New meanings of Pan Africanism in the era of globalisation

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Get Africa moving, collaborate in its organization, its regroupment, on revolutionary principles. Participating in the coordinated movement of a continent; that, definitely, is the task I had chosen …. Having taken Algeria to the four corners of Africa, we now have to go back with the whole of Africa to African Algeria, towards the north, towards the continental city of Algiers. That is what I want: great lines, great channels of communication across the desert. To wear out the desert, to deny it, to bring together Africa and to create the continent. … Take the absurd and the impossible, rub it up the wrong way and hurl a continent into the assault on the last ramparts of colonial power. (Frantz Fanon, ‘Cette Afrique à venir’. Cited in Macey 2000:439-440)

Introduction

Because of the occasion and because of the promise implicit in the title of this address, it is essential that I state clearly at the outset what I intend to cover and how I shall do this. In a few words, I shall try to demonstrate how those processes which we now call “globalisation” have led necessarily to the formation of regional economic and political blocs. “Africa” is one of these blocs and the aspiring continental leadership, mainly the power elites of South Africa, Senegal and Nigeria, are in the process of making a virtue out of necessity by proclaiming another “African Renaissance” as well as forging the 18th “partnership” between the countries of the North and those of Africa during the past 20 years (Mills 2002:48-49). The new meanings associated with the concept of Pan Africanism in the context of the new world order, as structured by the hegemonic project of neo-liberal conservatives, are contested by numerous forces, some non-antagonistic, others extremely antagonistic to one another. Towards the end of the paper, I attempt a succinct analysis of the openings for radical and transformative projects that are occurring as a result of the interaction between “Africa” and the world economy.

1 The Fourth Annual Frantz Fanon Distinguished Lecture, DePaul University, Chicago, 8 October 2003.
President Thabo Mbeki, in his capacity as the leader of the Republic of South Africa and as one of the foremost statespersons on the African continent, has sent out many signals and explicit statements that he intends, together with likeminded men and women in the leadership of other African states, to remake the image and the substance of the continent and of its peoples. Although he entered the international public limelight with a reputation as a realistic and pragmatic communist, it is clear that, since at least 1996, and probably even earlier, he has very deliberately been profiling himself as a Panafrikanist, one who is conscious of the lowly position which the continent of Africa occupies in the global pecking order. He is, like many others before him, especially since Kwame Nkrumah first gave notice to the world that Africans were going to take back their continent and make it into an integral part of the progressive civilisation of the end of the 2nd millennium, attempting to awake the “sleeping giant” and to make it possible for Africans on the continent and in the diaspora to escape from the legendary curse of Ham.

This vision and this trajectory are in themselves not remarkable at all. Any black person and especially any African who believes that s/he has access to the human and material resources to launch a campaign, or better, a *chimurenga*, for the total liberation of the peoples of the continent would experience the moral-political compulsion to make such an attempt. What is remarkable, however, is the political-economy frame of reference that apparently informs the chosen strategy by which Mbeki and his colleagues hope to bring about the desired end. This is, stated crudely, no less and no more than the extension to the entire continent, through the promotion of NEPAD, of the principles and the economic assumptions underlying the policy of GEAR, i.e., the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy, adopted to the surprise of most people by the South African ruling party in June 1996. By way of what one can only call the sweetening of the bitter pill of neoliberal economics\(^2\), Mbeki and his followers have also preached a so-called African renaissance and have managed in a few short years, together with other forward-looking African leaders, to reconfigure the Organisation of African Unity as the African

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\(^2\) According to Mbeki, “… (the) rationale behind our macro policy is based on the simple reason (sic) that we believe that macroeconomic stability is a precondition for economic growth and development. Fiscal discipline and curtailing inflation are necessary to restore confidence and create the basic environment within which growth can occur”. (Cited in Marais 2002:90)
Union (AU), a political and institutional configuration which is seen as initiating a new phase of African progress and development and which, therefore, leaves behind the discredited experiment of post-colonial independence by taking it as given that the continent is, and has to be, closely tied into the integrated world economy.

The focus of this address is the simple question whether this reopening of the panafrican political space will give rise to any radical perspectives on how the peoples of the continent should, or can, be organised so that from them new impulses – *aliquid novi* – may possibly touch other areas and political subjects in the global village. The question is highly relevant when we consider how the exceptional personality of Nelson Mandela has left an indelible imprint on the history of the late 20th century. Like US presidents or, previously, Soviet leaders, Mandela’s basic beliefs and his exploits have shaped the political terrain on which all agents or actors have had to act. The notion of reconciliation between actually or potentially warring ethnic or national entities by means of a process of painstaking negotiation and give and take is irrevocably associated with Mandela and with the African National Congress. An entire theory of political action has been spawned by the South African transition from apartheid to liberal democracy. In the conventional sense, the moral stature of the men and women who have emulated Mandela, whether in Northern Ireland, in Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi or in Palestine, is assured, simply because they have indicated in different ways that they are indeed trying to emulate him.

The first question is, therefore: what, if anything, has Mbeki to project? What is, or will be, the distinctive feature of his period of rule? Can the African renaissance, the African Union and NEPAD so increase his stature that his period of rule will also stamp a whole new approach on politics and on social ethics, such that many, perhaps even most, African leaders will want to walk his walk?

Although it is tempting to look at this issue in personal and biographical terms, I believe that that would be a sterile exercise. Mbeki represents something; he is the leader of a very diverse, contradictory and hybrid society. As a democratically elected leader, he has
to represent the whole range of interests and opinions of the people of South Africa. What is new, if anything, in the mix that is the new South Africa? And can this intriguing mixture of people, cultural and religious traditions, radical and traditional political views, in short, this microcosm of the modern world, help to give new meanings to Panafricanism? Or is it inevitable that Mbeki, like those who have gone before, will fail dismally and that the continent will continue to stagnate and to regress in some kind of vicious ethnicidal downward spiral?

