Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance in a Globalising World Economy: The Struggle for the Soul of the Continent

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The idea of an African renaissance has once again re-emerged on the continental agenda, and as in the past, it has captured the imagination of a number of scholars, journalists, and politicians. In South Africa, where the African renaissance has come to be associated with the political ideas of President Thabo Mbeki, it has been broadly interpreted as calling for African political renewal and economic regeneration. Mbeki speaks of the rebirth and renewal of the continent, the establishment of democratic political systems, the achievement of sustainable economic development and the changing of Africa's place in the world economy so that Africa becomes free of the yoke of the international debt burden, and no longer a supplier of raw materials or an importer of manufactured goods. At the core of Mbeki's renaissance therefore, is a deep concern with the position of the continent within a rapidly globalising world economy. While Mbeki acknowledges that these aspirations are not new from the point of view of continental struggles for emancipation, he argues that conditions currently exist in which they can be achieved. Among these, he has identified the end of the cold-war, completion of the process of decolonisation on the continent, and the acceleration of the process of globalisation itself.

Introduction

This article constitutes a contribution to the ongoing debate on the African renaissance. To this end it raises three central questions. First, what is the African renaissance all about? Second, as currently conceptualised, and given the context of a globalising world economy, to what extent is it capable of achieving political and economic regeneration of the continent? And finally, who will lead the African renaissance? In addressing these questions, I will first attempt to define the position of Africa in the globalising world economy – as characterised by a lack of capacity and, possibly, the will to influence the global market. The article then teases out the central pillars of the renaissance debate. Finally, the prospects of an African renaissance as a driving force of African political regeneration and economic recovery will be discussed.

Although the idea of an African rebirth is not new, the context in which this debate is taking place is new and does indeed pose new questions. With regard to the key features of this context – the end of cold war, the emergence of the 'market' as the
central organising principle of the global economy and an accelerated process of globalisation – the African continent remains in a precarious position, its various nation states caught in conjunctural crises of economic marginalisation, internal conflict and political decay. These conditions confront Mbeki’s renaissance with a daunting challenge and call for more creative engagement with forces of globalisation.

Africa in a Globalising World Market
Incorporated into the global economy towards the end of 19th century as a junior partner, and predominantly as a producer of primary products, Africa was largely destined to be a marginal player in the world market. For the three or four centuries preceding the formal colonisation of the continent, the predatory activities which passed as trade during the mercantile period had disoriented production and trading patterns while transferring huge economic surpluses to the centre (Baran, 1967; Rodney, 1972). Formal colonisation served to reinforce the unequal exchange that had been established during the mercantile period. The colonies were structured predominantly as producers of primary products and not manufacturers, and, except in mineral rich South Africa, a basis for industrialisation was never established. Even so, South African industrialisation was predominantly geared toward import substitution, and international trade continued to be based largely on primary products. Thus lack of development of productive forces, and of industrialisation, consigned Africa to the margins of global economy even before formal political independence. This is not to ignore massive economic transformation, and the pace of modernisation which took place in the majority of sub-Saharan Africa in the period between 1900 and 1960. In the ultimate analysis, however, these economies were never structured to participate in the global market on a competitive basis.

For a brief period in the 1960s and early 70s, in what has been called the developmental decade, there were signs of sustained economic growth, buoyed by positive terms of trade, increasing Official Development Aid and generally positive growth rates. In fact, in the period from 1965 to 1973, sub-Saharan African economies experienced average annual growth rates of around 5 per cent. Over the same period, annual rates of industrial production rose by about 10 per cent (Tarp, 1993). However this came to an end with the collapse of real commodity prices and the beginning of the oil crisis in the mid-1970s. According to World Bank figures, economic performance began deteriorating in the mid-1970s and has never fully recovered. From the 1980s, the position actually worsened with a marked failure to diversify the export base and continued reliance on one or two commodities, deteriorating terms of trade and sharply reduced access to international finance. Any hopes of sustainable economic growth were finally dashed by the onset of the debt crisis, initiated in 1982 when Mexico declared a moratorium on its international debt repayments.

The Impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes
Structural adjustment refers to the set of conditionalities and measures imposed on the developing countries by the Bretton Woods institutions and individual donor countries, as a basis for their receiving institutional funding. The IMF/WB philosophy has been characterised by reduction of state spending on social services, devaluation of currencies, removal of subsidies from the important sectors of the economy and the retrenchment of state sector. According to Leftwich (1993), adjustments sought to shatter the dominant post-war state-led developmental paradigm and overcome the problems of developmental stagnation by promoting
open and free competitive market economies supervised by a minimal state as a condition for sustained economic growth.

