

International Symposium on African Renaissance

We have just entered a new century. Contrary to what many think, it is going to be a century of deconstruction and reconstruction.

There is no doubt that the current world equilibrium as roughly outlined in the aftermath of the Great Discoveries and the Italian and European Renaissance, and later refined by the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, will undergo changes of a magnitude never before witnessed.

I do believe, indeed, that we shall soon move, in the coming decades, from a unipolar into a multipolar world with a strong resurfacing of identity expressions on the part of all civilisations, whether in Asia, America and Africa, that are likely to claim that their history has existed for several thousands of years.

The end of the cold war will be followed by an inevitable showdown between cultures, religions and civilisations; it may not necessarily be an adversarial showdown but rather something that can be turned into a symphonic dialogue, founded on mutual enrichment of ideas, concepts, symbols, values and references such that we can work out together a new humanism, recast not according to the unilateral codes, rites, customs, visions and scenarios of a single world, no matter how dominant but according, from now on, to multifarious and successive contributions in which each people, each country, each race, each civilisation no matter the size, will bring their share.

So much so that, an era once marked by an ethnocentric vision tainted with a seemingly immanent superiority, will now be succeeded by that of diverse cultural expressions, that of identity assertions on the part of all peoples who have lived long enough and have a message to deliver to the rest of the planet.

Africa has to be prepared for this cardinal change by laying the foundations of a future described by the historian, Christopher Bayle as 'the reality of tomorrow'.

The geopolitical framing to which we have been accustomed so far is bound to break up.

One indication is that the centre of international economy is now shifting from

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Europe to Asia. This movement will also certainly and especially spread to Africa.

Yes, I truly believe so. Our continent is going to be the continent of the 21st Century.

Our continent is going to be the continent of the 21st Century, on the condition that we all, men, women, youth, adults and seniors dedicate ourselves to a spirit of work everywhere and at all times, to the ethics of enduring and conscious effort associated with a high sense of discipline and a true and full commitment to serving the supreme interest of our homeland and continent; on the condition that we stay united; on the condition that we nurture peace, full peace and still more peace, for peace is the *sine qua non* condition for development; on the condition that we elevate mutual solidarity and trust to being a vital imperative; on the condition that we are capable of formulating the lineaments of a new humanism, based on a liberation, re-motivation and mobilisation ideology at the service of a great cause, marking a complete departure from a certain past. I am talking here of African Revival

My humble view is that, it is in similar light that the concept of African Renaissance assumes full significance, value and an emergency character.

However, I have to make it clear from the onset that we are not suggesting that Africa should make a copycat of the Western Renaissance, for the simple reason that Africa is not Europe and that the challenges of the 15th and 16th Centuries are different from those of the 21st Century.

We simply need to study well when it came into being and its operational mode on the basis of our current ambitions, future challenges and the spirit of the African people.

What some termed 'African decline' started only in the 15th Century, whereas Europe's, when Renaissance came into

being, had lasted a millennium, more precisely since the fall of the Roman Empire.

Neither should we repeat the History of Florence with Durer or Francisco de Hollande, the Médicis, Petrarch era, not to say the Chansons de geste of Erasmus, Henri Estienne, Guillaume Budé, Machiavelli, Clément Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard or Montaigne, Michelangelo, Raphael or Leonardo da Vinci.

It was Fernand Braudel who wrote 'each epoch has its modernity if this word is to mean the contrary of apathy'.

However, the lesson contained in this European experience for us is: 'The intellectuals of the Renaissance, first in Italy then in Europe think of themselves, mankind and the world in break off and not continuity terms'.

It seems to me that our two approaches find a common ground in this key-idea.

- While European Renaissance was mostly relevant in the cultural area, that of Africa and its Diaspora should, though duly allowing for this dimension, additionally spread to the other areas of human activity, including notably economy, science, technology, good governance and even geopolitics.