My prognostications are exceptionally optimistic, not because but in spite of Mbeki. The dialectic of political life, in my view, will let radical, even revolutionary, forces fill the many vacuums that have been created by the policy shifts necessitated by the overall objectives and modalities of the Africanist mission on which Mbeki has embarked. In the context of the anti-globalisation movement and in the political holdall of the World Social Forum, with the increasingly spontaneous and instantaneous solidarity actions worldwide, which it makes possible, events in Africa are about to explode in completely unpredictable and uncontrollable ways. Ironically, it will be through the cowboy strategies of Texas Ranger, George Bush, Fuzzy, Tony Blair, and the whole posse of major and minor presidents, prime and other ministers in different parts of the world that these explosions are going to rock the world and turn it into a completely different place from the one we know today.

**Globalisation and bloc formation**

Because of the technological and communications revolutions that have reshaped the world during the second half of the 20th century, all paradigms are in the process of being reviewed. The phenomena which, by way of a lazy shorthand, journalists and others have dubbed ‘globalisation’, i.e., the new material and ideological mechanisms by which the capitalist classes are controlling the economies and societies of the world, are the essential source of this unsettling imperative. Explanations of globalisation range from the attempted neutrality of descriptions of the components of the Washington consensus, such as that furnished by Stiglitz (2002:3-22) to the “technological determinism” of the
information society thesis à la Castells (1997) to orthodox Marxist theories of “overaccumulation” (Bond 2001:4-10).

Although I assume that as a concept, or at very least as a generalised notion, the term “globalisation” does not require elaboration, I should like to list those aspects of the phenomenon that are most relevant to the purpose of this address. To begin at the economic level, it is essential that we state clearly that the capitalist mode of production as described classically first by Ricardo and subsequently refined in decisive ways by Marx and Engels has not changed at all. This mode of production refers to the collective production of use values (“goods”) by individuals who, in return for wages, sell their labour power to a class of people, who own the means of production, and who in turn, as the private owners of the labour power sold to them appropriate surplus value (the difference between the price of labour and the total (exchange) value of the “socially necessary” labour inputted in the product (commodity). In spite of the many technical permutations that have evolved during the last century in particular, this is the generic mode of producing profit, the ultimate aim of all capitalist enterprise. Globalisation, at this level, refers simply to the increasing integration of all economic and social formations into the world capitalist economy, i.e., it has to do with the complexification - which is also an unprecedented simplification – of the capitalist system, viewed in its totality. This drive towards ever increasing integration is steered by the dominant economies of the tripolar world but especially by the USA. The governments of the relevant countries, whatever else they might be, are no less than the political representatives of the owners of the 200 or so major trans-national corporations in the world, since these are the real drivers of these processes.

The neo-liberal economic orthodoxy, which informs virtually every macro-, meso- and micro-economic environment on the globe has attained the status of common sense. To quote a recent article by three South African analysts, we have as an abstract model … a liberal political dispensation accompanied by a deregulated market economy with minimal state/government intervention as the norm for countries intent on engaging with the global economy.
This discourse … (emphasises) privatisation, open capital markets and trade liberalisation, market-based pricing, deregulated and flexible labour markets, and integration into the global economy as the most effective means to achieve economic development (Daniel et al 2003:373-374).

Writing this article, as I do, in the immediate aftermath of the historic events in Cancun, from the perspective of a radical intellectual in the South, I would summarise the dynamics at the economic level in the following simple terms. The government of the United States of America, acting in the interests of the all-powerful transnational corporations that are domiciled there is using exactly the same kind of tactics as those used by the ruling classes in the British empire in an earlier historical period by proclaiming and promoting a doctrine of “free trade” in the full knowledge that the acceptance of this ideology by the majority of people in the world, and by sovereign states in particular, can only benefit the strongest economic powers. In this, it is aided and abetted albeit, generally speaking, as competitors by the European Union and by Japan and some of the East Asian “tigers”. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, the USA and to a lesser extent, the European Union, have all the leverage at their command in order to compel virtually all states to toe the line; China and India, to a lesser extent, Brazil, are simply too huge for such compulsion to work without unleashing the danger of a destabilising reaction. And, the line is precisely the neo-liberal mantra referred to above. In order to do this, these strong powers use the surrogate or mercenary services of the international multilateral institutions, in the main the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Between and among themselves, the modern hegemons have divided up the world in such a way that their economic benefits are mutually reinforcing. This effect is attained mainly through the instrumentality of the transnational corporations and of mutual trade and

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3 Hence, the effective torpedoing of the Cancun talks on the question of EU and US subsidies to their farmers by the G20+, which includes these three states in its ranks.
investment. By means of a combination of multilateral and bilateral agreements, these agencies have, during the past 20 years, more or less, succeeded in forcing open the domestic markets of most countries in the world. With regard to the South, the standard device is that of advancing generous loans and other forms of aid at high rates of interest and tied to conditions (so-called conditionalities) which become the open sesame for the entry of short-term speculative finance capital and especially for dumped manufactured goods, the end-effect of which is de-industrialisation, i.e., the ruination of whatever infant industry is struggling to be born or to survive in the given third-world country. Lowering of import tariffs and the privatisation of state-owned and parastatal enterprises, among other mechanisms, ensure that the sovereignty of the national state is circumscribed and that, in effect, the national government becomes in many respects an agent of transnational capital (see Castells 1997: 307-308). Many strategic and tactical weapons have been, and are being, deployed by the general staff located in the think tanks and strategic planning teams of the corporate boardrooms. None of these, as we now know only too well, has been fired by chance. The costly and demoralising “Uruquay Round” of negotiations, which led to the creation of the World Trade Organisation, as we know it now, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which was calculated to do away with the sovereignty of small states and which was defeated by a combination of trade-union, community and other political forces as well as by the responses of some of the endangered regimes, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (a euphemism for the dastardly policy of universal commodification of public goods such as water and sources of energy) right across to the most recent debacle in Cancun: all these were carefully planned smart bombs aimed at obtaining access to, and control of, the resources of the weaker and powerless countries of the South, regardless of the collateral damage they would cause, and all wrapped in a miasma of misleading discourses about spreading democracy, transparency and good governance and fighting against terrorism, tyranny and dictatorship. The machiavellian machinations of the *Project for a New American*

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4 Some 50% of world trade takes place between the NAFTA, the EU and East Asia (mainly Japan) (see *Le Monde diplomatique* 2003:116). Together, these countries, comprising only 15% of the world’s population, account for 70% of world trade (see *AIDC Briefing* No. 1).
Century\textsuperscript{5}, with which some of George Bush’s inner circle are associated, have recently come to light as the result of the tragedy of the war in Iraq. According to Rouleau,

> The proclaimed objective of the signatories is to assure the global pre-eminence of the US, especially by preventing any other industrial power from playing a role on the international or regional scene…. A unilateralist policy is called for, as well as possible resort to pre-emptive wars, to defend the values and interests of the US. The United Nations is presented as a “forum of leftists, anti-Zionists and anti-imperialists” to which there should be recourse only if the UN supports Washington’s policy”.