It is now generally acknowledged that these policies, combined with fiscal and monetary austerity, have realised little success in fostering economic growth. On the contrary, over the last 20 years, the IMF/WB intervention in sub-Saharan Africa has led to economic stagnation, widespread poverty and the disintegration of Africa’s social fabric on an unmitigated scale. African economies have remained small, fragile, and characterised by extreme poverty. In fact, according to the UN’s socio-economic indicators, sub-Saharan Africa today is worse off than it was at the time of political independence in the early 1960s. Thirty-three of the forty-one heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) are in Africa. The debt burden of this group alone stood at $245 billion in 1996 (UNDP, 1999). The combined GDP of the whole of sub-Saharan Africa – excluding South Africa – remains a paltry US$300 billion. In fact, real GDP fell by 42.5 per cent between 1980-1990 (UNDP, 1999).

Among less developed countries, those in sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest GDP per capita growth rates, the lowest average life expectancy (52 years overall), the highest percentage of people living under the international poverty line (Sparks, 1999) and the highest rate of infant mortality (92 per thousand). HIV/AIDS remains the most threatening health problem on the continent. It is estimated that there are 21 million people in sub-Saharan Africa living with HIV or AIDS; this constitutes 70 per cent of all known cases worldwide. Moreover, 87 per cent of world’s AIDS infected children are to be found in Africa. The result is that in some countries, life expectancy has fallen well below 40 years.

The Impact of Globalisation

Globalisation is a concept that has gained phenomenal currency over the last decade or so, at the same time generating a fierce debate as to what it actually means. A detailed discourse on globalisation is beyond the scope of this paper. In any case this has been done quite ably elsewhere (see among others, Cox et al. 1995; Hoogvelt, 1997; Hirst and Thompson, 1996). As used here, globalisation represents a new phase of capitalist expansion and control of the global market through the revolution in communications technology. It involves the emergence of the ‘market’ as the central organising principle of global economic activity; in other words, it marks the triumph of the ‘market’ on a global scale. It also involves the construction and reconstruction of institutions of global governance and the deployment of these as the instruments of globalisation of the world market. Finally it entails a tendency towards the weakening of the nation-state and gradual loss of sovereignty in the economic sphere by economically weaker states within the global trading regime.

Thus globalisation as used here emphasises freedom and equality before the ‘market’, or in other words, the tendency to subject weaker states to the discipline of the market. Unfortunately, markets need institutions and rules to govern them (Wade, 1990). Left on their own, markets tend to reproduce existing inequalities and as such become a danger to the weak and the disempowered. Thus, already weakened by the SAPs, it was inevitable that globalisation should intensify the marginalisation of African economies.

It is not surprising, therefore, that African countries are now among the weakest members of the international trading system. As globalisation has proceeded, Africa has become further marginalised from the mainstream of the global economic
activity. Not only has its economic growth lagged behind other economies, Africa’s share of world exports and imports declined drastically by 1997 to a mere 2 per cent (HDR, 1999), and its share of global flows of foreign investments has fallen sharply, not to mention the fact that many economies on the continent remain heavily indebted. Yet economies in sub-Saharan Africa are deeply integrated into world trade, even if predominantly still as exporters of primary products. Their export to GDP ratio was 29 per cent in the 1990s as compared to 15 per cent for Latin America.

The Crisis of Governance

The picture that we have painted here has been further exacerbated by a crisis of governance in sub-Saharan Africa. From about the mid-1970s, the continent has witnessed a proliferation of kleptocratic and predatory ruling elites that

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\begin{align*}
\text{have robbed and pillaged and broken all laws and all ethical norms with great abandon to acquire wealth ... who seek access to power or those who have access to power so that they can corrupt the political order for personal gain at all costs} \quad \text{(Mbeki, 1998b:2).}
\end{align*}
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This has contributed to rising debts, civil wars, and in extreme cases, the informalisation and collapse of nation states. Acceleration of globalisation and deregulation of markets has led to intense competition over dwindling resources, ultimately sharpening the predatory instincts of the continent’s ruling elites. In a majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the predatory conversion of political power into economic wealth has been the norm rather than the exception. No wonder the main function of the majority of sub-Saharan African states has been to facilitate the corrupt appropriation of limited resources.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this class has been at the forefront of frustrating democratic transitions on the continent. According to Bayart et al. (1999), the process of democratisation has either failed or has been captured in the guise of competitive multiparty elections by these authoritarian groups. This general failure to combine the requirements of market economy with demands of popular sovereignty has, in their opinion, led to unmitigated conflicts, collapse of the state, the emergence of rogue states, and tragically, the proliferation of weapons of war.

These developments entrench the marginalisation of Africa. As Yash Tandon (1998) points out, Africa is not in the mainstream of decision-making in the world bodies that matter. Africa not only suffers from economic relegation; it is further marginalised from institutions of global governance. It is not surprising that this picture of unmitigated political and economic crisis has once again given rise to expressions of concern that something must be done and done urgently to prevent further collapse. The notion of an African renaissance is thus seen as portending the rebirth of a continent. More concretely, it is perceived as a renewal of a determination to be a global partner (Ntuli, 1999).

African Renaissance in Historical Perspective.