It should not be an essentially elitist undertaking but instead a tidal wave that irrigates the entire society and integrates into its problematic all the components of the African community.

Renaissance historians also discussed in length whether it represents in the History of Culture, such a clear departure that its actors and witnesses felt that they were experiencing a real renewal of civilisation of such a magnitude that they believed they were pulling out of an endless night, that of the Middle Ages, filled with obscurantism, regression and cold seclusion, and entering a new world, in what may be described as a total revolution.

In a country like France, the champions of Romanticism said and repeated it so well that the power of habituation established their opinion as an almost irrefutable scientific fact.

Reacting to this judgement, V.L. Saunier observed that 'an era in which the concept of human glory or outmoded nature of science or what have you becomes a new notion, is not that which invented it: almost any idea to formulate it into such a general pattern alone which constitutes its main foundation, will be never or always'.

But, he moved quickly to add: 'For each key idea, there is at least one era which attributes more to it than its formula viz. its prestige, glamour and freshness, making light out of a concept. It is in that era that it is new.'

The African Renaissance concept came into being in the sorrowful conscience of Maroon communities persecuted, victims of violence, reduced to slavery, dragged away from their fathers' land, packed in the wet and stinking holds of slave ships, exposed to the hazards of long and painful voyages, landed onto unknown lands, deprived of their identity, language, religions, and civilisation, separated and penned up in makeshift shelters like animals in a cattle fair, numbered just like sheer goods and subjected to inhuman code and disgraceful laws.

All they got from this ordeal was much suffering; notwithstanding this denial of freedom, the fact of being away from their homeland and the hardships of exile, it was by relying on their culture and their faith in their race that they survived and resisted against all odds the most implacable adversity, the most ferocious cruelty and the most shocking humiliations.

Those struggles and battles, whether individually or collectively, contained the seeds of African Revival, the scientific foundation of which has been laid since the 19th Century by Godfrey Higgins (1772-1833), François Lenormant (1837-1883) and John Baldwin, with the latter demonstrating the anteriority of the Cushite civilisation from time immemorial, across the whole of South East Asia; the work of Gérard Massey (1828-1917), author of the famous 'L'Afrique est le berceau et l'Egypte la voix' or Africa is the cradle and Egypt the voice formula, Marcel Auguste Dieulafoy (1884-1920), and lastly Henry Rawlinson (1850-1895) whose research work revealed the presence, from time immemorial, of Blacks on the Indian Peninsula before the Aryans arrived.

A meeting of all these authors was called by Runoko Rashidi to whom I would like to pay here a deserved homage.

We learnt from him that Japan even knew of a Black Shogun and that in the popular culture of this country, a saying still goes that 'to be a good Samurai, you need to have some Black blood running through your veins'.

The same author disclosed to us that ADN tests have proven that 1/5 of the Chinese also have Black blood running through their veins.

Relaying and as a committed pursuer of the struggles and resistances that these revelations have triggered mostly since the 19th Century, Marcus Garvey will encourage in all oppressed Blacks the will to claim and aspire to dignity and freedom through a slogan which represented a programme per se: 'Africa to Africans. Black Race Revival. Wake up Ethiopia. Back to Africa'.

Since that era, he linked the Egyptian civilisation with Black Africa, Black race of which he exalted the beauty, courage and dignity.

Since that era, he aspired to the establishment of a Negro Parliament, asserted his will to establish an African empire and to resuscitate the glory of Ancient Ethiopia.

Speaking up in August 1920, in an electrically charged environment, he wrote: 'We, Blacks claim Africa and we are prepared to shed our blood to defend her rights. We shall draft a Code for the Black Race'.

In his public appeal to the Black race prior to the 3rd Annual and International Congress of Negro Peoples of the World, which convened, in New York, on August 31, 1922, and was attended by 100,000 delegates and MPs representing the Black populations of Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, Central America, the United States and the Caribbean, he defined the paradigms of a programme ending a past history of submission and resignation and proposed 'the establishment of a climate of understanding and friendship between the members of the Black race, discussions on the formation of a Government of Black Peoples, exchange of views on the international protection of Blacks, debates on the condition and future of Blacks in various parts of the world, a reflection on the History of Black race that is yet to be written, the preparation of a Declaration of Black Race Human Rights'.