Theirs is no less than a manifesto for a conscious and deliberate policy of imperialist supremacy in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

The struggle for fair trade against the stranglehold of the multilateral institutions has taken many forms and has continued unabated since the early 1970s. These have ranged from reformist notions of improving the bureaucratic procedures of the multilateral institutions, especially of the World Bank and the IMF at one end, to more generously conceptualised attempts to change the architecture of “global governance” in the middle, across to the mass mobilising, campaign orientated international social movement for global justice and against “global apartheid”. The ruthless and cynical manoeuvres of the political leadership of the North have resulted in a series of civil wars and international conflicts, all of which are, naturally rooted in local or regional histories and none of which can be explained by simply reading off from a formulaic definition of “globalisation”. The peculiarities of each given situation are always complex and explicable in terms of its unique history. Certain trajectories, however, originate directly from the larger frame of reference that has been designed by the social, economic and political forces of globalisation. One of these, is the defensive strategy of target countries, regions and communities of banding together in order to resist being swamped or,

contradictorily, left out in the cold, by these processes. Those agents that have failed to
do this have, in effect, been annexed or re-colonised by one of the three poles of
international gravitation. Castells’ trilogy, especially the second volume, which deals
with The Power of Identity, is the locus classicus for the description and for a feasible
explanation of the phenomenon of what he calls “resistance identities”, of which bloc
formation is a specific dimension. It is within this explanatory framework that I locate the
African renaissance in its latest incarnation as proclaimed and commentated by President
Thabo Mbeki. My basic proposition is that the rhetorical trope of the renaissance is a
typical and instinctive attempt at constructing such a resistance identity which has,
paradoxically but in a most unpredictable manner, the potential of becoming what
Castells calls a “project identity”. For this reason, it is not doomed, as are mere resistance
identities. It is, moreover, for this very reason of great importance to a radical left project
in Africa today.

Africa de-linked?
The main point of this paper is that the processes of globalisation have created the
conditions for a new upsurge of panafrican unity. The current attempts by the official
political leadership of the continent to refurbish the discredited aspect of the structures
and functioning of the Organisation of African Unity and to design a new strategy for
continental economic development is the direct result of the realisation that unregulated
capital flows and all the other features of “globalisation” objectively perpetuate the
tendency towards stagnation and regression into barbarism in which the continent is
mired today. This is an important statement because we are acknowledging that the
relevant leaders are acting from a base of real knowledge of and insight into the world
system. All the more reason, therefore, to note what seems like a non sequitur at first
.glance, i.e., their decision to act on the belief that “if you can’t beat them, join them” or,
to put it another way, their myopic view that “there is no alternative” to the conservative

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6 Ndewga (1992:20-21), in discussing the desperate situation in Africa, recommends such a co-ordination
of economic effort and adds that “Africa would not be unique if it were to take this route, since … in recent
years there has been an active process of trade and economic “blocalisation” in the world economy, of
which the drive for “Europe 1992” and the US-Canada Trade Agreement are prominent examples”.
7 Manuel Castells, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture.
8 Best described as “hit-and-run investment” (by Saul and Leys 1999).
macro-economic strategies prescribed by the multilateral institutions and the corporate puppeteers behind the scenes of the world stage, on which they like to strut at Davos, Geneva, New York, Washington and elsewhere.

In a devastatingly honest and surgical analysis of the African condition, Colin Leys, almost 10 years ago demonstrated that the colonial legacy will take many years and a combination of improbable developments to be eliminated. In particular, he points to the fact that under colonial rule, “household production of commodities replaced household production for subsistence and local exchange…” and that this resulted in the destruction of “the precolonial economies and the social orders based on them, without putting in their place economies or social systems capable of defending themselves against ‘world market forces’ after independence” (Leys 1994:44-45). Five years later, together with John Saul, he described Africa south of the Sahara (excluding South Africa) as a place where there is “some capital but not a lot of capitalism” (Saul and Leys 1999). Our understanding of the reasons for the tragedy of Africa in the modern world has been enhanced by many incisive analyses but in the short time at my disposal, I cannot enter into the specifics of any of them. Suffice it to say that the failure of the postcolonial African state and the initially populist orientation of most post-independence African governments culminated in the domino-like collapse of most of them after the oil price-induced economic crisis of the mid-1970s. The structural adjustment prescriptions of the Bretton Woods institutions that were supposed to restore the economies of these states to health notoriously exacerbated their condition and catapulted most of them into the debt trap, where they languish up to this day.

Today, there is hardly any publicist or analyst that does not record and lament the fact and the scale of the marginalisation of the continent. Inevitably, suggestions for solutions have oscillated between accepting a kind of recolonisation of the continent, with effective government and decision-making taking place from Northern capitals, and what has been called (by Ndegwa 1992) “collective self-reliance for economic recovery and growth”. In

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9 For a useful review of the process, see Bond 2001:17-28.
fact, it does not detract from the credit of President Mbeki when one maintains that both the outline and the details of his programme, which has come to be known as the African renaissance, have been prefigured in a long series of studies undertaken by African as well as UN-based research institutes and political think tanks\textsuperscript{10}.

