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CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 POSTMODERNIST CRITICAL THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO AFRICA

Postmodernist critical theory can provide useful tools for examining Western discourses on Africa, and for assessing the responses provided by the African Renaissance to these discourses. Although postmodernist critical theory has not often been used in application to Africa, its central tenets are easily applied to the African context. In addition, the conceptualisation of discourse provided by postmodernist critical theory is very appropriate for this discussion of Western discourses on Africa. The basic ideas which form part of critical theory, the contribution made to them by postmodernist thinkers, postmodernist critical theorist's conceptualisation of discourse, and the political nature of discourse are discussed below. This discussion indicates the appropriateness of postmodernist critical theory for this study; and also provides the background and methodology needed for a critical assessment of the African Renaissance as a response to Western political discourses on Africa.

2.1.1 An Overview of Critical Theory

2.1.1.1 The origins of critical theory

Critical theory has been defined as being 'any social theory that is at the same time explanatory, normative, practical and self-reflexive' (Bohman 1999:195). More specifically, the term critical theory usually refers to an approach to the study of society which was developed by the Frankfurt School between the years 1930 and 1970. The Frankfurt School was a group of theorists who were associated with the Institute for Social Research which was founded in 1923 in Frankfurt, Germany (Geuss 1998:722). Critical theory also describes later ideas and movements which have been established upon the foundations provided by the Frankfurt School.

While critical theory has its roots in the Frankfurt School, the Frankfurt School has its own philosophical roots. Foremost among these is the thinking of Karl Marx (Kellner 1989:1). The members of the Frankfurt School were inspired by Marx's (in West 1993:45) famous statement that while until now 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'. Philosophers should look at the faults of existing society

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and be involved in the struggle for society's transformation. According to Poster (1989:1), to some critical theory implies 'the use of specific Marxist concepts, such as the dialectic, or includes an insistence on framing critical discourse in relation to some stage of capitalism'. However, generally critical theory is seen as being influenced by Marx, but not wholly situated within Marxist thinking. While the thinkers who made up the Frankfurt School were inspired by Marx, they recognised the need to examine, criticise and revise some of the basic assumptions of Marxism (West 1993:45).

Influential early critical theorists included Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Their works included critical studies of modern society, critiques of positivism and discussions regarding enlightenment (Geuss 1998:723; West 1993:45-48). The deaths of the early members of the Frankfurt School did not signal the end of critical theory, and critical theory has since been articulated by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas who enriched it with his conceptualisation of the 'lifeworld' and with his 'linguistic turn' and who saw critical theory as having a practical goal - to free life from all forms of unnecessary domination (West 1993:49-51). Recently, critical theory has been supplemented by the works of postmodernist thinkers.

2.1.1.2 The characteristics and contributions of critical theory

A number of characteristics of critical theory can be identified. One of the most important characteristics of critical theory is its critique of positivism. Positivism takes natural science as the model for all valid knowledge and aims to understand society using the methods and approaches of the natural sciences (West 1993:46). It assumes that knowledge can accurately reflect the world (Agger 1991:24). Critical theory rejects the positivist thesis that knowledge arises from the subject's neutral engagement with an objective reality, arguing instead that knowledge reflects social purposes and interests (Linklater 1996:279). Because positivism views empirical knowledge as an accurate reflection of the world, it leads to a tendency to view the *status quo* as rational and necessary, which discourages attempts to change it (Agger 1991:24). In this way positivism is seen as functioning ideologically such that it reinforces passivity and fatalism.

Geuss (1998:723-727) identifies and summarises four additional characteristics of critical theory. Firstly, critical theory rejects the general view about what theory is, refusing to see it as a set of propositions which can be used to explain and predict phenomena, and

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arguing that attention should be given the social context in which theories arise. Critical theorists contend that 'traditional theory' aims at reproducing society, but that it is possible to develop another kind of theory - 'critical theory' - which aims to change existing society. Unlike traditional theory, critical theory does not aim to explain, predict and ultimately control, but rather aims to deepen critical enlightenment regarding concepts such as justice and goodness so that society can be improved (Ingram 1990:xxi). Cox (1981) clearly distinguishes between what he calls 'problem-solving theory' (other theorists, such as Max Horkheimer, have called this type of theory 'traditional theory') and critical theory. Cox (1981:128) says that 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose'. Problem-solving theory takes a particular perspective as a point of departure and then tries to solve the problems posed within this perspective (Cox 1981:128-130). It accepts the world as it is as the framework for action, rather than questioning the *status quo*. Critical theory, on the other hand, aims to reflect on the process of theorising itself, to be aware of the perspective which gives rise to certain questions, and also to allow for the possibility of choosing another valid perspective. Whereas problem-solving theory tries to solve a problem within a framework, critical theory calls the entire framework into question. In addition, critical theory is distinctive in that it not only criticises other ideas, but is also critical about its own assumptions.

Secondly, critical theory provides a critique of instrumental rationalism, arguing that the kind of reason that dominates today is a highly developed form of instrumental reason. As a result of positivism, reason has been identified only with the kind of reason that is used in natural science and the role of reason has been severely limited. Critical theorists seek to allow the function of reason to be extended beyond what is allowed by positivism.

Thirdly, critical theory devises a general conception of society and in the context of this conception, develops a doctrine of internal criticism. Critical theorists believe that the practices and institutions of any society are orientated towards the realisation of a socially-specified conception of the good life. This conception must be extracted so that the actual reality of any social institution or practice can be confronted with its own ideal concept, and the discrepancy between the reality and the concept can be brought to light. Critical theorists suggest that negative dialectics can be used in internal criticism. Negative dialectics is a method of moving back and forth between concept and reality in order to point out the differences between them.

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Fourthly, critical theorists provide a discussion of the dialectic of enlightenment. The project of enlightenment is critically examined and its shortcomings are emphasised. The aim of critical theory's critique of enlightenment is not the rejection of enlightenment itself, but rather the furthering of enlightenment through 'enlightening enlightenment about itself'. Fairlamb (1994:239) puts it this way: '... [T]he Frankfurt School theorists hoped to escape the reductive excesses of Enlightenment progressivism while salvaging its emancipatory ideal'. It should be noted, however, that this point applies to modernist critical theorists but not to postmodernist critical theorists.

2.1.1.3 'Generations' of critical theory

Critical theory has gone through various stages and has been adapted as it moved through these stages. This adaptation is in line with critical theory's doctrine of internal criticism which argues that theories should be critical about their own assumptions. The application of this doctrine initiates changes in critical theory through the identification of shortcomings in earlier critical theory. As Agger (1992:6-7) puts it: 'Critical theory makes itself available for revision in light of its own methodological and substantive commitment to revisionism'. Thus, critical theory remains relevant through allowing the context in which it functions to rejuvenate it (Agger 1991:1).

This principle of revisionism allows the identification of three generations of critical theory (Pensky 1997:16; Agger 1991:1,19). The founders of the Frankfurt School can be seen as the first generation; Habermas and his communication-theoretic revisions of critical theory as the second generation; and current contributions to critical theory made by postmodernism and feminist theory as the third generation.