The idea of an African rebirth has been raised and debated in various forms ever since the colonisation of the continent at the close of the 19th century. In a recent contribution to the renaissance debate in South Africa, the former Secretary-General of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), Michael Muendane (1998), suggested that the idea of an African renaissance began with the founding of the first
Pan African Congress in London in 1900. Most analysts seem to concur. Mamdani (1998) for instance asserts that the African renaissance is a child of the idea of Pan-Africanism. It is worthwhile remembering that from its inception in the diaspora, the Pan-Africanist movement was a reaction to slavery and colonialism and sought to reassert African dignity and humanity. When the movement finally began to find a home in Africa in the immediate post-war period, it was only natural that Pan-Africanism would assume a political dimension and serve as a battle cry for political freedom aptly captured in Nkrumah’s autobiography, *Africa Must Unite*:

... the twentieth century has become the century of colonial emancipation, the century of continuing revolution which must finally witness the total liberation of Africa from colonial rule and imperialist exploitation ... (Nkrumah, 1963).

The second moment of African renaissance can be identified with the actual liberation of a substantial part of Africa from colonial domination, starting with Nkrumah’s Ghana in 1957 and spreading across much of the continent over the period between 1960 to 1964. It is interesting to observe how the discursive idea of African renewal assumed different forms in the newly independent states. For instance, economic nationalism became one of the defining characteristics of the period, and among the emergent African ruling elites it became fashionable to denounce imperialism and rail against multinational corporations. In the immediate post-independence period, development became a major preoccupation. Under varying forms of developmentalist states, accelerated modernisation was indeed achieved with considerable success.

The fever of economic nationalism affected a diverse range of African leaders. Even Mobutu Sese Seko briefly nationalised the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK), the Belgian copper mining conglomerate, an affiliate of Belgian Société Générale de Belgique, which in all respects was a colonial power in its own right. In other words, ‘true African nationalists had to be seen to be pursuing something new and aggressive in pursuit of a new African identity. What is significant, however, are the conflicting and at times competing interpretations, definitions and conceptualisations of these notions of an African rebirth. For instance, African socialism in the form of populism tinged with bits of marxist pretensions became quite popular at this stage. However, it meant different things to different political leaders. Leopold Sedar Senghor, for example, speaking at the Dakar Conference on the African Road to Socialism declared that:

*Socialism is the merciless fight against social dishonesties and injustices; fraudulent conversion of public funds, rackets and bribes* ... (cited in Mboya, 1963:164).

Kenya’s Tom Mboya was more concerned to emphasise the Africanness of this socialism. ‘African socialism was not just socialism’, he declared. Rather it

... was bound up with African reaction against colonialism. The African is anxious that his attitude of mind, his approach to problems, should be identified as an African approach. After independence ... He wants to see that Africa is recognised in her right and on her own merits ... (Mboya, 1963:164).

These ideas were subsequently to develop into Kenya’s Blueprint for Economic Development – Sessional Paper No. 10 – a blueprint in fact for unadulterated capitalism which was passed under the guise of African socialism. That notwithstanding, given the political environment of the immediate post-independence period, it is noteworthy that even an avowedly conservative pro-American figure like Tom Mboya had to be seen to be advocating something new for Africa.
In the then Congo Republic (Democratic Republic of Congo), Mobutu's *recours à l'authenticité* (recourse to authenticity) went a step further. All places were renamed, including the capital to Kinshasa and the country to Zaire, despite the fact that Zaire was in reality a Portuguese corruption of the Kikongo word nzadi, a vast river (Young and Turner, 1985). Christian surnames were replaced with African names, Mobutu changing his from Joseph Desireé to Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku wa Dabanga. Western attire was replaced with a multi-coloured long cloth for women and the *abacost*, complete with a scarf, for men. Authenticity, the official ideology from around 1970 was defined as follows:

*The term authenticity takes the form of a movement tending to revive the moral, cultural, philosophical, social and economic values distinct to the Zairian nation. Such a movement repudiates contradictory foreign ideas. It proceeds from a crystallization of consciousness of the particularity of Zairians, and the conviction that their cultural patrimony is not, as colonialists had maintained, the product of an infantile imagination, but the expression of the soul of mature people...* (cited in Young & Turner, 1985:214).

As Young and Turner (1985) point out, the essence of *l'authenticité* was to return to ancestral heritage in order to pursue the goal of economic modernity without the alienating materialism of the western world. The past thus unlocked the door to the future, but it was a past which was very carefully selected.

African renaissance or rebirth differed in content depending on the nature of social forces driving the project, as well as on the historical traditions informing the anti-colonial struggle. Thus we find that Julius Nyerere's conceptualisation of an African rebirth, unlike Mobutu's *l'authenticité* was a fairly inclusive one, and yet at the same time staunchly anti-imperialist. As early as 1963, a year after Tanzania's independence, Nyerere was already warning against the evils of neo-colonialism:

*... it is true that we must be on our guard. The question is still being asked, 'Who is going to control Africa? Those who are asking it do not expect the answer to be 'The Africans' ... For let us make no mistake; as we are emerging successfully from the first 'Scramble for Africa, so we are entering a new phase ... this second scramble will be conducted in a different manner from the first, but its purpose will be the same to get control of the continent ...* (Nyerere, 1968).