It is not surprising that the impetus for the regeneration of the continent has come from the new South Africa. Besides the more intangible factors of particular biographies and personalities, it is the paradoxical legacy of apartheid and of the struggle against apartheid that has draped the mantle of leadership over the shoulders of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and their colleagues. Elsewhere\textsuperscript{11}, I have specified in more detail the dynamics involved in this evolution. Suffice it to say that against the background of the marginalisation of Africa (“the forgotten continent”), referred to above and which can only be described as a de facto de-linking from the world economy, as the statistics\textsuperscript{12} make abundantly clear, the domestic capitalist class in South Africa has been presented with the unprecedented opportunity to move into the “African hinterland” virtually undeterred by any rivals from the disillusioned and nervous investors in the North. In this connection, the demoralising words of Colin Leys (1994:44) force themselves on to the page:

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\ldots (\text{Unless}) \text{ the global economic and political forces bearing on Africa radically alter, much if not most of the continent is doomed to further decline, material and moral degradation and suffering. This is not to say that no region of the continent can become, at least for a while, poles of capital accumulation – where there is a resource of interest to capital in general, and where local class forces are able to appropriate some of the surplus generated in exploiting that resource, and have the ability and will to use that as}
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\textsuperscript{10} See, for example, the detailed study edited by Obasanjo and Mosha (1992).
\textsuperscript{11} Alexander 2002, especially Chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{12} 11 of the 12 poorest countries in the world are located in Africa; the continent as a whole accounts for less than 3% of world trade and of the global GDP in spite of the fact that it is home to more than 10% of the world’s population. It is “the most indebted area in the world”. Africa’s external debt, “as a percentage of GNP, … rose from 39.6 percent in 1980 to 87.7 percent in 1994; as a percentage of the value of exports it went up from 97 percent in 1980 to 324 percent in 1990” (Castells, cited in Saul and Leys 1999). In 1998, the Economic Commission for Africa stated that “… according to current estimates, close to 50% of the population live in absolute poverty. This percentage is expected to increase at the beginning of the next millennium…” (Cited in Saul and Leys 1999).
capital and invest it locally, and are able to secure political conditions under which they can expand it.

Capital and continental unity

It is one of the paradoxes of the post-Wall world during which the attraction of Eastern Europe as an investment destination became irresistible to Western investors that the related increasing marginalisation of Africa from the world economy has constituted a historic opportunity for domestic South African capital. In one of the most recent analyses of this process, Daniel et al (2003) trace the colonial-apartheid origins of the dominance of South African big business in southern Africa and spell out the depth and the scale of the post-apartheid penetration of the continental “hinterland” by South Africa-based firms and enterprises. For reasons of space, the following reference will have to suffice:

A cursory glance at the literature shows South African businesses running the national railroad in Cameroon, the national electricity company in Tanzania, and managing the airports located in or near seven African capitals. They have controlling shares in Telecom Lesotho and are the leading providers of cellphone services in Nigeria, Uganda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Rwanda and Cameroon. South African corporates are also managing power plants in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mali, building roads and bridges in Malawi and Mozambique, and a gas pipeline between offshore Mozambique and South Africa. They control banks, breweries, supermarkets and hotels throughout the continent …. And provide TV programming to over half of all Africa’s states…. (Daniel et al 2003:376-377)

They go on to point out that South Africa has become “the biggest foreign investor in southern Africa” and that it is also “the continent’s largest source of new FDI, averaging $1 billion per year since 1994” (Daniel et al 2003:379). They state that the balance of trade between South Africa and the rest of the continent is in favour of the former in the ratio of 9:1, i.e., South Africa, on average, exports nine times more to the rest of the continent than it imports from it. In specific cases, however, this ratio is much less favourable to individual African countries. In the case of Angola, for example, the ratio is as high as 22:1. I cannot refrain from underlining the grotesque irony that the need for reconstruction and development in Angola derives from the apartheid-era wars of
destabilisation and that many of the firms that are now offering to rebuild the country are the same ones that collaborated in the destruction of its infrastructure and the decimation of its human resources. As Daniel and his colleagues point out, this is a particularly wry case of reaping where one has sowed. And, I would add, that in the case of Angola, one of the things that were sown was something called “dragon’s teeth” in the form of landmines. It is a pathetic and pitiable fact that South Africa has accumulated the best landmine-removing expertise in the world as the result of the “efforts” of its ruling class in Angola.

Given the sensitivity of continental politics and the need for South Africa’s political leadership to avoid any whiff of Big Brotherism or of wanting to throw its weight around as a kind of regional bully-boy, it is significant that the penetration of the continent by South African capital has mostly taken the form of mergers, take-overs and joint ventures, even though some “greenfield investment” has taken place, as in the spectacular example of the Shoprite supermarket chain which, at the time of writing, had 89 stores in 14 other African countries and expected to grow much more rapidly over the next few years (see Daniel et al 2003:379). This fact gives a different perspective on what is meant by the “New Partnership for Africa’s Development” (NEPAD), which is usually interpreted as an attempt to get the transnational corporations based in the North to enter into a “Marshall Plan”-type partnership with the business firms and governments of Africa for its economic development. For, as I shall show presently, although it is essential to distinguish between the South African government’s motives and modalities in conducting foreign policy on the continent and the profit-driven strategies of big business, there is, clearly, a strong causal link between the two processes. Indeed, it is important to state that the thrust into Africa is a well co-ordinated strategy involving all six of the main economic sectors of South Africa and both private and public sector enterprises. The crowning goal of this thrust is the truly panafrican project of “awesome dimensions”, as Daniel et al (2003:381) call the vision of an energy grid across the entire

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13 In a recent article in the South African newspaper, Business Day, Diana Games (2003) writes about the perception of South African firms in many other African countries. “SA has been accused of bullying local business and crushing competitors while continuing to protect its own economy. The debate on whether SA is an economic powerhouse or simply a bully has gained momentum recently.”
continent, which is being spearheaded by the South Africa-based Eskom Enterprises. This analysis should also be viewed against the background of the fact that the very transition to a liberal democratic polity in South Africa was to a large extent the result of the realisation (since the mid-1970s) by the major capitalist interests in South Africa that the ideological and institutional fetters of the apartheid paradigm were preventing the expansion of their profit-seeking enterprises. Hein Marais, in various contributions (most recently in 2002:95-96) has shown irrefutably – adopting a kind of j’accuse stance – that the marriage between the ANC leadership and big business in the early 1990s at the latest was a deliberate match.