Such were the objectives and foundations of Black Race Revival about 100 years ago.

Others, to mention only a few, like Cheikh Anta Diop in 1948, Frantz Fanon in 1952,

Aimé Césaire in 1955 followed and in turn set other landmarks of African Revival.

In 1955, *Présence Africaine* published a thesis by Cheikh Anta Diop, titled:

« Nations Nègres et Culture » (Negro Nations and Culture).

This worthy son of Africa revealed in it that Solon, Clisthenes, Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes, Eudoxe and Eratosthenes had all studied Egypt, something that has, however, not been taught anywhere, proving Chancellor Williams right when he wrote that: 'The Africans and their descent should assume responsibility and lead in historical research. If we leave it to the Whites to do almost all the research and the basic historical writings on Blacks; then we must accept their vision without complaint'.

The following year, the same publisher published in December, 1955-January 1956, an article titled: 'Alerte sous les tropiques' or Alert in the Tropics.

The 1st Congress of Black Writers and Artists was held at the Sorbonne in 1956, the second one took place in Rome in 1959, and without explicitly addressing the concept, it defined the lineaments of an African Revival Project.

The publication, in 1973, of Théophile Obenga's work titled: 'L'Afrique dans l'Antiquité' or Africa in Ancient Times, was part of this movement.

The 1966 Dakar World Festival of Negro Arts, held in an era of dominant Negritude, those of Algiers in 1969 and Lagos in 1977, addressed in their own way the same themes from a dominant cultural perspective.

Adding to these events were the publication of the same Cheikh Anta Diop's: 'Fondements Economiques et Culturels d'un Etat Fédéral d'Afrique Noire', K. Nkrumah's 'Afrique Must Unite', and Professor Abdoulaye Wade's 'Un Destin Pour l'Afrique' in 1989; lastly, on entering the scene, Thabo Mbeki made of these themes the number one objective of his post-Apartheid policy. Since 1996, when the First Conference of Intellectuals and Men and Women of Culture of Africa and the Diaspora was held in Dakar, re-convened in October, 2005 and was moved thereafter to Brazil; since the Symposium held in this room on the United States of Africa, followed by a Forum on Africa and World Governance; since especially your decision, Mr. Chairman, to make African

Revival the central theme of FESMAN III, which will be held in our country in December 2010, the African Revival concept seems to have been strongly established.

Each of the events that I have just mentioned constitutes, indeed, a landmark of variable significance in this long march towards African Revival.

In the light of the foregoing, this Revival should first rely on the restoration of our prestigious past, in other words, our history, making current and future generations aware of the contribution of our culture, not only to science and technology, but also in every area of human activity such that no one can, henceforth, ignore that we are world civilizers and that our contribution to universal heritage is worthy of respect and consideration.

This is neither a narcissistic and backward-looking glorification undertaking nor one of misleading and exhilarating delight.

Instead, it is a moral duty, an obligation of truth, that makes us and others not to continue teaching unacceptable falsehood but to inscribe, instead, on the minds proven scientific concepts that will cure mankind of racism, cultural despise, truths that will impose on all consciences the sacred paradigm of equal dignity of all peoples and cultures.

This approach will provide the opportunity to rewrite entire pages of our history, including those that are called with some exaggeration, 'conquest' and 'pacification'.

The truth of the matter is that Africa has never been conquered.

No ! Pacification has always been a myth.

Whether in the past, today like in future, the African people, as always, will remain firmly standing, proud and haughty, heroic and resilient, never submitting, never accepting to resign themselves to being dominated whether under pre-colonial empires, at the time of slave trade and slavery, under colonial administration and Apartheid or after independence.