As can be gleaned from a number of speeches he made in the course of 1968, Nyerere was equally emphatic about the need for meaningful development. In one he declared:

*... if development is to increase people's freedom, it must be development for the people. It must serve them, and their interests. Every proposal must be judged by the criterion of whether it serves the purpose of development - and the purpose of development is the people.... It is important therefore to realise that the policy of Ujamaa Vijifini is a new concept based on the post-Arusha declaration that what we need to develop is people ... and that people can only develop themselves ... Ujamaa villages are supposed to be socialist organisations created by the people, and governed by those who work and live in them ...* (Nyerere, 1973:67).

Nyerere's passionate concern for Africa is clear from these quotations. Like fellow African leaders, particularly, among the Bandung group of countries, he was equally concerned to find ways and means of addressing the core question of African economic and political backwardness. While Nyerere approached this question from the perspective of a people-centred development, Mobutu and his ilk urged for a
return to ancestral heritage. What is obvious from these interpretations of an African rebirth, however, is that the notion of African renaissance has historically been a terrain of contestation between different social forces. This contestation remains in the manner in which the questions have been posed in the current debate.

South Africa & the African Renaissance

South Africa’s renaissance discourse, as indicated above, has been mainly associated with the pronouncements of its current president, Thabo Mbeki. It can be said to have been initiated by Mbeki’s speech in Parliament in May 1996 entitled I Am An African, a speech which indeed did invoke a great deal of emotion both within Parliament and outside it (Mbeki, 1996). This speech was significant not only because it sparked off the renaissance debate, but more profoundly because it prompted South Africans to reflect on their identity crisis – were they were part of Africa or of Europe. Thabo Mbeki’s notion of African renaissance can be said to constitute the third moment of the African renaissance. As already indicated, what is new about this period is the prevailing balance of forces as embodied in the end of the cold war and prospects of re-democratisation across the continent.

Vale and Maseko (1998) identify two broad interpretations of South Africa’s discourse on African renaissance. The first is the Africanist interpretation which seeks to use the African renaissance to construct a new African history, identity and culture and to reassert the notion of Africanness. The second is the globalist interpretation, which emphasises Africa’s economic and political regeneration as part and parcel of a globalising world economy.

There is nothing basically new in these interpretations. The debate in South Africa draws very much from the different strands and traditions that we have identified above, from Mobutu’s *recours a l’authenticité* to Nyerere’s call in 1967 for a people-centered development. The dangers of the Africanist interpretation lie in its narrow exclusivist emphasis. Like Mobutu’s authenticity, it runs the risk of getting lost in the morass of ancestral heritage without producing anything new. As Ndebele argues, ‘the call for black roots has less effect than the provision of water and sanitation, electricity, telephones, houses, clinics, transport, schools and jobs ...’ (Ndebele, 1998). In other words, an African renaissance is inherently not just about cultural regeneration, but more critically, about accelerated economic modernisation.

Vale and Maseko (1998) argue that African renaissance can be seen as an empty policy vessel. But it may be more appropriate to regard the African renaissance as a contested policy terrain alongside the ideological contestation witnessed in Africa’s quest for an economic alternative. While the Africanists might wish to carve out their own version of a culturally pure African continent, South Africa’s business elite see in the African renaissance the prospect of a captive market rendered accessible by the role of South Africa on the continent. African critics of market fundamentalism seek to deploy it as an instrument for negotiating a new global division of labour. It is argued here that Mbeki’s use of the notion falls into this latter category, a point which we will return to below.

The globalist interpretation would seem to be an extension of the progressive interpretation of the African renaissance identified with both Nkrumah and Nyerere. It is not simply an ‘elite plot, a vital lie to recruit the masses into neo-liberal politics’ (Liebenberg, 1998). It is neither Mobutu’s authenticity nor Mboya’s African socialism. At his first substantial elaboration of the concept, Mbeki referred to:
... the establishment of genuine and stable democracies in Africa, in which the system of governance will flourish because they derive their authority and legitimacy from the will of the people ... (Mbeki, 1998b).

More recently, Mbeki has elaborated further on his vision of an African renaissance. At his Gallager Estate speech in August 1998, he declared that Africa cannot renew itself,

... when its upper echelons are a mere parasite on the rest of society, enjoying a self-endowed mandate to use their political power and define the use of such power such that its exercise ensures that our continent reproduces itself as the periphery of the world economy, poor, undeveloped and incapable of development ... (Mbeki, 1998b).

