the development of more efficient bookkeeping techniques.<sup>24</sup>

It was due to that critical state in Europe that renaissance became unavoidable. Estep describes the Renaissance as a return to classical excellence in the social, political, and religious realms.<sup>25</sup>

Some important features of its background were (1) the rise of a pan-European culture; (2) emergent individual thinking; (3) the rise of capitalism opposed to the Church's prohibition of loans for interest, as well as the Church's later compromise with capitalism; and, (4) the nation states in Europe with the consequent divisions of territory.

The African Renaissance presents similar trends to those of the European Renaissance. One of the greatest similarities is the issue of vernacular languages and the fact that Africa is undergoing tremendous challenges in regards to its identity and culture. Many African leaders and scholars use the term *African Renaissance* limiting it to reclaiming the validity, in a global sphere, of national forms of African civilization and languages. President Mandela states that, "The time has come for Africa to take full responsibility for the woes and use the immense collective wisdom it possesses to make a reality of the ideal of the African Renaissance, whose time has come."<sup>26</sup> Pixley ka Isaka Seme argues for a regeneration of Africa that reflects African innate creativity, rather than a creativity acquired from Europe or America.

This regeneration that reflects African innate creativity is essential because Western art theory, for instance, is often viewed as the *sine qua non* to validate African art. For example, the work of the internationally renowned African artists such as Malangatana, Katarikawe, Soi, Boghossian, Daman-M'Bemba, and Vincent Kofi are often appropriated to Western context of art theory by scholars. It seems to me that unless an African artist crosses the world of traditional or native creativity and interpretation of art, such an artist cannot reach a level of recognition as a globally renowned artist. In other words, highly and globally recognized art forms are those that are recognized by Western art scholars as having followed, or reflected, a certain complex art theory or technique. In essence, there is a covert statement that African civilizations are not mature enough to articulate complex art forms unless appropriated by the Western art world.<sup>27</sup> Pixley ka Isaka Seme states that,

The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine, plated

willow-ware and weapons of superior workmanship. Civilization resembles an organic being in its development—it is born, it perishes, and it can propagate itself. More particularly, it resembles a plant, it takes root in the teeming earth, and when the seeds fall in other soils new varieties sprout up. The most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic -indeed a regeneration moral and eternal!<sup>28</sup>

In view of what constituted Renaissance for Europe, Africans do have a fair case for comparing the two phenomena, and although they are not exactly the same and do not occur under the same circumstances, Africans do have a rebirth of some sort. Renaissance is a French term for *rebirth*; thus, to use such a term to mean only that which it means, i.e., *rebirth*, is fair. However, in light of the arguments made by the very movement, theory, philosophy, or era (whatever the perspective may be on the nature of the African Renaissance) that Africans are attempting to describe, it is not legitimate to use a European term for an African phenomenon. If Africa intends to assert herself in a world where European constructs have dominated for many centuries, Africa must begin with the nomenclature of events and phenomena in a way that marks its uniqueness. It is important to note that former President Thabo Mbeki, who promoted the term, has sparingly used the term in recent discourses; however, to this date, the term *African Renaissance* is still used in academic and political discourse. The concept needs to be reevaluated, particularly in academic discourse where the opinions of the intelligentsia are stamped and propagated, and a term must be found that characterizes the phenomena in an African way. One classical example of such terms can be found in the use of the Zulu word *uBuntu* and the Kiswahili word *Ujamaa* to characterize the philosophy of African communal living and the ‘extended compact family’ construct (*uBuntu* will be discussed further in a separate section towards the end of the article). Kiswahili and Zulu are not the only languages that possess concepts to describe this communal philosophy; and, considering that Africans are generally polyglot, it is not imperative to use select African languages to describe phenomena—the call is for African terms to describe African phenomena. In other words, Africa must find her own way of defining phenomena—the call for African terms to describe African phenomena. In other words, Africa

must find her own way of defining phenomena in order to place herself on a better position to counter any assimilationist tendencies of globalization, even if there are no specific languages selected to represent this discourse. This, I must admit, is not an easy undertake and goes beyond the identification of appropriate concepts—it calls for a cognitive rebirth of the African mind as it wrestles with the continent's reality amidst global tendencies.