**The African Renaissance and NEPAD: continuing the great tradition?**

There can be no doubt, if one accepts the analysis I have offered hitherto, that the economic basis for President Mbeki’s attempt to spearhead the revival of Africa exists in South Africa itself. The interests of the South African state and capital converge and coincide on this domain.

The old adage, “cometh the time, cometh the man”, has never been more apt. The Africanist credentials of Nelson Mandela, the first president of a democratic South Africa, go back to the foundation of the African National Congress Youth League in 1944, which, in its origins, was conceived of and established as an organisation with a panafrican mission. Like most of the leaders of the ANC before him, President Mbeki, too, is driven by the original vision of Edmund Blyden, who, like most of the first panafricanists was from the Caribbean diaspora, and one of the first black people to define the meaning of the panafrican vision. His stress on racial pride and on acknowledgement of the humanity of people of African descent laid the foundations of the subsequent anti-racist ideology which has characterised the approach of virtually all

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14 “The ANC government’s embrace of economic orthodoxy was designed precisely to help steer South African capital out of … (the) cul-de-sac. Rather than a grudging surrender to the vagaries of the ‘real world’, its economic policies represent a conscious and expectant attempt to rescue – and importantly, help restructure the operating conditions for – South African capital, and thereby hopefully enabling it to address some of the key demands and rights of the South African majority. (Marais 2002:95) That this is indeed the case has recently been confirmed by Terblanche 2002. See especially pp. 96-103
the most prominent leaders of panafricanism. In the words of Vercoutter and Leclant, who wrote some 30 years ago:

> It must be strongly underlined that Pan-Africanism (or “Negritude”) most fortunately has never had any racist connotations, although it is fundamentally racial. Because the black “Race” has been the most derided, despised, humiliated throughout history, it is part of the aims of Pan-Africanism to rehabilitate it and give it rights, equality and dignity to the same extent as other “races” (Cited in Glele 1991:191).

This sentiment, whatever the practical contradictions and the deeper problematic of which it is a manifestation, has been the source of inspiration of all Africanists from Blyden to Biko and beyond. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Nigerian independence leader, put the matter in the clearest possible terms, when he stated categorically in his book, *The Future of Pan Africanism*, that “Africanism includes all the races inhabiting Africa and comprises all linguistic and cultural groups domiciled in Africa”. Nkrumah’s terse formulation to the effect that an African is “any person of good faith, of any race, creed (faith or religious belief) or colour who has chosen to live in Africa” put the matter beyond all doubt (see Glele 1991:191).

Mbeki undoubtedly belongs to this latter category of Africanists, as one can infer very clearly from his occasional reflections on the subject. The most famous of these cogitations is the speech, “I am an African”, which he delivered in the Constitutional Assembly of South Africa on 8 May 1996 on the occasion of the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill. He is obviously driven by a combination of genuine commitment to and passion for the total liberation of the African people from all forms of racism and all vestiges of colonialism on the one hand, and a sober calculation of the best interests of the power elites in general and of South Africa in particular. One of the more attractive dimensions of the causal mix that one is able to identify is the position he has espoused that in driving the African renaissance process, South Africa’s liberation

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15 See Mbeki 1998:31-36. Most analysts who have made a study of the South African president share this view. Ryklief (2002:114), for example, writes that “the Africanness he refers to is regional rather than racial in character”
movement is in some little way making good to the people of the rest of the continent for
the many sacrifices they made during the struggle against the apartheid regime\(^{16}\).

The psychological and cultural dimensions of Mbeki’s renaissance trope are without
doubt of great significance at the subjective level. It is, however, at the level of the
political economy that the issues are and have in fact been decisively shaped. After many
detours and alarums, Mbeki and his collaborators, finally settled on NEPAD as the
economic strategy for powering the African renaissance. There is a growing forest of
literature about NEPAD, ranging from scurrilous newspaper articles in many African and
other print media to serious articles in learned journals as well as scholarly economic and
political science studies\(^{17}\). It suffices, therefore, if I try to capture briefly the problematic
of the tedious document that spells out the NEPAD vision and strategy\(^{18}\). Bond (2002:53)
makes the crucial point that in so far as it is the intention of Mbeki and his fellow-authors
to establish a new basis for interacting with the industrialised countries of the North and
with the multilateral institutions in order to address the abiding problem of compradorism
in post-colonial Africa, the battle has already been lost because

… Mbeki and his main allies have already succumbed to the class
(not necessarily personalistic) limitations of post-independence
African nationalism, namely acting in close collaboration with
hostile transnational corporate and multilateral forces whose
interests are directly opposed to those of Mbeki’s South African and
African constituencies.

This is the nub of NEPAD as a contested strategy for economic development in Africa. It
goes to the heart of the question: what radical potential is there in the notion of
panafricanism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the political space that has been brought
about through the de facto de-linking of the African continent from the rest of the world

\(^{16}\) “As South Africans, we owe our emancipation from apartheid in no small measure to the support and
solidarity extended to us by all the peoples of Africa. In that sense our victory over the system of white
minority domination is an African victory. This, I believe, imposes an obligation on us to use this gift of
freedom, which is itself an important contribution to Africa’s renaissance, to advance the cause of the

\(^{17}\) Two excellent and most insightful critiques relating to the subject were published recently by Patrick
Bond and Hein Marais in Jacobs and Calland (2002).

economy and the consequent imperative for Africans to find “African solutions”? To put the issue beyond all doubt: the fact that the ANC leadership, together with their allies in Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal and elsewhere have adopted the neoliberal economic orthodoxy of the Washington consensus as the frame of reference for the promotion and implementation of NEPAD means nothing less than that it will benefit only the elites if it works at all. The vast majority of the urban and the rural poor will remain on the margins, desperately trying to eke out an existence in an alien and hostile world. Most of the more insightful scholars of African affairs are extremely pessimistic and sceptical in this regard. Thus, Saul and Leys (1999) conclude that “… the dream of a transformative capitalism in Africa remains just that: a dream”.