Even today, they continue to struggle through all their component parts for democracy, justice, dignity, freedom and economic and social advancement.

This concept of a permanent resistance of the African populations constitutes a powerful asset which African Revival should take advantage of, if it were to successfully meet all the challenges and

stakes of the 21st Century. It is one of the essential conditions for its accomplishment.

Studying our contribution to Universal Heritage and highlighting the permanent resistance of our populations should have two main corollaries:

– first is the formulation of a strategy that will end once and for all the isolation and weakness of our continent, cutting it off its Diaspora.

The Black world, the African world is not just limited to the 30 million sq. km corresponding to the surface area of our continent. It spreads well beyond.

Since time immemorial, the African man has migrated to all regions of the planet.

While I am speaking with you, there is evidence of Black populations as old as 60 000 years on an archipelago of the Bengali Sea, in the Adaman Islands. The newspaper *'Le Monde'* dated March 28, 2000 reported on them in an article.

In India alone, there are 350 million Dravidian Blacks living there.

You all know that Ivan Van Sertima demonstrated that Black people came before Christopher Columbus in America.

They have today spread all over Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States and Canada, Europe, the Islamic-Arab world including Iran, Turkey, Russia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Arab Peninsula, etc.

Finally, the world is not host to just a billion people corresponding to the current population of Africa, but now to close to 1 billion 500 million Blacks and Africans. This is a formidable force that we have, a major asset of preeminent value because, contrary to what has been taught since Malthus, an individual is not just a mouth to feed. He is also working arms and mostly a thinking, reflecting, conceiving, imaginative, creative, inventive, organising and acting spirit, at a time when the immaterial sphere imposes its victory in the realm of knowledge and know-how.

That dimension, which means studying the geography and composition of the Diaspora and that of its history in order to establish a connection with Mother Africa as a 6th region, should be the 3rd line of action of African Revival.

Indeed, if we want to successfully build Euro-Africa on the basis of real development partnership agreements and set up

with the United States its proposed AGOA, on the one hand, and Latin America, the Islamic-Arab and Asian world, a mutually advantageous cooperation, on the other hand, we must do it with the recognition of our Diaspora as the 6th region of our continent.

The second corollary consists in making all aware of the key role played by the African Peoples in the advent of Human Rights and the birth of the Free World.

I would like to recall that as soon as 1500 B.C., you could, referring to an Egyptian Pharaoh, proclaim, according to the Book of the Dead, the following declaration which is an expression of an admirable moral and political philosophy: 'He gave bread to the starving and water to the thirsty. He clothed the naked'.

I remember having written somewhere that 'in 617, when Prophet Mohammad (PSL) decided to send from Mecca to Abyssinia an Arab community in order to move them away from ostracism and Quraysh persecutions, a perfect illustration of a desire for Islamic/Christian dialogue and an admirable example of tolerance, he based his choice on the fact that there lived a king named Nadjachi who, by his own description, was 'a just king who harmed no one'.

During the 13th Century, the Kurukan Fugha Charter, a contemporary document with Magna Carta, went much further even sketching a right falling today under the 3rd generation categories.

Set aside Arab columnists' testimonies, justice administration in Ghana, education in the Malian empire, science and scholarship as reflected through Songhai humanism, I would like to recall the Zanj revolts, the Haitian revolution of 1526, the glorious epic of Benkos Bohio in Colombia in 1599 (before being proclaimed king, governing his community in the Matuna region up to March 16, 1621), that of Zumbi in the Palmarès State between 1630 and 1667 in Brazil, the Haitian revolution, with Toussaint Louverture, his role during the savannah battle where 800 Blacks under the command of Rear-admiral Destaing saved George Washington's troops from a debacle as they were threatened by Lieutenant-colonel Maitland, and all the scores of admirable heroes painted by Abdoulaye Wade in 'Un Destin Pour l'Afrique' not to mention the multiple and heartbreaking resistances opposed by Muslim Black slaves in many countries of

South America and the Caribbean where they had been resettled against their will.