Although I believe in the interconnectedness of reality and concepts, I reiterate that I am not suggesting that concepts alone will change reality; rather, I am asserting that the two are not mutually inclusive. It is not coincidental that people in all cultures attempt to find names that have meaning in order to name their children, countries adjust their names to suit a certain political change or desired political change, educational institutions change their names to suit the kinds of philosophy they embrace, and so forth. This takes place regardless of culture, economic status, or geographical location: It is a human phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the celebrated Mozambican writer, Mia Couto, argues that there is a common misperception in Mozambique that to change a name will change reality.<sup>30</sup> Couto alludes to the misgiving in relation to the assumption that Mozambique's name change from *People's Republic of Mozambique* to *Republic of Mozambique* was reflective of a change in the politico-economic life of Mozambicans. The bottom line is that rhetoric may change, but reality may remain the same amidst such change. In Couto's argument, a change in attitude is far more important than a name change. However, one may evoke traditional historical accounts in which a name change was a manifestation of the attitude one was to embrace or had already embraced. For instance, the biblical account of the change of name from Jacob, i.e., deceiver, to Israel, i.e., struggles with God, demonstrates an instance in which name change had a remarkable impact on a person's life.<sup>31</sup> In African traditional contexts and other many traditions in the world there is evidence that names are considered to bear an impact on human life. In traditional Africa, for instance, name giving is a spiritual ceremony as names are given in consultation with the ancestors, those that African theologians such as Mbiti categorize as the *living dead*<sup>32</sup>. This attachment of name with reality compels people to ask me if I am Portuguese, a fact that forces me to explain why I am José, and not Zihlenga as originally named by

my family and with ancestral and divine consent. Consequently, like many people born under Portuguese colonialism, I am confronted with the dilemma of wanting to reclaim my ancestral roots by using my ancestral name. However, caught in the web of global identification, the change of name in identity cards and social networks is an extremely complex undertaking.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, this limitation does not extend to name-giving alone or to a continent's reclaiming its space in the global sphere. A question may be raised as to how essential is a name change for Africa's phenomena and whether such resistance to global assimilationism would render Africa competitive in the world today. My answer to these questions would be plain and simple: a change in the naming of African phenomena will at least give Africa a new attitude towards such changes since phenomena is named and interpreted in a way that fits the broadly common aspects of African cognitive systems, uBuntu (or any other equivalent concept) being a case in point. Once Africans embrace the connection between nomenclatures of phenomena to reflect tradition, then there will be hope that more can be accomplished by the continent in affirming itself in the global arena. To emulate experiences of other countries' (e.g., China and India) versions of global participation is not enough for an African Renaissance, or equivalent transformational phenomena, because individual countries are unique in their expression of global participation—each participates in a way that their leaders see as fitting their needs—and a comparison begs the question of legitimacy, i.e., whether such comparison is legitimate or not. Africa, as a continent with a long history of colonialism and civil wars as well as a rich arrested development, ought to find its original expression of global participation in order to be successful. Model-hunting is not the solution for Africa, particularly when such so-called cosmopolitan models are in essence imperialistic more than equitably cosmopolitan; any equitable cosmopolitanism would welcome integration of African traditional cognition and worldviews without necessitating its verifiability by Western empiricism or pragmatism in which rest the possibility of universals, the duality of relativism-positivism, and the seductive terrain of postmodernism.<sup>34</sup>

Recent debates have at the center stage a possible United States of Africa (which in my view begs conceptual questions) as advocated by leaders such as the late Muammar al-Gaddafi

of Libya and Abdoulayne Wade of Senegal. Although I find this argument sensual, I have great reservations as to whether or not Africans are ready to embrace such a radical move at this back-sliding point from the Pan-African vision of Kwame Nkrumah and the like.<sup>35</sup> Regardless of how I view this agenda as contested terrain needing careful analysis, I think that Africans who entertain the possibility of unity beyond Western conceptions of government or Western conceptions of Africa's emergent agendas might be more prone to accepting the challenge presented in this paper than those who oppose any possible unity of the continent.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Way Forward**