2.1.1.4 Modernism and postmodernism

Critical theory began in the modernist tradition, but moved onward into the postmodern era to avoid stagnation. Several similarities between postmodernist ideas and those of modernist critical theorists can be identified. Differences between the two are also evident, allowing for the conceptualisation of a postmodernist critical theory, which is founded upon the ideas of earlier critical thinkers, but which includes revisions and additions made by postmodernist theory.

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Before conceptualising the term 'postmodernist critical theory' it is necessary to consider the meaning of postmodernism as well as the intersection between the ideas of postmodernism and those of modernist critical theory. Postmodernism is a much disputed concept. It can broadly be defined as a reaction to modernism, but this definition says more about what postmodernism is not, than about what it is. It is often defined in terms of what it opposes rather than what is supports. For example, Magnus (1999:725) described postmodern philosophy as being a 'complex cluster concept that includes ... an anti- (or post) epistemological standpoint, anti-essentialism, anti-realism, anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendental arguments ... [and] rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions'. From this definition, postmodernism appears to be nothing more than a negative response to modern society.

This impression of postmodernism being predominantly negative is refuted by other thinkers who identify what postmodernism stands for as well as what it is against. Louw (1995:69) lists both what postmodernism favours and what it opposes. He says that postmodernism is against imperialism, totalising ideologies, silencing or converting the other, the '"antagonism of identity" (i.e. each person exclusively concentrates on maintaining his own sovereignty)', hegemony, the universalism of the particular, and claims to finality and universality. This negativity is balanced by what postmodernism supports. Postmodernism is in favour of tolerance, critical awareness, questioning, unveiling hierarchical relationships, dialogue, differentiation, and enrichment through contact with the other.

Ermarth (1998:587) suggests that the term 'postmodernism' functions like Levi-Strauss' 'floating signifier' in that it holds open a space for something that exceeds expression, rather than itself expressing something. However, despite the difficulties in clearly conceptualising postmodernism, several broad definitions have been attempted. Gibbins & Reimer (1999:8-12) provide a definition by conducting a detailed investigation into the meaning of both 'post' and 'modern' in order to try to provide some clarity about what is meant by postmodernism. 'Post' generally means 'after' but can also be seen as meaning a 'break from', 'opposition to', 'difference to and from' and a 'response to'. Their definitions of the 'modern' include 'a particular epoch or period in history', 'the spirit of that age', 'a view of the world', 'a cultural phenomenon' and many others. The term 'modern' has related terms such as 'modernity', 'modernisation' and 'modernism'. Thus although

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'postmodern' can be seen as referring to 'after the modern', this still lacks clarity, because of the lack of certainty regarding the meaning of the 'modern'.

Some substance can be given to the term 'modern' and related terms. Modernity can be seen as 'a cultural epoch and "episteme" founded in a humanistic belief that the world is One' (Ermarth 1998:587). Modernism asserts that there is a common denominator for all systems of belief and that the world can be explained by a single explanatory system. It is associated with progressive rationalisation and differentiation and with great faith in progress (Gibbins & Reimer 1999:9-10). A modern society is seen to be one which is characterised by social complexity, control of the environment, specialised adaptation, production of knowledge, and rationality (Coetzee 1996:43).

Following the meaning of modernism, a description of some of the characteristics of postmodernism is provided. Firstly, while modernism tries to explain the world using a single explanatory system, postmodernism rejects this, suggesting instead that such grand explanations (or to use Lyotard's term - *grand narratives*) are inadequate and in fact tell only 'small stories'. There are many possible 'subject positions' which can be adopted, and each has its own explanation of the world (Agger 1991:31). The totalising perspectives which characterise the modern are discarded. As part of this rejection, postmodernism opposes the modernist culture of realism, representation, humanism and empiricism as each of these can function as *grand narratives* (Ermarth 1998:588).

Ermarth (1998:588-590) looks at two other aspects of postmodernism: its approach to language and its challenge to the bases of consensus and representation. Postmodernists see language differently from modernists. Ferdinand de Saussure (in Ermarth 1998:588) developed the idea that a word does not point at the world, but rather indicates a system of meaning in which the word has a function. A linguistic sign thus acts reflexively, rather than referentially. The postmodernist conception of language was developed further by Derrida who conceived of language as being a model of organisation and developed the methodology of deconstruction (Ermarth 1998:588). Because linguistic signs are seen as specifying systems of value and meaning, postmodernist thinkers aim to discover what systems are being specified when linguistic signs are used. They attempt to reveal the way in which language helps to constitute reality and thus demonstrate the impossibility of complete objectivity (Agger 1991:35).

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In terms of postmodernism's challenge to the bases of consensus and representation, postmodernism's assertion that all systems are self-referential has the implication that no system can be seen as representing the truth, and, in fact, that the truth cannot be established. No truth is seen as absolute, but rather each so-called 'truth' or 'reality' is seen as being one system's 'truth' or 'reality'. While this idea is very alarming, postmodernism should not be seen as signifying the end of meaning, but rather as signifying the end of hegemonies of meaning (Ermarth 1998:589-590).

Agger (1991:26-33) discusses the problem of trying to distinguish between post-structuralism and postmodernism. Both are opposed to the positivistic inclination to define and categorise, and bearing this in mind, perhaps it is best not to try to define and categorise them neatly. Although he is of the opinion that while certain distinguishing characteristics of each can be identified, generally the term postmodernism can be seen as broad enough to include poststructuralism. In accordance with this, this study will not attempt to identify a poststructuralist critical theory and a postmodernist critical theory, but will rather take postmodernist critical theory to include both.

Different versions of postmodernism can be identified. Rosenau (1992:14-20) divides postmodernists into two groups: 'sceptics' and 'affirmatives'. Among the 'sceptic' group are the poststructuralists and post-Marxists whose work is essentially critical and deconstructive and who are antipolitics, while on the 'affirmative' side are those who use the new ideas of postmodernism to emancipate and express themselves, and who support political participation.

Agger (1992:73-82) also discusses various forms of postmodernism. He identifies two principle subdivisions of postmodernism, one of which he feels is commendable while the other should be strongly resisted. He refers to the latter postmodernism as 'an Establishment version of postmodernism' (Agger 1992:72-74). Agger (1992:289,280,74) castigates Establishment postmodernism for being Eurocentric, for being a 'mindless vehicle of cultural production and consumption', and a 'minor cottage industry', Most importantly for this discussion, he (1992:284,75,76) rejects Establishment postmodernism for 'reject[ing] politics as a venue of meaning', having a 'thoroughgoing aversion to political discussion and contention', and 'conceal[ing] politics under a thin veneer of the rejection of politics'. This postmodernism has nothing to contribute to critical theory. While this type of postmodernism may appear to prevail, another form of postmodernism exists. Agger

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(1992:74) continues to argue that a Marxist version of postmodernism can assist in the development of new critical insights and social movements. This version of postmodernism is a radical theory of society and has important theoretical and political contributions to make to critical theory (Agger 1992:278-281). It can help to repoliticise critical theory and to ground it in everyday experience. Between Agger (1992), and Gibbins and Reimer (1999), three versions of postmodernism are thus identifiable: a sceptical postmodernism; an Establishment postmodernism; and a third type - labelled affirmative by Gibbins & Reimer (1999:16-17) - that allows for political action and pushes for social and political change. It is this affirmative type of postmodernism which makes the conceptualisation of a postmodernist critical theory possible.