NEPAD, seen from the perspective of a South African, is simply GEAR writ large. Like the domestic version of the strategy, it is driven by the need to attract foreign direct investment and to stimulate growth by means of an export-led strategy in the hope that a trickle-down effect will be forthcoming sooner rather than later. The failure of this policy in South Africa itself, after more than seven years of implementation, is common cause. Only those who, as Marais (2002:87) formulates it, are willing to employ “obtuse measurements” would hope to be able to conceal its “failure to achieve its major stated goals – growth, jobs, and redistribution….”. In case there should be any doubt about the bourgeois orientation of the ruling party, I should point to the persuasive argument brought forward by Marais (2002) that the shift (from the more populist Reconstruction and Development Programme) to GEAR was a carefully planned, deliberate process calculated to realise a range of related imperatives”:

- The appeasement of South African and international capital in order to secure support for and the stability of the democratic transition;
- The (perceived) need to reverse economic stagnation by aligning economic policies to internationally dominant ideology;
- The improvement of the social and economic conditions of life of the African majority; and
- The objective of aiding the rapid rise of the African bourgeoisie – in order to address one aspect of the ‘national question’, and to
assist the democratic state in its efforts to heed its pledges towards the African majority. (Marais 2002:98)

It is in this context that Mbeki’s Bukharinist call on black entrepreneurs not to be ashamed of becoming rich and to help to establish a “patriotic bourgeoisie” makes sense. It also explains why the bourgeois press delights in pointing out that the “utopian” precepts of the Freedom Charter have been ditched for the “realism” of the (black) empowerment charters and that taking control of the “commanding heights of the economy” will come about “… not by nationalisation but by ownership and the conscious creation of a capitalist class in the first instance, a sizable middle class in the second” (Financial Mail 2002)

The objectives of NEPAD are the same as those of GEAR, except that they apply across the length and breadth of the continent. The most ambitious aspect of these is the desire to reform the institutions of global governance, i.e., the WB, the IMF, the WTO and the UNO. This is deemed to be essential if Africa, as part and parcel of the Third World, is to have its debt reduced or written off, obtain increased development aid grants as well as more equitable access to the lucrative markets of the North and attract what is considered by the orthodox economic strategists its decisive portion of foreign direct investment. The ruling party realises that this is a strategy of desperation. Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, said as much as far back as 1999 already. According to him

The biggest problem that confronts us in relation to the Bretton Woods Institutions is that you need an 85 per cent vote to effect any change. With the United States holding about 17 per cent of all shares, no reform can take place without its agreement. Therefore, the kinds of reforms we are hoping for are not going to happen unless the world takes a very different approach to these institutions. (Cited in Marais 2002:67)

The tone of pessimism and desperation has become ever more audible after the collapse of the Cancun talks and as the incidence of “IMF riots” increases in African countries and in South Africa itself. In his most recent statement on the matter (at the United Nations), Mbeki even threatened the possibility of uncontrollable violent action. (See Katzenellenbogen 2003)
According to Gelb (2001), one of Mbeki’s main advisors on economic policy, NEPAD postulates the following preconditions for development:

- Peace, security, democracy and political governance\(^{19}\)
- Economic and corporate governance with a focus on public finance management
- Regional cooperation and integration

Priority sectors are identified as “infrastructure, information and communications technology, human development, with a focus on health and education and skills development, agriculture and the promotion of diversification of production and exports, with a focus on market access for African exports to industrialised countries”. …

Gelb is an apologist for the position of the South African government. That much is clear, but even he cannot but caution that the combination of NEPAD and the African Union may make too heavy demands on the traditionalists within the leadership echelons of the continent in as far as NEPAD’s peer review mechanism as well as the AU require the cession of a measure of sovereignty to the continental institutions. Critics of the strategy are unequivocal. It has no chance of succeeding in the present conjuncture. For my part, after studying the literature carefully and observing the ways in which the reformist agenda of the South African government and its allies has been marginalized, most recently at Cancun, I agree with Patrick Bond’s assessment, one which is based on some very stubborn facts:

… (The) evidence thus far is that equitable and sustainable growth and Africa’s rapid ‘integration into the world economy’ … are mutually exclusive. Although Africa’s share of world trade declined during the 1980s and 1990s, the volume of exports increased, while the value of sub-Saharan exports was cut in half relative to the value of imports from the North … In other words, the more Africa engaged in international trade during that period of intense globalisation, the further it slipped backwards. … Africa’s ability to grow … has actually declined, compared to the period prior to structural adjustment. Thus, … the reform strategy will fail …

\(^{19}\) Without being able – at this stage – to provide any hard evidence for my assertion, I believe that this is the spot where we have to dig if we want to unearth the source of what has come to be known in South Africa as the arms-deal scandal.
(The) failure is emanating from the very project of global reformism itself … Mbeki and NEPAD effectively exclude … alliances with those international social, labour and environmental movements that, in their struggles for socio-environmental and economic justice, are the main agents of progressive global change. (Bond 2002:54-55. Emphasis in the original).

The cultural revolution and the alternatives in Africa

In my view, we will be seeing more, not less, of “the revolution of rising frustrations” that has typified the African continent in the post-1973 era of globalisation, as attested by IMF-riots, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, xenophobia and, most devastatingly, genocide\(^\text{20}\). The discussion about radical alternatives to the trajectories that are alleged to be imperatively determined by “globalisation” is in its infancy\(^\text{21}\), although the World Social Forum, as a kind of Anti-Davos, has constituted a space in which all possible alternatives – under the banner-slogan: Another World Is Possible – can be raised and debated at different levels and in different but interconnected geographical and political spaces. In fact, this is the first time in the history of struggle that a truly international, a global, movement against the capitalist system has come into existence. It is not a movement for a socialist alternative but it represents a platform from where that alternative can be promoted as never before.