To this degree Mbeki’s African renaissance is also a call to rebellion:

we must rebel against the tyrants and the dictators, those who seek to corrupt our societies, and steal the wealth that belong to the people (Mbeki, 1998b).

He has also spoken of the necessity for an economic regeneration of the continent through attracting a growing slice of foreign investment, liberalisation of trade, the reform of financial markets, development assistance, and the transfer of resources from the developed to the developed world. Mbeki’s notion of renaissance is thus predicated on two intricately linked processes; the first, economic development, is based on fostering the productive forces of capitalism; the second, political stability and accountability, draw authority and legitimacy from the will of the people. Vusi Mavimbela, a political adviser to Mbeki when he was Deputy President, has argued that the raison d’être for an African renaissance is,

... the need to empower African people to deliver themselves from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism and to situate themselves on the global stage as beneficiaries of all the achievements of human civilization ... (Mavimbela, 1997).

Mavimbela’s own formulation reflects a debt to the earlier work of Julius Nyerere, while at the same time signaling Mbeki’s overriding concern to see Africa as a global partner. Mavimbela has identified the driving forces of renewal as a proletarian class organised into new forms of trade unions, and active in the market place of economic ownership, production and distribution; a large (and strong!) urban middle class propelling the development of civil society; and the rural masses incorporated into the modern economy via information technology.

Although appearing to be affirming the need for a class analysis, Mavimbela is more likely merely underlining the importance of the development of productive forces as a basis for African economic and political renewal. The same point has been made by the Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who has argued that Africa cannot hope to build democracy on the basis of a peasantry. In like fashion, the boldness with which the development of the productive forces of capitalism has been emphasised throughout his speeches as the building blocks of an African economic and political regeneration is probably the most important trademark of Mbeki’s notion of the African renaissance. How this squares with the view that Mbeki is a critic of market fundamentalism will be discussed below.

But first it is necessary to address the question of what Mbeki’s African renaissance is all about. In the manner in which it has featured in the mainstream of South African discourse, African renaissance would seem to rest on three pillars:
• The mobilisation of the African people to take their destiny in their own hands and constitute a bulwark against kleptocratic regimes. In this sense it is a call to rebellion;

• The establishment of political democracy on the continent, respect for human rights and, above all, good governance;

• A clear programme of economic regeneration whereby African countries can emerge from the depths of economic disaster. In Mbeki’s view, this is clearly related to the position of Africa within the global market. To this degree the African renaissance is therefore also a quest for a new world order.

The Anti-Imperialism of Mbeki’s African Renaissance

The African renaissance as articulated by Thabo Mbeki would seem to imply a subtle and sophisticated challenge to globalisation, similar in tone and content to the anti-imperialism of some African leaders and intellectuals in the late 1960s and the 70s. In essence Mbeki is questioning the existing global division of labour and calling for a world order in which Africa is a global partner. In this context, the notion of an African renaissance constitutes a strong message that Africa is no longer prepared to be marginalised.

This idea of a new world order runs throughout Mbeki’s speeches. At the opening of the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Durban in 1998, he argued that the process of globalisation

... ineluctably results in the reduction of the sovereignty of states, with the weakest being ourselves, being the biggest losers – those who are already the worst off, suffer losses of the first order as a result of a marginal adjustment by another ... (Mbeki, 1998c).

A month later at the African Renaissance Conference in Johannesburg, he returned to the same theme, declaring that ‘... the much acclaimed beneficial effect of the process of globalisation’ is by no means automatic. It was absurd and unacceptable, he declared, that ‘... poor countries such as ours in Africa as a consequence of their foreign debt burden become net exporters of capital ...’ (Mbeki, 1998d). African conditions, he has argued, reflect the negative consequences of the process of globalisation.

Mbeki has also rejected the notion of the ‘market’ as an efficient means of allocating resources. The new God of our world, the market’, he declared, ‘is not informed by a tablet of commandments on which is inscribed – thou shalt banish poverty in the world’ (Mbeki, 1998b). Africans should be at the forefront of ‘challenging the notion of the “market” as the modern God, a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates every human must bow in a spirit of helplessness ...’ (Mbeki, 1998d). Rather he has advocated intervention into the market in order to achieve objectives of ending poverty and underdevelopment.

It was in his statement at the close the XII Summit of the Non-Aligned movement in Durban on 3 September 1998 that he situated the meaning of an African renaissance squarely within an anti-imperialist agenda. This statement can be said to be President Mbeki’s most direct critique of ‘the market and of the globalisation process’. He observed that the volatility in the financial market had seriously affected the economies of the ‘emerging markets’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These ‘emerging markets’, he noted,
were supposed to be success stories because they had followed various strictures dictated to by the market. Yet recent experience suggested that the model of the free market path of development (my emphasis) ... has failed to live up to the expectation of the people of the South.