Set aside the role played by Haiti in the liberation of South America, the participation of African troops in the Crimea and Mexican wars, World War 1 and World War 2 or in other words, in the victory against militarism, fascism and Nazism; set aside, the heroic, worthy and admirable struggle that Afro-Americans have led since 1619, with emblematic figures like Nat Turner in 1831, to obtain their civic and political rights, a clear expression of a will to totally break away from a past history of labelling, pain and stigmatisation; it is also in Africa that the 'rainbow society' and 'Truth and Reconciliation' commission concepts were invented to settle the mass violations of Human Rights; it is again in Africa that the National Assembly of Senegal adopted two historic laws: one establishing full parity in all elective functions and the other declaring slave trade crimes against humanity.

All these feats of arms and strong symbolic deeds have, so far, earned Black troops no equal dignity as founding fathers of a Free World as it did, for example, for Americans, Canadians, the British, New Zealanders or Australians.

Making an assessment of our contribution in the birth of civilisation, our contribution to the advancement of mankind through science and technology, our demographic weight which makes of the African world one of the strongest community globally, we have a right to a

greater share in global governance or in other words, in bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation, etc.

Still, we are being denied this legitimate right.

We can put an end to this ostracism if we are able to implement, as soon as possible, the United States of Africa which will enable us, without renouncing our States, our hymns or our flags, to speak in one voice in the name of 53 African States subject to ceding a bit of sovereignty.

We shall succeed if we create an African Central Bank operating a single common currency; if we have an integrated educational system, a common legislation allowing for the free movement of goods, persons, capital and merchandise; a coordinated and integrated African scientific and technological research policy, founded on centres of excellence; if we have exchange, coordinating and self-development spaces, where articulate, virtuous economic and monetary policies implemented with rigour and duly allowing for infrastructures and ICTs will be debated for the purpose of formulating relevant strategies for Africa to make the big jump forward that will pull it definitively out of under-development. Let me just note very quickly that we have every reason for hope.

Between 1998 and 2007, 18 African countries (seven of which outperformed China) recorded a cumulative growth of over 100 per cent.

The top 20 highest growth rates around the world were found in Africa, within the same period, and these include Equatorial Guinea 963 per cent, Angola 75 per cent, Mozambique 306 per cent, Sudan 283 per cent, Nigeria 201 per cent and Chad 197 per cent.

In 1998, 17 African countries were involved in conflicts. They are today only five of them.

The African Renaissance machine, as we can see, has now been definitively launched under favourable auspices.

But most especially, it is in our culture and the positive values it conveys that we should find the reasons and motives for our unity, solidarity and commitment to the service of African Revival.

Culture is, as someone said, the shortest path from a human group to another.

And yet, there is some terrific revival and fantastic boom of music, fashion, cinema, painting, architecture, singing taking place in the cultural domain with a powerful development of rappers and reggae enthusiasts but also of dance, photography, handicrafts, jewellery trade which convey the continent's new message to all regions of the world, thanks to greatly talented artists and designers who have become international icons and reliable assets.

All we need to do now is to arm ourselves with the conscience needed for African Revival, because 'conscience, as a wise man said, is always some form of power'.

Africa: Reaffirming our Commitment

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Dakar, CODESRIA, 2010, 96 pp

Price: Africa 3500 FCFA –

Outside Africa: www.africanbookscollective.com



ISBN: 978-2-86978-250-1

Africa: Reaffirming our Commitment examines the economic foundations of our states and the question of the dignity of Africans as human beings. The objective of this book is not to lament or finger-point those who caused Africa's ills, but rather to think of means and propose strategies that can be used to free ourselves from poverty and oppression, and most importantly, identify the main drivers that could accelerate Africa's development. This publication proffers ways by which our economy and our governments can be put at the service of all Africans.