Having argued for the need to reassess the concept of the African Renaissance or its equivalent, given the context of globalization, I feel the need to provide some sort of prophetic utterance as to what might work for the success of such a noble project. One vehicle for a successful occurrence of an African Renaissance is education, but education alone is not enough. If education must become the vehicle, we ought to think carefully about what kind of education we are to implement. For that to be successful, we are to acknowledge that national forms of education are education and do not need any form of foreign validation to acquire such a label. Therefore, in arguing for a way forward and in order to demonstrate my point more efficiently, I will switch from a formal academic articulation of my ideas to a more informal one.

In recognition of national forms of knowledge, I recently said to my wife and my friends that my mother, Angélica Maguiguane, has what in Western education might be termed a dual Ph.D. in History-Linguistics and my mother-in-law, Lidia Sekobolo, has a Ph.D. in Counseling-Spirituality. This may sound condescending to some who hold educational degrees as off-bounds for Africans who have not set foot in colleges, but it is a serious assertion and can only be attested—not empirically proven because that would defeat the entire argument of this paper—by one who attends these women's lectures. I have learned so much about my mother's ongoing research of the connections between the Mfecane<sup>37</sup> and Maguiguane-Khoza; and, on the other hand, I have learned a lot about the importance of traditional spiritual symbolism from my mother-in-law.

If we acknowledge national knowledge systems as of equal value to Western systems, not only for our parents and for others who are not educated in Western systems but in general, my immediate suggestion is to pursue the establishment of an educational system that is founded on national African worldviews without neglecting the presentation of non-African worldviews. This is not foreign to globalization advocates in the West. More than ever before, Western institutions are aiming at pursuing the knowledge of non-Western worlds in order to maintain their status of domination in academia by publishing the knowledge gained from people like my mother and my mother-in-law. Why then, should Africans succumb to such a trend when there is so much awareness today about the ills of the assimilationist tendencies that come with every wind of global transformation in the name of progress, i.e., progress as defined by the West?

This is not to say that Western researchers must cease to engage in research in Africa, but rather a call to redefining the very nature of acceptable research. For instance, would my mother's oral pursuit of the origins of Maguiguane-Khoza and my mother-in-law's constant grappling with philosophical-spiritual issues constitute rigorous academic research or would they be rendered mere exercises of curiosity that can only be legitimized once framed into Western modes of research by one who attained a considerable degree of Western education? I acknowledge that evoking the knowledge of these two women as representatives of all elders in my continent may be grounds for contestation because some may claim that elders in Western countries also suffer from similar marginalization. However, I argue that such claim is incommensurate to the argument in this paper because Western elders are the matriarchs and patriarchs of the system that leads the current phenomena of globalization, and their children are on the forefront of advancing an agenda already traced by their parents, which is obviously a privilege or association not enjoyed by African elders. Nonetheless, I believe that some Africans may claim a slice of the cake by evoking a level of the Appiah cosmopolitanism. Despite great respect for the views already advanced by pro-globalization advocates or some moderate positions such as Appiah's cosmopolitanism, I beg to differ by emphasizing that globalization, as it stands now, has no interest in the African *per se* as an equitably valuable citizen of the



world. The only way Africa will have an equitable participation is to affirm itself independently of the West and its constructs by abandoning the prevailing current Western constructs such as nation-state, development, republic, international, etc., and re-defining itself in constructs that reflect relevant African national perceptions of reality.<sup>38</sup>

Given this status of disadvantage, the challenge is *whether* Africa is willing to engage in such a process, rather than *when*. One should remember that, for Africans, traditionally, the Western conception of time is inherently not of the essence in the construction or interpretation of their reality. What matters most is the unfolding of the event; however, this is not to say that Africans, traditionally, have no conception of time, but to point out that conceptions of time vary with cultural context. Thus, time for the African is not the same as time for the Westerner; yet, the latter is imposed on Africa as a yardstick to efficiency and time-consciousness.