At the economic level, as long as the opponents of globalisation are compelled to argue within the parameters of the capitalist system, they will not be able to go beyond tactical

\(^{20}\) Arundhati Roy (2003), writing in a global context, calls a spade a spade when she writes that “What the Free Market undermines is not national sovereignty, but democracy. As the disparity between the rich and poor grows, the hidden fist has its work cut out for it. Multinational corporations on the prowl for ‘sweetheart deals’ that yield enormous profits cannot push through those deals and administer those projects in developing countries without the active connivance of the state machinery …. Today, Corporate Globalisation needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, preferably authoritarian governments in poorer countries, to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws, and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that it’s only money, goods, patents and services that are globalised – not the free movement of people, not a respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical and nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, or god forbid, justice. It’s as though even a gesture towards international accountability would wreck the whole enterprise. (Emphasis in the original)
adjustments to the current hegemonic policies. That is to say, a greater degree of state intervention, larger budget deficits and some of the other classical Keynesian policy tools are all that they can put up against the neoliberal approaches. This is not to be sneered at, however, since it demonstrates at the very least that there are indeed alternatives even if they do not rock the boat.

Clearly, however, the long walk to a different world has to begin elsewhere. Whatever transitional and tactical demands are made on behalf of the poor and the dispossessed in the world – and every reform that improves the conditions of life of the dispossessed has to be supported – they only gain legitimacy if they are made in the context and for the furtherance of a longer-term programme of radical social transformation. Today, we have become sceptical of monistic blueprints that stand or fall by some fundamental(ist) set of formulae. We much prefer the kind of simple logic of the late Ernest Mandel who, on a memorable visit to South Africa just before the end of the apartheid regime, stated that at the beginning of the new millennium, the socialist programme is biblical in its simplicity in that it does not differ essentially from the demands of the sermon on the mount. We strive for a world, he said, where these imperatives can be realised:

- Feed the hungry;
- Clothe the naked
- House the homeless;
- Care for the aged, the young and the sick.

The point is, of course, that this situation has never been realised, not even in the most advanced capitalist country, in spite of a superfluity of the means to do so.

At the same time, therefore, as we are struggling against globalisation and its fall-out, especially in the South, we have to strive to create the models of the alternative world in all sectors of social life, even in the economic sector, wherever there is a measure of de-linking possible, whether at the level of the local, the national or the regional economy. I need not spell out the implications of this proposition. Suffice it to say that by means of social forum, environmental, feminist, youth, political party and other networks, it is

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21 Examples are Saul and Leys 1999 and Vale and Maseko 2002.
completely feasible to begin to sketch the outlines of the different world without losing one’s footing. And, as we know, people will become intellectually and politically mobile as soon as they are able to discern, or sense, the possibility of an alternative. All the great revolutions that have transformed world civilisation have shown the truth of this insight.

In the African context, I want to stress, we should promote a new panafricanism as the platform from which to step into the different world order that is taking shape in Porto Alegre and in all the other cities that have taken their cue from there. At the same time, we have to guard against the ever-present danger of the imagined community of Africans becoming what (the late) Edward Said recently called a “fictitious collective identity”. In this respect, Fanon’s words, written more than 40 years ago, ought to serve as a compass:

A people that undertakes a liberation struggle rarely legitimises racism. Even in acute periods of armed struggle, biological justifications are never used. The struggle of those who have been inferiorized takes place at a more human level. Its perspectives are radically new. … (Universality) lies in … (the) decision to take responsibility for the reciprocal relativism of different cultures once colonial status has been ruled out. (Fanon, ‘Racisme et culture’, cited in Macey 2000:289-290)

I want to end by saying very clearly that my position implies that the struggle continues. As long as the deep division between the classes persists – and few have evoked this fact as eloquently as President Mbeki himself – class struggles will be the order of the day. In this respect, I think it is clear that I am suggesting that the rhetoric of the African renaissance, through its economic (NEPAD) and political (AU) loudspeakers, affords left-wing activists and other socially committed agents the opportunity to explore systematically all the openings that are necessarily provided when something new is being built or attempted. By way of example: we are in the unique position today to ask very serious questions about the character of the “democracy” or, better still, “democratic governance”, which every politician worth his or her salt spouts in and out of season. By doing so, we are able to push the system to its limits in every domain.
Hitherto, I have focused on the economic and political aspects of the African renaissance. The reason for this approach is the fact that the NEPAD document and the documentation relating to the AU are concerned in the first place with those domains. There is a social issue, however, that requires much more thought and that should be integrated into the material aspect of the analysis of the African renaissance. I am referring to the question of AIDS. If ever a phenomenon can be said to have taken on the menacing mask of one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, it is this devastating and – because of the superficially inexplicable attitudes of Mbeki and his Minister of “Health”, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang – controversial pandemic. This Reaper of especially African women and children is wielding its scythe as though some hostile force has deliberately set out to undermine and mock Mbeki’s nationalist and “utopian” dream of the rebirth of Africa. His dissident position on both the fact and the cause of AIDS is the result of his politician’s survival instinct and of the folly of denying the – physical, social and economic - reality of the nightmare. The social and economic predictions are dire\textsuperscript{22}, Few authors are prepared to go beyond predicting a definite lowering of the rate of economic growth and potential but all are agreed that the social and social-psychological impact of the pandemic will endure for many decades to come. Unless an effective vaccine is found soon, it will take another 15 to 20 years for the epidemic to run its course. Whatever happens, there can be no doubt that the failure of the ruling party to treat AIDS as one of the most urgent threats to the long-term stability of South Africa and of the continent is already a blot on its reputation. It will come back to haunt them in election results in the next decade or so. Ex-president, Nelson Mandela, who bears a large part of the responsibility for the quasi-genocidal negligence with which this particular matter was approached, with his unerring tactical instincts, has tried to recover some of the lost ground by identifying himself and his brand name with AIDS activism à la the Treatment Action Campaign. It may, however, already be too late to rescue the reputation of the ANC. In the words of Mandisa Mbali (2003:326),

\begin{quote}
It (ANC foot-dragging N.A.) has … led to a serious lessening of the moral authority of the post-apartheid state. Unless the government finally repudiates AIDS denialism and rolls out anti-retroviral triple
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} See, among many others, Mbali 2003 and Whiteside and Sunter 2002.
therapy in the public health sector, it is likely that Mbeki’s denialism will eradicate from historical memory many of the positive aspects of his tenure of office.