2.1.1.5 Postmodernist critical theory

It is possible to identify some common ground between critical theory and affirmative postmodernism. For a start, both are critical movements, standing in opposition to ideas which dominate. Both identify shortcomings with ideas and concepts that are frequently taken for granted and call into question perspectives that appear to be generally accepted as infallible. They are united in their opposition to the types of theory and practice which are predominant in modern life (Leonard 1990:254).

Both critical theory and postmodernism reject positivism and interrogate assumptions regarding the way people read and write science. Both question assumptions about how knowledge should be accumulated and undermine the idea that empiricism is an infallible technique for accumulating knowledge. Critical theory and postmodernism make an important contribution to drawing attention to the way in which empirical methods and practices conceal value positions, even in their own affirmation of their value-neutrality (Agger 1991:21,37).

A further intersection between the two is that both argue that knowledge is contextualised by history and culture, and so the possibility of 'presuppositionless representation' is rejected (Agger 1991:32). Knowledge claiming to be timelessly true, is revealed by both critical theory and postmodernism as being contingent (Leonard 1990:81). In addition, both critical theory and affirmative postmodernism use their critique in an attempt to bring about change for the better. As Fairlamb (1994:237) notes, the critique of domination by the early critical theorists 'shares the emancipatory aims of postmodern critics of

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modernism'. They share the goal of emancipation although they differ on the route towards emancipation.

While critical theory and postmodernism have enough overlap to allow the development of a postmodernist critical theory, this postmodernist critical theory differs from modernist critical theory in several significant ways. As discussed above, modernism holds to ideas of comprehensive explanations for the world, or *grand narratives*, while postmodernism rejects this idea, and supports the idea of a heterogeneity of explanations. Thus modernist critical theory (as expounded by the Frankfurt School and Habermas) examines the *grand narratives* of modernism in order to illustrate the discrepancy between such *narratives'* ideal concept and their reality; without rejecting the possibility of a *grand narrative* itself. Postmodernist critical theory does not just explore such explanations' shortcomings, but also rejects the idea that the explanations truly explain what they purport to explain. An example of this is found in each's critique of Marxism (Agger 1991:25,31). The Frankfurt School accepted many of the principles of Marxism, but rejected certain aspects, such as its positivism. Postmodernist critical theory rejects the *grand narrative* of Marxism which attempts to use the idea of certain patterned relationships to explain the world. Postmodernism rejects the idea that Marxist theory can be universally accepted - it is but one 'small story from the heterogeneous "subject positions" of individuals and social groups' (Agger 1991:31).

Related to this, is modernist and postmodernist critical theory's approach to the Enlightenment. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Habermas criticised many of the assumptions and methodologies of modernity, but still sought to recover the promise of modernity which was reflected in the ideals of the Enlightenment. Postmodernist critical theory, on the other hand, is part of a tradition of 'rejectionist criticism of modernity' (Leonard 1990:54), which seeks 'a total break with the Enlightenment' (Fraser in Leonard 1990:54).

Another difference between modernist and postmodernist critical theory involves their conception of critical reason. Modernist critical theory accepts a universal concept of critical reason, while postmodernist critical theory rejects such a concept on principle (Leonard 1990:81). Once again, this is related to the postmodernist rejection of any kind of *grand narrative*.

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Although it is possible to speak about a postmodernist critical theory, the problems with such a concept cannot be denied. Postmodernism and critical theory have common ground, and postmodernism can be seen as a way to rejuvenate critical theory and allow it to remain relevant today, but there is also some antagonism between the two concepts. This antagonism is reflected by the criticism of the Frankfurt School and Habermas by postmodernists, and, in turn, by the criticism of postmodernists by Habermas. Poster (1989:17-33) gives a comprehensive discussion of this point. He notes that postmodernists rarely refer to the Frankfurt School and that when they do, their comments are often critical. Lyotard, for example, attacks the Frankfurt School in his *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* and criticises Habermas in *The Postmodern Condition* (in Poster 1989:17). Foucault is the only postmodernist who appears to hold the Frankfurt School in some esteem (Poster 1989:17-18).

The first generation of critical theorists died before they had given comment on post-modernist thinking, but Habermas' (in Poster 1989:19) opinion of postmodernist thinking is openly hostile. He sees postmodernism as representing a retreat from the challenge of the Enlightenment.

This antagonism may appear to suggest that the idea of a postmodernist critical theory is inconceivable. However the disputes between theorists of the two schools of thought is insufficient reason to abandon the quest for a postmodernist critical theory. The arguments between Habermas and the postmodernists conceal the similarities between their ideas. Fairlamb (1994:254) notes that '[i]nsofar as postmodernists continue to argue with Habermas, they practice much of what he preaches' and Poster (1989:24) comments that 'Habermas and Lyotard appear to veer toward one another, despite their acrimonious hostility'. The common ground between the ideas of modernist critical theorists and postmodernism can be recognised, and a broad conception of a postmodernist critical theory can be sketched.

The value of conceptualising a postmodernist critical theory has been recognised by several writers. Poster (1989:33) argues that the current age necessitates a development of criticism and that critical theory can benefit from the contributions of postmodernists. Fairlamb (1994:238) suggests that dialogue between the critical theory and postmodernism is 'a useful exercise for current political and social enquiry' and Agger

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(1991:2,9,42) sees postmodernism as being able to 'fortify', 'refresh' and 'fertilize' modern critical theory.

In summary, a postmodernist critical theory can be considered to be a movement which builds itself upon the foundations of the Frankfurt School accepting the idea that theory should not aim to reproduce the world and that the assumptions of dominating theories must be exposed through criticism. A positivist approach to knowledge is shown to be deficient, and knowledge is shown to be contingent upon historical and other factors. The need for social theory to be reflective is recognised, and the examination of the influence of theorists own position, beliefs and attitudes on the theories they develop, is supported. In addition to these cornerstones of critical theory, postmodernist contributions are added. Modernity's belief in the oneness of the world, and the possibility of grand explanatory schemes is rejected. The postmodernist idea of the self-referentiality or reflexivity of linguistic signs and systems is adopted, and hegemonies of meaning are revealed and rejected.

2.1.2 Situating Postmodernist Critical Theory in the Context of Political Theory

In addition to conceptualising what is meant by postmodernist critical theory, it is necessary to situate postmodernist critical theory within the broader context of political theory. When trying to do this, three important questions must be asked:

- Is postmodernist critical theory explanatory or constitutive?
- Is it foundational or anti-foundational?
- Is it rational or reflectivist?