Therefore, in arguing for an African Renaissance or auto-generated agendas of continental transformation (e.g., the United States of Africa), Africans must realize that amidst the pragmatist pressure of Westerners to ask questions that necessitate a practical and timely answer pertaining to discourses of African affirmation lays the key of the African deeply-rooted cognition. This cognition compels Africans to provide non-immediate answers to complex problems because to answer a question is an epistemologically and axiologically bound craft that ought to be addressed within the philosophical domain of a people-group. Ultimately, Africa will never excel outside its own domain.

### Afterthought on the Way Forward

‘uMuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’: Can uBuntu and Humanism  
Inform a New Philosophy of Education, Globally?

One of the questions that African scholars, particularly those who are informed by the ideal of an African Renaissance, should ask themselves is whether, or not, uBuntu and Humanism can simultaneously inform a new philosophy of education, globally. This question emerges as a continuation of my musings about the African Renaissance and concepts that are African-originating such as uBuntu and from my interest in problematizing the theme of the 59<sup>th</sup> conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) with the theme “Ubuntu! Imagining a Humanist Education Globally”. It became my priority to look critically at the challenge presented to us by N’Dri Assié-Lumumba since most papers seemed to assume that the relationship between uBuntu and humanist education were synonymous, thus compatible. My argument is that they are not and here’s why. . .

In the last decade-and-half, there seems to be a revival of African intellectual quest for defining education in a way that makes sense to us. This quest might be accompanied by similar phenomena in other regions of the world that have suffered the ills of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism and the consequent degrading of their people and disregard of their knowledge systems. It is this common thread of a *conscientização* that has elevated the discourse to attempts toward identifying concepts and developing philosophies that will orient the thread into a movement of social transformation that has educational transformation at its core.

Amidst these developments, one may ask, ‘should Africans and the rest of the non-Western world be thinking in terms of a philosophy of xyz? Is the nature of uBuntu compatible with the nature of a philosophy?’ While wisdom is a manifestation in uBuntu world, and consequently the love of such, is there compatibility between how wisdom is thought of within western constructs when referring to something as ‘wisdom ‘ and within non-western constructs, particularly ones such as those found in uBuntu?

In humanist thinking, wisdom is centered around the individual human's ability to make decisions about daily life matters and, when it operates within the context of education, it seems to focus on the ability to offer a sophisticated logic (perhaps linear) endowed with cumulative insight based on other humans' thinking when making such decisions. It does not seem farfetched to argue that non-western contexts might offer alternative decision-making sophistications that are not compatible with such western wisdom. For instance, in biblical ancient world wisdom is equated with the fear of God and it is personified as God, perhaps as a means to construct it as a God-originating rather than Human-originating phenomena. In uBuntu world, wisdom can only be centered on the embodying the motto 'Motho ke Motho ka batho', not as an African conception of self but as the essence of humanity and its humanness. While in uBuntu world, wisdom is the realization that one is, only if others are; in humanism, one is because one thinks, thus the Cartesian syllogism "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) is compatible with humanism but incompatible with uBuntu. In uBuntu, existence is not reduced to thought but to the perception of being that is contingent on, and inseparable from, others. It was humanism that provided the western world with a construct it could call its own, i.e., Western world, after all what is known as the western world is the brainchild of humanism. So, to understand uBuntu as humanism begs the question of legitimacy as do questions of comparison in comparative studies.

Moreover, uBuntu focuses on the whole being and manifests in the communal, known in Swahili as ujamaa; whereas Humanism focuses on the creative power of the human brain and manifests in the individual. While in uBuntu a community is not made of individuals because the perception of individual is absent in uBuntu world, individuals comprise community in humanism. Allow me to illustrate this with a story of my own experience as one caught in the conundrum of being an African amidst the forces of a Western perception of humanity, even to the degree of Western-oriented cognitive engagement in native language speaking:

When I was 17, while a student of law in Mozambique, I was in Johannesburg, South Africa visiting with a Venda friend who sold fish and chips in a local Park Station joint. She said to me in Shangaan, "A tolo, hi vuyili hi mi vacaxa!" (yesterday, we came

to visit you!) to which I immediately asked “nwini na mani?” (you and whom?). As our conversation continued, we were able to iron out our misunderstanding about who had visited me. Dissonance in perceptions of personhood became clear to me as I later realized that to the Shangaan (if properly spoken) there are no individuals, while to the Shangaan operating within a non-uBuntu cognition, the person is an individual. In uBuntu world there is never a time when a person is alone, even if it appears to be the case if one is to be confined to physical existence, because in uBuntu world we walk accompanied by our ancestors who are part of what John Mbiti (see Endnote 32) once described as ‘the living dead’ (those who may not manifest in the physical but their memories are alive in us and their sprits, i.e., *moya*, are felt in real terms rather than in the realm of belief alone).