The AIDS pandemic is a historic warning to the leadership of the continent that there are as many stopping stones on the long road to recovery as there are in their optimistic estimation economic and political stepping stones. However, there is another significant moment that is obscured by a leadership blind spot, one which can turn the entire project into an exercise in futility. As Raji-Oyelade (2002) points out in an otherwise unremarkable paper, “culture” in the narrower sense of creative, artistic and intellectual endeavour hardly features in the NEPAD analysis. In fact, “it must be noted that of the 204 main paragraphs of the Document, only two refer directly to the importance and function of Culture (sic) as a necessary part of the dream of an African Renaissance” (Raji-Oyelade 2002:4).

The real danger, however, is not that culture is treated as an add-on element of a “package” called NEPAD. Given the fact that most of the spokespersons are invariably politicians, business people and economists and only very unusually also academics, this is to be expected. What is more disturbing is the manner in which “African culture” is being turned into a tourist attraction. To quote Raji-Oyelade (2002:9-10) once more:

… ‘Culture is practically safari, is flea-market sales, is airport dance troupe; thinned and ossified, Culture is raffia palm, naked women dancing, initiation rites, infibulations; reductively, Culture is only the exotic artifact of the voyeur.

At a more profound level, some African scholars have been considering the relationship between culture and development, most often and sometimes very profitably under the rubric of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. At one level, the question of the coexistence – in a vertical configuration – of traditional knowledge systems and modern scientific inquiry.

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23 … (The) biggest limitation of the idea of “the African Renaissance” as it stands now goes back to the process of making of the NEPAD document as a blueprint for development. The MAP vision of Mbeki, Obasanjo and Bouteflika on the one hand and the Omega Plan of Wade are documents of high diplomacy to engage the industrial North in a game of investments and debt rescheduling (Raji-Oyelade 2002:10)

24 See especially Odora Hoppers 2002)
knowledge producing systems (see Hontoundji 2002) is a global question, not one that is peculiar to the African continent. Odora Hoppers (2002:15-16) puts the matter most trenchantly:

If development is endogenous … then the people are the subject. They are not trapped in the cold condescending gaze of the rich upon the poor, because endogenous development begins at the point where people start to pride themselves as worthy human beings inferior to none: and where such pride is lost, development begins at the point at which this pride is restored, and history recovered.

Yet the confluence between modern scientific knowledge, wealth and power continues to privilege the exogenous model of development … It cannot be said enough that rural people’s knowledge and modern scientific knowledge are complementary in their strengths and weakness. Combined, they can achieve what neither would alone ….

It is in the domain of culture that some of the first and, incidentally, the direction-finding initiatives will be engendered. It is the writers, poets, musicians, sculptors, architects, in short, the artists of Africa, those whom Ngugi calls the “keepers of memory”, who need to serve as the bridge between an African past that is in every sense of the word increasingly acknowledged as “the cradle of civilisation” and a future that is at one and the same time indubitably global as well as distinctively African. What is needed is no less than a fundamental shift in consciousness or in the habits of mind of the peoples of the continent. Such a shift is only possible through the creations of art. In the best of all possible worlds, the artistic imagination forecasts the storms as well as the beautiful days that are yet to come. Innovative, parameters-shifting work is being performed in domains such as music, dance, sculpture, literature, applied language studies, historical linguistics, including the amazing rediscovery of the Timbuktu archives, in which South African historians and scholars are playing a significant role.

My own example derives from the sphere of language policy. The hegemony of three European languages – English, French and Portuguese – in “independent” Africa is a measure of the depth of the colonised mind. It is also a measure of the class character of the African states because it is only middle-class people who are able to gain from the
fact that – 40 years after the first wave of independence – these are still the only languages of power in virtually all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. For the vast majority of the urban and the rural poor, this means that the one skill they possess in full measure is of no use to them. Their marginalisation and their alienation from the modern sector are reinforced because they are not proficient in the foreign languages of the erstwhile conquerors. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2003:10) puts it:

Most governments tend to hide their heads in the sand and pretend that African languages do not exist or else try to force a retrograde policy of mono-lingualism. Governments can help by policies that make African languages part of the languages of social mobility and power, currently a monopoly of European languages. But renaissance, as rebirth and flowering, can only spring from the wealth of imagination of the people, and above all, from its keepers of memory. …

To move forward from here, and not only in the domain of language policy, the African middle class, and the intelligentsia in particular, are called upon to do what Amilcar Cabral challenged them to do more than 30 years ago, i.e., commit class suicide. But, this does not mean, as most of them instinctively think, moving “upward” into the positions of the bourgeoisie. To do this, as so many have indeed done, is to consummate a “false decolonisation”. In the words of John Saul (2002:41), this amounts to

… the rising African middle class, both entrepreneurial and political/bureaucratic in provenance, merely sliding comfortably into their political positions as … ‘intermediaries’ of global Empire and, from their heights, fending off the claims of the poverty-stricken they have left behind.

Instead, a superlative act of the imagination is required by means of which they can consistently and consequentially view the world from the angle of vision of the workers and peasants, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the people of the continent. Africa will survive the era of globalisation. It will rise up and develop. Out of the very depths in which the continent is trapped, visionary, imaginative, passionate and committed leadership will be compelled to explore and eventually implement alternative approaches to economic and social organisation and behaviour. The portents of the
radical transformations which alone can take the continent out of its present desperate situation are already discernible in the distance in social movements and in the network of civil-society organisations and projects that are uniting the people of the continent at the base. Therein, I believe, lies our hope.

Cape Town, S.A.
26 September 2003

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