In answering the first question, it is evident that postmodernist critical theory is a constitutive theory. Explanatory theory sees the world as external to theory, whereas constitutive theory believes that theory is part of the world and helps to construct it (Smith 1997:167-169). Clearly, postmodernist critical theory rejects the idea that theory can be stand outside of the world it explains and so this theory must be considered to be constitutive.

The distinction between foundational and anti-foundational theories refers to the distinction between theories which accept that there is an objective procedure which can be used to test all claims to knowledge, and theories which argue that there are no neutral grounds

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according to which one can determine what is knowledge and what is not (Smith 1997:167-169). Postmodernist critical theory rejects the idea that there is a set of neutral, objective criteria which can be used to differentiate between competing claims to knowledge, and so postmodernist critical theory is anti-foundationalist.

Finally, postmodernist critical theory can be classified as reflectivist rather than rationalist. Rationalist theories overlap with the realist and liberalist theories which have long dominated international relations theory. Reflectivist theory is opposed to these theories, with the most notable characteristic of reflectivist theory being its post-positivist character (Smith 1997:172-183). The categorisation 'reflectivist' brings together a variety of theories which are united more by their opposition to positivism than by the perspectives they have in common. Included among reflectivist theories are normative theory, historical sociology, feminist theory, critical theory and postmodernist theory.

Postmodernist critical theory is thus constitutive, anti-foundational and reflectivist. A final important note to make with regard to how postmodernist critical theory fits into the broader framework of theory, is that by being constitutive, anti-foundational and reflectivist, postmodernist critical theory can be said to be part of a group of marginal rather than mainstream theories. While perspectives such as those of postmodernism and critical theory are becoming increasingly prominent, they remain outside of mainstream theory.

2.1.3 The Politics of Postmodernist Critical Theory

> Critical theory is meant to be a form of knowledge that can enlighten us about the roots of social and political oppression, and help us collectively transform our relations in ways that might overcome the damaging and destructive legacies we have inherited from the past.

This quote from Leonard (1990:251) gives some indication of the importance of critical theory to politics. Critical theory is capable of drawing attention to forms of oppression which may not be revealed by other approaches, and aims to bring about an improved future.

Critical theory did not develop as an overtly political movement, but its political connections and connotations are very evident. For a start, it finds its roots in Marxism,

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one of the most politically influential theories of the twentieth century. Marxism's political legacy is evident in much of critical theory. Poster (1989:3) refers to critical theory as containing 'the best of what remains in the shambles of the Marxist and neo-Marxist theoretical positions'. Critical theory takes the Marxist idea of class power as social exclusion and extends it to include axes of exclusion other than class (Linklater 1996:280). It maintains the Marxist belief that humans have the ability to change their conditions and bring about a situation of greater freedom than that found within current social relations (Linklater 1996:280). This extension of Marxist principles allows for a theory that supports political action which opposes exclusion and tries to improve the current situation. In addition, critical theory's acceptance of Marx's (in West 1993:45) statement that while until now 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' clearly implies political action - theory must be related to practice, and should be active in changing the world.

Critical theory's rejection of postivism has implicit political implications. Linklater (1996:279) sees critical theory's challenge to positivism as an important achievement for politics, in that it reveals how knowledge is socially constructed and can play a role in reproducing social arrangements. Positivism can function ideologically because it assumes that knowledge can represent objective reality, thus discouraging attempts to change this reality and resulting in passivity and fatalism (Agger 1991:24). The rejection of positivism implies and encourages political action with the intention of changing society.

Another way in which critical theory has political relevance is related to its rejection of traditional theory, and its suggestion that critical theory should replace traditional theory. Critical theorists see traditional theory as functioning to reproduce reality, and argue instead for a kind of theory that allows and fights for change (Geuss 1998:724). The political implications are clear - reality as it is, should be shown not to be immutable, and political action should be directed towards change.

The influence of postmodernism on critical theory has further political implications. If postmodernism rejects grand explanatory schemes and resists hegemonies of meaning (Agger 1991:31), then postmodernist critical theory will reject political schemes and theories which view political ideas, practices, and solutions developed in one political system as being universally appropriate.

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Postmodernism criticises the fundamental political concepts of modernity, arguing that these concepts marginalise and denigrate whatever does not measure up to modernity's criteria for normality. Western modernity's attitude towards liberal democracy is also criticised for constructing binaries such as we/them, rational/irrational, and legitimate/illegitimate (White 1998:590-591). Postmodernism shows these boundaries to be socially constructed and reproduced. This critique of the political concepts which are part of modernity, allows for Western political ideas to be questioned, and for alternative types of political belief and action to be promoted.

Critical theory and postmodernist critical theory have had a specific influence on a variety of political concepts, some outside the scope of this dissertation. For example, critical theory has contributed to new ways of theorising about the role of the state (Agger 1991:38), has undermined realist arguments regarding the use of military power (Linklater 1996:280), has added to the debate regarding political boundaries (Linklater 1996:288-289), and has been instrumental in suggesting more radical forms of democracy (White 1998:591-592).

While critical theory clearly has political implications, it can be argued that critical theory has not reached several of its political goals. Fleming (1997:33) argues that critical theory, unlike traditional theory, attempts to establish an ethical-political relation with those it addresses, but has failed because those who would most benefit from social and political change, are not addressed by critical theory. Fleming (1997:31) argues that those who would truly be advantaged by the political change envisaged by critical theory - women, blacks, gays, lesbians, and others - are not addressed by critical theory. Other thinkers have echoed this idea by arguing for the development of a 'feminist postmodernist critical theory of public life' which will strengthen critical theory by allowing it to be more applicable to many of the social problems which have been ignored by critical theorists (Agger 1991:1-9). Critical theory may be aided in reaching its political goals through the contribution of postmodernism.

Leonard (1990:256-258) sees all three generations of critical theorists as having failed to bring about the political consequences of their theoretical positions. The Frankfurt School felt unable to endorse any particular struggle for empowerment because no particular struggle could be regarded as having a universal interest, and therefore the first generation of critical theory became a theory without a movement, succumbing to the

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'politics of despair'. Habermas was less despairing, but he too was unable to unite the practical-emancipatory intentions of his theory with its political implications. Leonard (1990:257) feels that the reason for modernist critical theory's failure to translate its ideas into practice was rooted in its commitment to normative universalism. This normative universalism was rejected by postmodernists such as Foucault, but Leonard does not believe that Foucault had any more success in realising the political implications of his theory than the earlier generations of critical theorists. Foucault rejects normative universalism, escaping the pitfalls of earlier critical theorists, but his replacement of normative universalism with the idea that all norms are arbitrary, introduces problems of its own. If the idea that all norms are arbitrary is taken to its extreme, then it is impossible to identify which norms to support, and whose claims to defend, making political action impossible.