Given the nature of these two orientations, one is to ask if a new philosophy of education, globally, can derive from the interaction between them; or, if their incompatibility in nature does not allow for such a possibility.

To end this quest, allow me to share the following poem that I shared as part of a performance during CIES2015, which constitutes a pedagogical engagement on the distinctions between uBuntu and humanism as well as a pursuit of a universal uBuntu-infused philosophy of education:

uBuntu: Minha Essência. . . My Philosophy. . . of Education!  
By Zihlenga (a.k.a., José Cossa)

(Part 1)

How did we get this far?  
Sa hlupheka because we somehow  
Somehow we grew too big  
We grew too far apart  
Too big to accept the humility  
The humbleness inherent in our nature  
That nature of being human and humane

Sa hlupheka manje  
Porque esquecemos a nossa natureza  
Essa natureza humana  
Se lebale uBuntu, uMutho, uMhunu. . .  
Hi dzivalile le pswako a mhunu i mhunu ka vanu

Kodwa, I'll say it again. . .  
Motho ke Motho ka batho

How did we get this far?  
Sa hlupheka because we somehow  
Somehow we grew too big  
We grew too far apart  
Too big to accept the humility  
The humbleness inherent in our nature  
That nature of being human and humane  
We bought into an ideal of ownership of some sort of educa-  
tional grandeur  
We became in our minds  
The owners of better knowledge  
Rather than fellow searchers of wisdom  
The owners of school systems and progress  
Ignoring the very core of our uBuntu  
Negating ourselves the joys of ujamaa, harambe, ni ku hlonipha

iS'khati si fikile  
Chegou a hora  
Yi tlasile a nkama  
The time has come  
To turn our political energy for revolutions  
Into uBuntu revolutionary moya  
umphefumulu wami longs for a return to the essência  
Uma essência de viver, respirar, e celebrar uma liberdade de pensar  
A freedom to think and be thought of as an intellectual in equi-  
table terms  
Because I bring to intelligentsia the intellect I inherited from my  
forerunners  
The uBuntu of Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Eduardo  
Mondlane, the Queen of Sheba, Nefertiti, Josina and Samora  
Machel, Biko, Mandela, my great-grand father Maguiguane. . .  
Kodwa. . . I bring to the global community of learners the ideals  
and practices I inherited  
The ideals and practices of education “Ngugi, umongameli wam’,  
u ndi fundisele”  
I urge you. . . like Simphiwe Dana urges in her song “Bantu Biko  
Street”

Nawe Mongameli  
 Xa ubon' abantu bakho  
 (Unqandwa yintoni ungaphilis' isizwe)  
 Wena Mongameli  
 Fundis' abantwana bethu

With this uBuntu wisdom in your soul,  
 When these children come to your classrooms  
 You will no longer wonder what you will teach them  
 As you will understand that teaching them is teaching whom you  
 once perceived as yourself  
 But now know that such self is inexistent in a world perceived  
 through uBuntu  
 Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu; yes, a person is only a person  
 because of others, unto others, and through others  
 Without those children you are nonexistent  
 Without you these children are nonexistent  
 Wena mongameli, Fundis' abantwana bethu!  
 Mwalimu, teach our children!