He elaborated the point further as follows:

... the message that comes across is that the market is a cannibal that feeds on its own children... its feeds on the emerging adolescent it has spawned, taking advantage of the fact that this fattened being, described as being in transition, is fat enough to be an attractive meal and not yet fat enough to defend himself or herself from attack by the cannibal progenitor ... So does it come about that the market feeds on its most robust children, seemingly as an expression of a necessary condition of its existence ... (my emphasis) (Mbeki, 1998e).

What then is President Mbeki’s solution to this problem of market fundamentalism? He concluded his speech by urging the Non-Aligned Movement to go back to basics, to demand a new world order – ‘to turn itself into an effective organ for the creation of the new political, economic and security world order which will succeed actually to assist in the life and death matter that the aspirations and the agenda of the weak and poor become an integral part of the actual agenda of the entirety of our world’ (Mbeki, 1998e). Contrary to the logic of his argument, however, Mbeki’s solution to the problem does not involve de-linking from the global economy, but rather, engaging with globalisation. The assumption is that such engagement can influence its dynamic and its consequences, so that it comes to favour the interests of the poor. Thus he advocates a ‘conscious and deliberate intervention in the process of globalisation ... to produce the results of ethics, equity, inclusion, human security, and sustainable development’ (Mbeki, 1999). He has urged fellow heads of state to engage globalisation in an informed manner, and not like ‘King Canute striving to wish the waves away’.

Is Mbeki proposing globalisation with a human face? It would seem not. At the Non-Aligned Movements conference in Durban, he characterised engagement with globalisation as a conscious and purposeful challenge to powerful and vested interests which uphold current and entrenched orthodoxies about the modern world economy. For him this constitutes a challenge of historic importance to the evolution of human civilisation. He further identified the restructuring of the institutions of global governance as central to this challenge, particularly the UN, so that ‘... it pursues an agenda truly determined by the united nations of the world’. More importantly, he talked of the need

... to radically review the manner in which we make our intervention into such important organisations as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (Mbeki, 1998c).

Mbeki revisited these themes at the 35th Ordinary Session of the Organisation of African Unitys Assembly in Algiers, where he spoke of,

the challenge ... to develop our own sovereign and continental capacity to participate in the global processes aimed at producing a framework of rules, institutions and established practices to promote our own interests ... (Mbeki, 1999).

He identified the following issues as of immediate attention: debt, negotiations at the World Trade Organisation relating to the global trade system, post-Lomé negotia-
tions, attracting investment capital technology transfer; restructuring and reorientating the World Bank and the IMF; sales of gold by the IMF and the central banks of the developed countries and volume and use of overseas development assistance. He concluded by pointing out that:

*more moral appeals from the have-nots to the haves are not likely to take us very far. Such is the degree of comfort among the haves, even in our own societies, that their ears are closed to the correct warnings we give repeatedly, that the worsening relative and absolute poverty of the many can never serve as assurance that the prosperity of the few is guaranteed for all time* (Mbeki, 1999).

It would seem, therefore, that those who have assumed the pinnacle of Mbeki’s African renaissance to be the drive for the virtues and dictates of the free market, making Africa safe for the overseas multi-national investments and private capital (Kornegay and Lansberg, 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; Lansberg and Masiza, 1998), are grossly mistaken. Mbeki’s African renaissance represents a much more nuanced and a subtler critique of the contemporary world order than such interpretations allow. It is indeed a new call to take up an anti-imperialist stance!

**Challenging Globalisation?**

If what we have said above about Mbeki’s notion of African renaissance is correct, then it follows that we must address ourselves to the question of anti-imperialism in the epoch of accelerated globalisation. In a global economy which has witnessed an ideological shift to the right, consensus around market fundamentalism as the central organising principle of global economic activity represents a triumph of the ‘market’ on a global scale. Within this context International Financial Institutions have become the most important players, and now increasingly, the World Trade Organisation is serving as the main arbiter in international trade issues. At the same time, weaker members of the international system have lost sovereignty in almost all the important areas of their economic and political life, and by extension, the legitimacy to intervene in the regulation of social relations in favour of popular classes.

It is argued here that this changed balance of forces has altered the manner in which we can now talk of anti-imperialism in theory and practice. The question then is how do we begin to conceptualise an anti-globalisation agenda against some of the most powerful players in the global arena?

**Towards Developmental Regionalism**

In a number of ways, the call for the creation of a new political, economic and security order is at the same a call for the taming of the market. The lesson of the last decade is precisely that an unbridled free market is a danger to the majority of humanity. Mbeki talks of the market’s inability to banish poverty, and therefore of the need to challenge the ‘market’ as the modern God. He correctly points out that the mere existence of the global institutions of governance, especially WTO, IMF and the World Bank, is a clear indication that intervention in the market has always been a matter of fact.