Despite Leonard's (1990:270) assertion that neither modernist nor postmodernist critical theory has thus far managed to inspire political action, he still believes that critical theory is the most important resource which can be used in order to forge a future that avoids the mistakes of the past. The ideas of critical theory have to be turned into a 'critical theory in practice'. This is a critical theory that recognises the contingency of norms and practices but avoids the mistakes of past manifestations of modernist and postmodernist critical theory by committing itself to both solidarity and plurality. Critical theory in practice would be willing to show solidarity with oppressed groups, while recognising the plurality of forms of oppression as well as the multiplicity of forms of emancipation. Critical theory in practice sees no universal emancipation that ends all domination, but rather sees each emancipation as contingent and emancipation as a whole as being a continuous process of putting an end to the dominating practices that are likely to emerge time and again (Leonard 1990:261-270).

Critical theory has clearly made a contribution to the political realm through undermining positivistic knowledge regarding politics, and arguing for theories about politics which battle for change, rather than being instrumental in reproducing the current situation. While critical theory has not yet fully achieved its implicit political goals, it clearly has the potential to be translated into a political practice which confronts forms of domination and promotes struggles for emancipation. Postmodernist theory can be instrumental in adapting modernist critical theory so that it can achieve these goals.

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2.1.4 Postmodernist Critical Theory in the African Political Context

The roots of critical theory are in Europe, and postmodernist contributions to critical theory also originate in Europe. Most discussions of critical theory do not mention Africa, and little, if anything, has been written about Africa by thinkers associated with critical theory. This appears to suggest that critical theory has little relevance for Africa, and is a Western theory which should be applied to Western countries only. If this is so, critical theory could not serve as a foundation for this study.

A careful examination of each of the aspects of critical theory refutes the idea that critical theory is only relevant to the West and illustrates its applicability to the African political context. Firstly, critical theory's critique of positivism challenges the idea that knowledge can be objective. Rather, the context in which knowledge develops must be examined so that the social purposes and interests represented by knowledge can be uncovered (Linklater 1996:279). If this is applied to the African context, it is immediately clear that knowledge about Africa cannot be considered to be neutral. When this knowledge is written and distributed by Westerners, rather than Africans, it is likely that the interests of Westerners are served by this knowledge. Instead of regarding Western knowledge about Africa as being a non-negotiable reflection of reality, thus seeing this reality as immutable and political action to change it as futile; knowledge about Africa, especially knowledge produced by the West, should be interrogated in order to reveal the political context which shaped it. This will allow for alternative types of knowledge regarding Africa to be produced and can encourage political action towards change. Critical theories, which aim to change rather than explain and predict ought to be developed.

Critical theory's principle of internal criticism also has relevance for Africa. The socially-specified conception of the good life implicit in every theory needs to be extracted and the theory must be confronted with this conception to show how the reality and the concept differ (Geuss 1998:725). A critical theory of Africa, by Africans, should examine its own implicit conception of the good life and compare the reality with the concept. This exercise would be useful in rooting out incidences where Western conceptions may be implicit in a theory purporting to be African, as well as in showing the discrepancy between realities and conceptions in theories about Africa.

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Postmodernist contributions to critical theory have special relevance to Africa. The rejection of *grand narratives* (Agger 1991:31) allows for Africans to assert that Africa must find its own destiny and that the destiny of Africa may be very different to that of Europe. There need not be one model of progress, one model of political development, one model of good governance, and one model of democracy. The postmodernist rejection of the idea of universal truths means that what may be true for the West is not of necessity true for Africa, and further, that what may be true for one part of Africa need not be true for the continent as a whole.

Postmodernism also draws attention to the importance of language (Ermarth 1998:588-589). Language is seen as self-reflective rather than as reflecting an objective reality outside of itself. This means that attention must be given to the language used in speaking or writing about Africa, to see what system of norms and values it reflects. This point is elaborated upon in the discussion of discourse which follows.

In conclusion, it can be said that postmodernist critical theory is applicable to the African context. In addition, it is particularly applicable to the research theme of this dissertation. An approach rooted in postmodernist critical theory allows for Western discourses of Africa to be challenged as they cannot be assumed to be neutral and objective. The absence of any challenge to Western discourses allows for Western knowledge to become hegemonic. Africa's recent history is a story of Western hegemony, and in this post-colonial era, this domination cannot be allowed to continue through the domination of Western systems of knowledge. A postmodernist critical approach to discourses about Africa produced by the West will aim to end this type of domination by questioning and challenging these discourses to see the way in which they are a reflection of Western interests and Western values, rather than a neutral reflection of an objective African reality.

A postmodernist critical approach can also be adopted towards the African Renaissance. The African Renaissance recognises that Africa's recent past has been characterised by Western domination, and seeks to end that domination, allowing for a rebirth, or revival of all that is African. If ending Western domination is a goal of the African Renaissance, then an attitude of interrogation and challenge has to be adopted by the African Renaissance when it confronts Western discourses regarding Africa. The ideal concept embedded in the African Renaissance has to be elicited, and the reality of the African Renaissance has

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to be compared to this concept. A postmodernist critical approach enables an assessment of the extent to which the African Renaissance does indeed confront these discourses and thereby remain true to its goal of ending Western domination, and can reveal ways in which the African Renaissance may incorporate, rather than challenge Western discourses.

2.2 DISCOURSE AND CRITICAL THEORY

2.2.1 Various Uses of the Concept 'Discourse'

'Discourse' is a wide and flexible term that has been used to mean or imply a number of things. The term has most often been associated with linguistics, but its usefulness is not limited to this context. The word 'discourse' has its roots in the Latin word *discursus* which means running from one place to another (Blackburn 1994:107). In its broadest sense it refers to a stretch of language, consisting of more than just a sentence.

Because discourse refers to language, many analyses of discourse have been conducted by linguists, and at first glance the study of discourse may appear to have little relevance outside of the field of linguistics. Discourse analysis has frequently involved investigations into language in use in order to discover various norms and rules regarding language use in social interaction (McHoul and Grace 1993:26-31). Many discourse analyses painstakingly examine (usually verbal) language use in various social situations in order to discover these norms and rules. The focus in such analyses is frequently on the structure of spoken language. While this type of analysis of discourse assigns some social relevance to discourse, the focus is on language use rather than the broader social context in which the language use appears.

Other definitions of discourse extend its usefulness to more than just linguistics. Discourse is seen as being language practised (Lemert & Gillan 1982:129) or as language in use (Jaworski & Coupland 1999:1-3). The study of discourse is 'the study of *any* aspect of language use' (Fasold in Jaworski and Coupland 1999:1); and discourse is seen as part of 'language as an instrument of communication' (Benveniste in Jaworski and Coupland 1999:2). These definitions of discourse introduce its relevance to the field of social studies in general. Because discourse is language in use it has social roots, social restraints and social implications.

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An examination of discourse thus cannot only look at language, but must also look at how and why language is used; analyses of discourse must explore 'the purposes and functions which [linguistic forms] are designed to serve in human affairs' (Brown and Yule in Jaworski and Coupland 1999:1). Discourse has to be seen as being a 'practical, social and cultural phenomenon' (Van Dijk 1997:2). Discourse occurs in context and this context has to be examined.