-----  
 (Part 2)

Qaphela! Njonga!  
 We are here to revive the vision  
 The vision of our living dead  
 The ancestral wisdom we abhorred in favor of the 'I', that individ-  
 ualistic and narcissistic self-absorption on an empty wisdom that  
 thrives in sentiments of superior peoples, superior knowledges,  
 superior languages, superior cognitions, even superior percep-  
 tions of the observable world. . .  
 We abandoned in the hinterlands of what we once termed the  
 "third world"; fertile lands of what we termed the "underdevel-  
 oped world"; those fertile lands replete with ideas and inventive  
 creativities we rendered unscientific and incapable  
 We continue to abandon in the mountains of what we now still  
 call developing world, emerging economies, and some select fron-  
 tier economies, albeit knowing that such descriptors are futile  
 inventions to describe a lesser people

Asi hlanganeni, bafwethu!  
 Asi hlanganeni si be munye!  
 UBuntu is not just a word  
 An exotic word to enrich our already fancy African-infused academic vocabulary to tell ourselves that we, too, 'speak African' after all  
 UBuntu is not just a concept  
 A concept to glue North-South differentials  
 Ubuntu, uMotho, uMhunu  
 A mhunu y mhunu ka vanu  
 Motho ke Motho ka batho  
 Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu  
 Is the essence of our lives. . . the core of our existence  
 For us, Ubuntu is a calling  
 A calling to educate the child growing up in Africa. . . In the Americas . . . In Asia. . . In Europe . . . In Antarctica. . . In Oceania . . .  
 A calling to re-educate the adult  
 The adult whose mind is replete with misconceptions about what being educated is,  
 With misconceptions about what being erudite is,  
 With misconceptions about what being human is.  
 Wena mongameli, Fundis' abantwana bethu!  
 Mwalimu, teach our children!  
 But teach our children that they are Bantu  
 Teach our children that they are people  
 Not some colonial miscategorization of the people of Southern Africa  
 But the essence of our being, we are Bantu!  
 Motho ke motho ka batho  
 uMuntu ngumuntu ngabantu  
 A person is a person unto others  
 Uma pessoa é pessoa diante os outros  
 Because when we teach abantwana bethu this truth  
 We are teaching ourselves this truth  
 If we internalize this value, abantwana bethu internalize this value  
 If we, Bantu, internalize this understanding of humanity. . . of  
 uBuntu  
 Then our education will be transformational and humane  
 Then our education will be an uBuntu-infused education  
 Then our education will henceforth become humanness-centered.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Thabo Mbeki, *Statement at the African Renaissance Conference*. (Johannesburg, 28 September 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Malegapuru William Makgoba (ed.), *African Renaissance* (Mafube, Sandton, South Africa, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Thabo Mbeki, 'Prologue', In M. W. Makgoba (ed.), *African Renaissance*, (Mafube, Sandton, South Africa, 1999), pp. xiii-xxi

<sup>5</sup> For example, Kirby (1998) argues that the "African Renaissance" is mythical and misused by Thabo Mbeki; and, Luke Baker (Daily Nation, 20 October 1998, Nairobi, Kenya) is very skeptical about its conceptualization.

<sup>6</sup> For some insightful readings on the role of African languages see Adams Bodomo, (1996). On language and development in sub-Saharan Africa: The case of Ghana. In *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 5 (2): 31-53.

<sup>7</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 'The allegory of the cave: Language, democracy, and a new world order.' In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o *Penpoints, gunpoints, and dreams: Towards a critical theory of the arts and the state in Africa* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1998), pp. 71-101.

<sup>8</sup> For Greek sources see (1) Loeb Classical Library (1982& 1987). *The Republic*. 2 vols. Vol. I, 9th ed. Vol. II, 8th ed. Cambridge: (1) Loeb Classical Library; (2) Oxford Classical Texts (1992). *Respublica*. Vol. IV. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For English translations see (1) Allan, D. J. (1940). *Republic I*. London: Methuen; (2) Bloom, A. (Trans.) *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>9</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 'The allegory of the cave: Language, democracy, and a new world order.' In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o *Penpoints, gunpoints, and dreams: Towards a critical theory of the arts and the state in Africa* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1998), pp. 98-99.

<sup>10</sup> Disadvantaged, neo-colonized, and oppressed are used interchangeably in this paper because they all have a common denominator—a relationship of dependency between some sort of elite group and another that is not elite.

<sup>11</sup> W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (ZPH, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1981), 263.