The argument against market fundamentalism is increasingly becoming winnable. The UNDP’s 1999 *Human Development Report* concedes that ‘when the market goes too far in dominating social and political outcomes, the rewards of globalisation spread unequally and inequitably’. It concludes that markets need institutions and rules, but are seldom adequately subjected to the control of either (UNDP, 1999:2). In fact, the
intellectual and ideological panic witnessed at the World Bank over recent years is precisely focused on a re-think of the role of the market. The demise of the Washington consensus has set the stage for the role of the state to be viewed with less suspicion and open hostility. For all intents and purposes, developmentalism is coming back on the agenda.

The problem confronting African economies, however, is not only the negative impact of market fundamentalism, but more basically that they remain small and fragile. As a recent report of the ECA points out, limited market size, failure to exploit the potential of inter-African trade through development and co-ordination of development plans at sub-regional levels, and lack of harmonisation of standards present obstacles to sustainable economic regeneration (cited in Asante-Darko, 1999). One of the alternatives we should be looking at, therefore, is the potential of developmental regionalism.

The idea of developmental regionalism has come onto agenda’s fairly recently (Tsie, 1999; Hettne, and Soderbaum, 1998; Shaw, 1998). An important element of it is the realisation that successful participation in the global economy might be most effectively achieved through membership of regional trading blocks. It is argued that individual economies like those in Africa frequently lack the capacity to cope with the challenges of globalisation, and they therefore need to come together to enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis, MNCs, IFIs, more highly developed economies and, of course, the international institutions of governance. Regional trading blocks, it is argued, have the advantage of a larger market and as such become attractive to global operators. Through regional blocks, states may be able to effect that which they are not capable of achieving individually on the international stage. But more importantly, developmental regionalism, as Tsie (1998) argues, is indisputably a state-initiated project, one which is embedded in the market economy, and an initiative through which states seek to regulate capitalism at the regional level, given the evident obstacles posed at the national level. Developmental regionalism is thus an attempt to govern the market.

The idea of a developmental state is not new. It straddles the intellectual traditions and practices of the last two centuries (see White, 1988: Amsden, 1985 and 1989; Chenery, 1958; Chenery and Syrquin, 1975, Gerschenkron, 1966; Wade, 1988, 1990). At the centre of its theoretical elaboration is the idea that late starters such as Germany and Japan needed the intervention of the state to achieve industrialisation and competitive penetration of the global market. The much heralded success of the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) in deploying the state to tame domestic and international forces and harness them to national economic interests (Hoogvelt, 1997) is but one in a long chain of what Wade has called ‘exercises in governing the market’ to achieve rapid industrialisation. Wade, like Mbeki, thus concedes that the market has always been governed, the East Asian tigers just being one of the most recent examples.

Developmentalism as discussed here, it is important to emphasise, is not state capitalism. The primary purpose of state intervention by a developmentalist state is to promote the interests of the private sector to achieve certain national or, as in this case, regional goals. Private firms continue to operate according to the logic of the market, while the state merely provides incentives, and bureaucratic regulation (credit, finance, taxation) to prioritise those specific interests or sectors capable of achieving competitive advantage at the global level. The role of the state is thus limited to providing concessionary assistance to those sectors of the economy considered
capable of achieving dynamic comparative advantage. This is why Tsie argues that
developmentalism at the regional level is not incompatible with globalisation. The
two, he maintains, are mutually reinforcing, but in ways which do not conform to the

Historically developmental states have not often demonstrated adherence to
democratic accountability. At the height of their successes, the NICs were notorious
for their nasty authoritarianism and kleptocratic tendencies. Despite impressive
economic performance in the 1960s and 70s and improvement in socio-economic
indicators (Hoogvelt, 1997:213-214), the question of accountable governance remains
an open one. Despite periodic elections, democratic accountability is only now
gradually emerging within these countries. This begs the question whether
development and democracy constitute two sides of the same coin in the manner
implied in Mbeki’s notion of an African renaissance. The crucial question, however, is
whether developmentalism in the form experienced in the NICs continues to be
possible within the current balance of international forces. Yet even if it is, and despite
the reverses market fundamentalists have suffered over the last few years, an
expanded role of the state in economic activity remains a heresy to the dominant
players in the global market. Not least for this reason, the global playing field remains
uneven. While the dominant players seek protectionist measures to protect their
markets, the weaker members are exhorted to liberalise at all costs.

Who will lead the African Renaissance?

This takes us to our final question: who will lead the African renaissance? What is
clear from the above analysis is that the project outlined requires an alliance of
political forces. The developmental states of South East Asia were predicated on a
certain kind of political leadership – an authoritarian ruling elite, largely corrupt,
with heavy doses of kleptocratic practice – but one which nonetheless maintained
strong commitment to the ‘national interest’ and was thus capable of privileging the
national interest above narrow self interest. For want of a better description, this was
a patriotic authoritarian ruling elite. The present crop of sub-Saharan African ruling
elites unfortunately exhibit no such loyalties or commitment to broader interests.
Rather they are a kleptocratic and predatory crowd who have concentrated mainly in
deploying public office for purposes individual private accumulation.