2.2.2 Critical and Postmodernist Uses of the Concept 'Discourse'

The variety of definitions above shows that discourse is of interest to all who study society, and that discourse cannot be taken to mean nothing more than words strung together. This idea has been elaborated upon by postmodernist critical thinkers who reject positivism and with it the implication that knowledge can arise from a subject's neutral engagement with an objective reality. This means that no discourse can be considered to be a neutral description of an objective reality. Postmodernism rejects grand explanations, and asserts that there are several possible realities rather than one objective reality. If this is related to discourse, it can be argued that it is always possible to produce a number of discourses regarding a single object, and that none of these discourses can be assumed to be true. Postmodernists have also looked in particular at the role of language in constituting reality, seeing language as part of reality, rather than as a tool to objectively reflect reality.

Included among writers who investigate discourse from a critical and/or postmodernist perspective are Ball (1987, 1988), Laclau (1993), Fairclough (1989), Macdonell (1986), Foucault (1972) and others.

Ball (1987:24-27; 1988:3-6) discusses the 'linguistic turn' or 'linguistic half-turn' which has recently taken place in philosophy and especially in political philosophy. The 'linguistic turn' refers to the recent realisation that language does not reflect an external social reality, but is in fact part of it. While philosophers have always been interested in language, recently a different approach has been taken. Language is not seen as consisting of words which can be affixed to a reality which exists independently of these words, but rather this reality is seen as being partly constituted by words (Ball 1987:24-25). The linguistic turn also refers to the realisation that no particular set of linguistic

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practices, such as scientific discourse, can be regarded as more meaningful than other discourses; nor should all discourses aim to emulate scientific discourse (Ball 1988:5). However, Ball (1988:5-6) cautions that the changes in the way language is regarded may only amount to a 'half-turn' which is on its way to completion, but may not yet be complete. The new emphasis on language has tended to focus only on language in a particular age and culture and this new emphasis needs to be expanded further, and needs to be careful never to assume a single unified speaking subject.

Laclau (1993:431-432) sees Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas regarding language as an important foundation for contemporary conceptualisations of discourse. If, as De Saussure suggested, words act reflexively rather than referentially, then discourses cannot be said to be made up of neutral words referring to some objective reality, but rather, discourses refer to systems of meaning within which the discourses themselves play a part.

Fairclough (1989:22) echoes this idea by saying that discourse is not external to society, but rather part of society. Discourse is part of the social process of language, and involves social conditions of production and social conditions of interpretation (Fairclough 1989:25,41-42). This means that discourse is to some extent determined by social structures and can in turn affect society through its reproduction of social structures. Discourse is not a neutral commentary on an objective social reality, but acts to reflect and even construct a social reality.

Macdonell (1986) gives an overview of various recent discussions regarding discourse. These discussions have challenged the previously accepted hypothesis that the discourses of knowledge are neutral (Macdonell 1986:2-3). Instead, each discourse can be said to emanate from a particular position or institution. A discourse is an area of language use which can be related to a particular institution or position. No discourse is neutral, but each puts forward certain concepts while neglecting others. Discourses need to be unmasked so that the institutions or positions which they represent can be revealed. According to Macdonell (1986:7) unmasking these discourses can challenge inequalities by undermining the 'discourses and knowledges which ... claim to speak on behalf of everyone, saying in effect: "we are all the same: we speak the same language and share the same knowledge, and have always done so"'.

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Michel Foucault's (1972) discussion of discourse has contributed to an alternative understanding of the concept discourse. His discussion and uses of discourse are complicated and could serve as a topic for many lengthy debates. What is clear however, is that Foucault uses discourse in such a way as to draw attention to language use and its linkages to power.

According to Foucault (1972:80), he uses discourse to mean several things:

> treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements ....

The Foucauldian concept of discourse thus refers not only to language in use in social interaction, but also to 'relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge' (McHoul & Grace 1993:31). It is related to the idea of a scholarly discipline such as medicine or sociology, and is also associated with institutions of social control such as the prison and hospital. Discourse is related to both bodies of knowledge and to the institutions, practices and rules which control the production of knowledge.

2.2.3 Academic and Journalistic Discourses

When discussing discourse, verbal speech acts tend to come to mind immediately. This would mean that written language and other forms of communication would be excluded from a discussion of Western discourses regarding Africa. However, when it is accepted that discourse refers to bodies of knowledge, it must further be accepted that all types of communication and representation which form part of these bodies of knowledge are also part of discourse. Discourse can then refer to spoken and written language, as well as pictures, graphs and other representations which may form part of knowledge regarding a particular topic. Jaworski and Coupland (1999:7-9) discuss multi-modal discourses saying that in today's technological world, discourse is more than just language, but should be extended to include 'non-linguistic semiotic systems (systems for signalling meaning)'. This means that discourse can include language, visual images, design, music and film and that many discourses are reinforced by using several semiotic systems. Discourses regarding Africa are compiled of language, pictures, graphs and other representations, and are perpetuated in academic works, newspapers, the internet, films, music, daily

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conversation and many other sources. It would be impossible to allow the scope of this study to extend to all modes of discourse, and so this dissertation will focus on written academic and journalistic discourses. While discourses produced by these media and according to the mode of writing will form the focus of the discussion, this dissertation acknowledges the multiplicity of media and modes of discourse.

Before looking at Western academic and journalistic discourses, it is necessary to briefly examine the worlds of academia and journalism in the West. Western states are frequently labelled 'liberal democracies'. This means that government is through elected representatives and that certain rights and freedoms are supposedly guaranteed. Included among these freedoms are freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. This implies that journalists and academics in Western states should be free to write whatever they choose. If this was true, it could be assumed that it would be difficult for certain ideas to dominate, given that a multiplicity of ideas could be voiced on any given topic. However, an examination of certain practices within the worlds of journalism and academia, suggest that it is possible, and in fact likely, that certain ideas will dominate. Agger (1991:89) argues that while the dominant view of American academia (and by extension, Western academia) is that there is 'an open market of competing ideas, paralleling the liberal metaphor of a market economy', in fact Western academia is more similar to a 'state-guided Keynesian economy'. Parenti (1993:33-50) describes the world of journalism in a similar way, saying that Western news organisations are closer to being militaristic than democratic and that journalists are strongly influenced by their superiors (who tend to be conservative politically), by career considerations and by the general political climate and dominant ideology (which not only influences them, but is also partly sustained by them).

With regard to the academic world, it can be argued that the requirement generally made in the West that academics publish in mainstream journals, puts pressure on academics to perpetuate certain worldviews (Agger 1991:90). Academics need to publish in order to establish and maintain careers, and they are strongly encouraged to publish in particular journals. The journals in which they are encouraged to publish are mainstream and tend to support certain ideologies and methodologies. This situation encourages academics to 'perpetuate the limiting worldviews in which they themselves are constrained' and also imposes similar constraints upon students because these academics and these journals

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give students little exposure to ideas which challenge the dominant worldview (Agger 1991:90).