<sup>12</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harder, New York, 1970). Portuguese manuscript published in 1968.

<sup>13</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Renaissance: A Triple Legacy of Skills, Values and Gender*. Keynote Address at the 5th General Conference of The African Academy of Sciences, held in Hammamet, Tunisia, April 22–27, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid



<sup>15</sup> African Renaissance Institute, *The amended version of the vision, mission and objectives* (African Renaissance Institute, Sandton, South Africa, 2000), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Something* or *thing* will be used here as generic for events, characteristics, and aspects of life, etc.

<sup>17</sup> See Rodney, Cabral, Wa Thiongo, Mugo, and others.

<sup>18</sup> I recall the lengthy discussions about nationality in the Mozambican parliament in the 1990s.

<sup>19</sup> I often wonder why there is no fight for the independence of Native-Americans, i.e., one that goes beyond a movement for Native American rights, but the details of my concern are beyond the scope of this paper

<sup>20</sup> Firoz Hirjikaka presents a reflection on this issue in the Associated Content (May 27, 2007), "Who is an American?"; for further discussion of *American*, see Jonathan Shapiro's review, "Citizenship vs. Nationality: Who is an American?" Available: <http://www.worldfreeinternet.net/news/nws73.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Rose Uchem, "The challenge of marginalization: the experience of Africans in Europe and in the united states"; *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 1, 1 (2001), pp.1-23.

<sup>22</sup> For a treatment of *model case* in conceptual analysis, see John Wilson (1963). *Thinking with Concepts*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.

<sup>23</sup> Thabo Mbeki, *The African Renaissance: An Address to the South Africa Institute of international relations, 9 April 1997*.

<sup>24</sup> John F. New, *The Renaissance and Reformation* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986)

<sup>25</sup> William R. Estep, *Renaissance and reformation* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Nelson Mandela, *President Nelson Mandela's Address to the Parliament of Zimbabwe* (Harare, 19 May 1997).

<sup>27</sup> For example, the Smithsonian Institution Libraries has compiled a reading list entitled "Modern African Art."

<sup>28</sup> Pixley ka Isaka Seme, "The Regeneration of Africa." In *The African Abroad*, April 5, 1906.

<sup>29</sup> Mia Couto, *Os Sete Sapatos Sujos: Oracao de Sapiencia na Altura da Abertura do ISCTEM*. [Trans. *The Seven Dirty Shoes: A Commencement Speech at ISCTEM*]

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 32: 28 "Then the man said, 'your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have wrestled with God and with men and have overcome.'" In F. C. Thompson (ed.), (1983), *NIV: Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (B. B. Birkbride Bible Co., Inc., Indianapolis, IN, 1983). Here, I am not claiming correlation between name and attitude, but reporting on the account as presented in the Bible.

<sup>31</sup> Living dead are family members that have translated to a world beyond the visible world of the living. See J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (London; Heinemann, 1990 ed.)

<sup>32</sup> For reading on models of name giving ceremonies among the Namakarana and the Ashanti see, R. D. Datta, Zillur Rahman Khan, Clinton B. Seely (2001). *Bengal Studies: A Collection of Essays*. India: Allied Publishers.

<sup>33</sup> For recent treatment of cosmopolitanism, see Kwame A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Penguin Books, London, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> In religion terminology, backsliding condition is one in which a person has given up, or temporarily ceased to practice, their faith. In this context, it means that most Africans have ceased, or interrupted, their militancy towards the fulfillment of the Pan-African vision of Nkrumah.

<sup>35</sup> Although it is important to make this connection between the existing debate on the United States of Africa and the African Renaissance, the assessment of the intricacy of this relationship is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> A war triggered by Shaka-Zulu that caused the scattering of various leaders and formation of several kingdoms and empires in Southern and part of Central Africa.

<sup>37</sup> For further reading about my position on Africa equitable participation in a global world, see my following two books: José Cossa (2008), *Power, Politics, and Higher Education in Southern Africa: International Regimes, Local Governments, and Educational Autonomy*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press; and, José Cossa (2008). *African Renaissance and Higher Education: A View through the Lenses of Christian Higher Education*. Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller.

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