If what has been said about Mbeki’s notion of an African renaissance is correct, then it
will require a different kind of an alliance of class forces – of democrats with a deep
sense of commitment to the public good. Where are these to be found? Mbeki himself
seems to have little regard for present incumbents of high level office on the sub-
continent. Not only did his Gallaher Estate speech of August 1998 call for a rebellion
against this class; it also seemed to be pointing in the direction of an altogether
different alliance of class forces:

Surely, there must be politicians and business people, youth and women activists, religious
leaders artists and professional from Cape to Cairo, from Madagascar to Cape Verde, who
are sufficiently enraged by Africa’s condition in the world to want to join the mass crusade
for Africa’s renewal? (Mbeki, 1998c).

A number of ANC documents confirm the extent to which the African renaissance
constitutes a central pillar of the ANC and government policy. As Mavimbvela (1997)
has argued:
... South Africa has made the African Renaissance the cornerstone of its interactions with the world, especially within our continent. Our national interest is underpinned by this vision. Any talk of renewal of our country, region, and continent can be predicated only on a stable and peaceful Africa (Mavimbela, 1997).

Does this mean that South Africa is prepared to lead the African renaissance? And if so what ought South Africa be doing to mobilise the renaissance ‘battalion’ that Mbeki talks of? Mbeki’s South Africa constitutes the largest economy in Africa. Because of its economic and military capability, it is uniquely placed to play a leading role in Africa’s political and economic recovery. Will it grasp the nettle?

One of the most positive and encouraging developments to emerge out of South Africa since 1994 is the recognition that South Africa is indeed part and parcel of the African continent, and not part of Europe. The problem which remains, however, is how South Africa plans to be part of Africa. Is as a hegemonic force, a partner, or a regional proxy of the West? And what are the implications of these various stances for empowering an alliance of the class forces of the sort that Mbeki talks of above? What is South Africa doing about supporting democratic aspirations on the continent? Yes, it is encouraging to hear such adamant condemnation of African tyrants. But what is to be done about them? What signals is South Africa sending throughout the continent that it is indeed willing to give support and encouragement to this alliance of youth and women activists, religious leaders, artists and professionals from Cape to Cairo, from Madagascar to Cape Verde, who are sufficiently enraged by Africa’s condition in the world to want to join the mass crusade for Africa’s renewal? The central question therefore is: is South Africa willing to provide leadership in this direction?

If South Africa were to have any ambitions of leading the African renaissance of the sort Mbeki has described, then it needs to develop a higher profile in Africa. South Africa’s foreign policy initiatives on the continent – in respect of Zaire, Nigeria, the Great Lakes, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Lesotho – have not met with spectacular success. It has been pointed out, for example, that the refusal of Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Dos Santos of Angola, and Nujoma of Namibia to follow South Africa’s lead in respect of turmoil within the Democratic Republic of the Congo was not without its significance for an assessment South Africa’s leadership potential (Adar and Motseta, 2000). The same could be said for South Africa’s Olympic bid, where the majority of nations in sub-Saharan Africa failed to rally behind South Africa at the crucial moment.

So what kind of engagement should South Africa pursue on the continent? I would argue that whatever course of action South Africa chooses to follow, the first requirement is that it develop a better understanding of the problems and sensibilities of those across the continent. Recent events have painted a picture of a chaotic and at times an uninformed understanding of what goes on beyond the Limpopo. Even within its own borders, as demonstrated by the Maseru intervention, South Africa did not seem to know the difference between the Lesotho Sun and the Royal Palace. Above all, South Africa will have to deal with a growing xenophobia in South Africa. The growing intolerance to what South Africans derogatorily refer to as ‘aliens’ (Africans from beyond the borders of South Africa) needs urgent attention if an African renaissance is to have meaning and relevance.
Conclusion

Let me conclude by returning to the question of how far Mbeki's notion of an African renaissance represents anything new. As indicated above, his is not the first call for an African rebirth. What is new is the context in which this call is taking place – the end of cold war, the emergence of the ‘market’ as the central organising principle of global economy, the accelerated globalisation of world economy and, finally, the worsening position of the African continent at the marginal pole of the world economy. In essence Mbeki’s notion of an African renaissance entails grappling with the same old question that emerged with colonisation of the continent and preoccupied many during the early days of independence: what should be done about Africa’s place within the world market? In the context of accelerating globalisation, this question has become more urgent today. Africa has no alternative but to find a constructive way of engaging the forces of globalisation.

This article argues that it is up to those on the continent to pursue a collective effort to move the forces of globalisation onto more favourable terrain. This is no more novel a call than Mbeki’s notion of an African renaissance. Africa is indeed replete with failed attempts to forge a common platform. But the emergence of democratic space within the continent over the last decade has brought new forces into the socio-political arena and has set the stage for new possibilities. Fruitful alliances will not be formed nor battles won in a day. But with persistence and commitment, the coming decade may present us with a much more optimistic picture than the past.

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