In this way, Agger (1991:89-105) argues that the academic world operates in a Keynesian way. In support of this argument, Agger (1991:91) discusses the ideas of Marcuse, who was an early critical theorist, and who argued in his *One-Dimensional Man* that capitalism heightened need for conformity and adherence to duty led to the 'one-dimensionalisation' of thought and experience. Other critical theorists developed this idea arguing that positivism is part of the one-dimensionalisation in that it influences academia and leads to a situation where critical thought is reduced and theories regarding society are only considered legitimate if they conform to positivistic methodology.

Thus, from a critical theory perspective, it is be argued that Western academia places certain constraints upon academics, and encourages the perpetuation of particular worldviews. Western discourses regarding Africa are produced within these constraints, and the environment of Western academia allows certain discourses to dominate.

A similar argument can be made with regard to Western journalistic discourses. Parenti (1993:33-50) asks who controls the news in the West and then sets about arguing that the news is indeed controlled, and that the control of the news operates in a conservative manner. Owners of news conglomerates are usually politically and economically conservative and place considerable pressure upon news editors to produce particular stories while suppressing others. Advertisers also have an influence upon what journalists write, often discouraging journalists from writing certain critical articles. Editors exert influence and are influenced by those who employ them. While editors often insist that they act independently, their appointment to the job, and the duration of their position, is partially dependent upon their support for the ideas favoured by the owners of the news organisations for which they work. Reporters control themselves too by exercising self-censorship as they anticipate the reaction of their superiors should they adopt a stance with which their superiors disagree.

Hollingsworth (1986:287-288) argues that editors and executives do not directly order reporters to write in a particular way and about particular topics, but that the pressure to only write certain things operates subtly in that journalists find that if they write certain stories or adopt a particular stance, their work does not get published. This encourages

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self-censorship. Another controlling influence upon the Western media is dominant culture which influences journalists just like it influences everyone else. Like everyone else, journalists are exposed to socialisation through community, school, popular culture and the media (Parenti 1993:42-45). When particular opinions are expressed often enough, and little or no criticism of them is heard, it is easier to go along with these opinions than to challenge them. Thus many journalists, like other people, simply conform to the dominant culture without ever questioning the ideas and opinions which shape this culture. This last point is also relevant to academia as academics too are socialised into certain worldviews and are also likely to find it easier to conform to these beliefs than to challenge them.

A brief reference regarding the role of journalism and academia in politics should be made. If the political discourses produced by the academic and journalistic worlds had little influence on the political actions which take place, then the fact that they may both reflect certain political viewpoints would be of little concern. However, politics affects the production of academic and journalistic discourses, and the discourses produced in turn influence politics. Critical theorists argue that the academic world is not an ivory tower standing separate from the 'real world', but is an active participant in society as a whole (Agger 1991:90-91). What happens in the academic world parallels and also influences the culture and activities of the rest of society, including the political sphere. The media too plays a fundamental role in society. It reflects political realities and also acts to create new forms of action and interaction, and new ways of exercising power (Thompson 1995:4-5). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992:8) suggest that Plato's allegory of the cave can be applied today in order to understand the role of the media in shaping the political opinions of ordinary people. This allegory 'anticipates the mass citizenry dispersed in their private homes, huddled in front of flickering television screens and trying to make sense of the world at large around them' (Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992:8). In Western liberal democracies, this mass citizenry chooses its rulers and to some extent the policies which govern them, meaning that the media which shapes their political consciousness has considerable political influence.

Western academic and journalistic political discourses about Africa have several questionable characteristics. In terms of academia, it can be noted that while there are few examples of African books or journals which analyse Western political events and situations, there are many Western books and journals which have Africa as their subject. With regard to journals, journals like *Africa Today*, *African Affairs*, *African Studies Review*,

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Canadian Journal of African Studies, Journal of African Studies and many more are produced in the West but have Africa as their subject. There are few, if any, journals where the opposite occurs - journals in which Africans write about and analyse Western events. A similar situation is found with academic books, where it is possible to find many books written by Western authors analysing African events, but is it possible to find an African analysis of the American electoral system, or an African examination of civil society in Europe? A glance at the journals and books regarding Africa would suggest that while Western authors have the expertise and knowledge to comment on political events all over the world, African authors do not even have the authority to provide much comment on the politics of their own continent, and certainly have no authority or opportunity to comment on political events outside of their continent.

The situation is not as evident in written journalistic sources, where both Western and African newspapers have articles about political events occurring outside of their regions. However, for several reasons, there are many more Western newspapers, meaning that the volume and variety of Western journalistic sources regarding Africa exceeds the volume and variety of African journalistic sources regarding both Africa and the West. In addition, there are many general problems with Western journalistic coverage of Africa. Africa is both under-reported and badly reported (Rajab 1995:128). When Africa is covered by the Western media, the events which are reported are usually 'disaster stories': tales of earthquakes, war famine and massacres (Awa 1986:182). The focus of the reports are often very narrow, with concentration being on the leader of the country; and the events are often explained by means of 'convenient tag explanations' such as 'tribalism' (Awa 1986:182). The Western press adopts a patronising attitude towards Africa, an attitude which suggests that the West knows best and that Africa is a kind of a blank page upon which the West can write (Somerville 1995:126). Journalists who cover Africa for Western media bodies have little if any understanding of the local language and culture and little idea how African societies work (Rajab 1995:130). Chavis (1998) sums up the effect of Western journalism on Africa, saying:

> With the stroke of a journalist's pen, the African, her continent, and her descendants are pejoratively reduced to nothing: a bastion of disease, savagery, animism, pestilence, war, famine, despotism, primitivism, poverty, and ubiquitous images of children, flies in their food and faces, their stomachs distended. These ... powerfully subliminal message units,

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beamed at global television audiences, connote something not good, perennially problematic unworthiness, deplorability, black, foreboding, loathing, sub humanity, etc.

The under- and mis-reporting of Africa to other parts of the world, is not the only problem with Western journalistic discourses on Africa. Another problem involves what some have called 'media imperialism' (Awa 1986:175). Media imperialism is

> the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution and content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected.
>
> (Boyd-Barret quoted in Awa 1986:175).

The argument here is that Western discourses frequently dominate Africa media, thus giving Africans themselves distorted perceptions of themselves and their continent. Much the same can be said about academic discourses - Western academic discourses on Africa are not only prominent in the West, but also in Africa, with many Africans relying on Western writers to understand their own continent.

The dominance of Western discourses in both the academic and the journalistic worlds is not likely to be advantageous to Africa. The 'knowledge' about Africa produced by Western academic and journalistic discourses cannot be seen as unrelated to the power relations between Africa and the West, and the role that these discourses play in perpetuating these power relations should not be underestimated. The African Renaissance cannot just challenge Western policy towards Africa, but should also look at the academic and journalistic discourses about Africa which are produced by the West.

2.3 THE POLITICS OF DISCOURSE - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

> 'It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together'
>
> (Foucault in Lemert & Gillan 1982:40).

As discussed in the previous section, discourse can be taken to mean a body of knowledge. This may not appear to assign any kind of political value to knowledge, but an investigation into the relationship between power and knowledge indicates that discourses

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are not politically neutral. Discourses bring together knowledge and power, two seemingly unrelated concepts which are shown by postmodernist critical theorists to be closely linked.

2.3.1 Common Perceptions and Definitions of Power

Power is central to politics and exists in all political processes (Ponton & Gill 1993:22-23). It has been considered to be the most fundamental concept in the study of politics (Rothgeb 1993:18). While it may easily be accepted that power and power relationships are integral to politics, what exactly is meant by power is debatable. Power has been viewed in different ways by different thinkers.

Perhaps the most accepted definition of power is that of Dahl (in Hill 1997:38) who says that 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'. A similar definition of power sees power as 'the production of intended effects' (Russell in Tansey 1995:5). Both these definitions relate power to control. A group has power over another group if it exercises some form of control over the second group (Van Dijk 1997:17). Power is being able to control others so that they do as you would like (Rothgeb 1993:21). This can be achieved in several ways including through force, through economic power and through moral or social obligation (Danziger 1998:139). These ideas are summed up by Shively (1999:5) who suggests that power is 'the ability of one person to cause another to do what the first wishes, by whatever means.'

2.3.2 Discourse - Linking Power and Knowledge

The definitions of power given above have been shown to be inadequate in several ways. Critical and postmodernist thinkers have been instrumental in bringing these inadequacies to light. Definitions of power which see power as nothing more than one actor getting another actor to do as the first actor would like, allow for several aspects of power to be ignored and thus remain unchallenged.

Hill (1997:38-41) discusses dimensions of power which are given insufficient attention by the generally accepted definitions, but which have been highlighted by thinkers such as Bachrach and Baratz, and Lukes. Bachrach and Baratz (in Hill 1997:39-40) argue that power is not only one actor getting another to do as the first would like, but can also be

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deterring an actor from doing something because of an anticipated unfavourable reaction from another actor. Lukes (in Hill 1997:41) adds another dimension of power, saying that 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests'. When B is disadvantaged by something A does, then A has power over B even if there is no obvious power relationship between them. Marxists and neo-Marxists contribute to the discussion of power by arguing that social and economic life may be organised in such a way as to operate in favour of certain groups and that this too is an exercise of power (Ponton & Gill 1993:25). Challenges to the conventional definitions of power allow the meaning of power to be extended and this extension allows for power to be related to knowledge.

Critical theorists have influenced the way power is perceived through their critique of positivism. Positivism insists that theories of power should be descriptive and that propositions regarding power should be empirically verifiable (Joseph 1988:85). Critical theory sees positivism as inadequate, meaning that positivist theories of power are also inadequate. Positivist understandings of power ignore important aspects of power and through ignoring these aspects positivist theories of power can even act as instruments of power. It is necessary to draw attention to other facets of power, and the critique of positivism makes contributions in this regard.

One of the facets of power which should be given attention is the relationship between power and knowledge. Does power influence the acquisition of knowledge? Does knowledge reproduce power? Do power and knowledge intersect? Are they the same thing? Critical postmodernists have examined these questions and have associated these ideas with discourse.

Habermas (in Clegg 1989:92-95), the second generation critical theorist, discusses what he calls 'the ideal speech situation'. This discussion has implications with regard to the relationship between knowledge and power. Habermas (in Clegg 1989:92-95) argues that all speech aims to present true knowledge. However, power acts as a barrier to the realisation of this true knowledge. Communication is aimed at achieving truth, but this quest is distorted by power. Thus the knowledge that is produced by communication is affected by existing power relations.

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Foucault (in Painter 1995:9) argues that the way in which power is exercised has changed. In traditional societies power was exercised visibly, but today the exercise of power is more subtle. Because the exercise of power has changed, contemporary analyses of power should also change in order to acknowledge the subtlety of the exercise of power and its implications. Today, power cannot be seen as a 'single all-encompassing strategy' (Clegg 1989:154). Instead, power must be seen as a network of alliances which extends over a shifting region of practice and interests. Power is relational, it is 'not a Center, a Source, an Origin, a Truth, an Imposing Force' (Lemert & Gillan 1982:27). Power should not be seen as being only a negative force, but its positive aspects should also be recognised (Fink-Eitel 1992:50-51). It has the repressive quality of exclusion, but also the positive purpose of transforming integration and of productive discipline. In Foucault's (1980:119) words:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

This postmodernist conception of power relates power to knowledge and truth and can be contrasted with dominant Western notions of truth which view truth as being the product of science (McHoul & Grace 1993:58). According to these notions, knowledge is only deemed true if it is acquired through the use of scientific methods. The use of these scientific methods began with the natural sciences, but these methods have since been seen as also being appropriate for the study of humans and human society, leading to the establishment of the 'human sciences'. Postmodernist critical theory calls into questions these methods and disputes the idea that the knowledge produced by such methods is neutral and therefore unable to be challenged. Rather than being neutral, postmodernists see knowledge as related to power. Foucault (in McHoul & Grace 1993:59) declares that: 'We should admit... power produces knowledge ... power and knowledge directly imply one another...'. On the one hand power produces fields of knowledge and, on the other, knowledge constitutes power relations.

Foucault is not the only thinker to see power and knowledge as being related. As far back as the Elizabethan era, Francis Bacon (in Nola 1994:22) declared that 'the roads to human

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power and to human knowledge lie close together and are nearly the same'. This Baconian idea of knowledge and power being associated can be understood in two ways (Singh 1987:227). Firstly, it can be argued that knowledge allows for control and exploitation and is thus related to power. Secondly, it can mean that knowledge itself is an exercise of power - knowing involves capturing and experimenting with the object of one's knowledge, and this is in itself an expression of power. Today, there are several intellectual movements which have argued that power and knowledge must be seen as interrelated. These movements argue that power cannot be seen as external or opposed to knowledge, but must be seen as the mark of knowledge. Power relations permeate activities geared towards knowledge production, and knowledge arises out of these power relations rather than in opposition to them (Rouse 1987:17-25).

Discourses, as bodies of knowledge, cannot then be considered to be uninfluenced by existing power relations. The knowledge they produce is not neutral and objective, but reflects existing power relations and can also serve to constitute new power relations. Foucault (1980:93) argues that in any society the relations of power 'permeate, characterise and constitute the social body' and that these relations of power 'cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse'. Thus it is discourse which is the juncture at which knowledge and power meet (Lemert & Gillan 1982:62).

2.3.3 <u>What Makes a Discourse Dominant?</u>

If postmodern critical conceptions of power are accepted, is it still possible to speak of 'dominant discourses'? There are some who feel that the idea of dominance belongs to modernist thought and is incompatible with postmodernist, and especially with Foucauldian, conceptualisations of power. Consider Leroke (1996:237) who states that '[f]or Foucault, discourse denies notions of power, domination or oppression ... [w]ithin discourse, therefore, there is no hierarchy of domination'. Some excerpts from Foucault seem to imply that he does indeed use the term discourse in a way which denies the possibility of dominance. For example, Foucault (quoted in Young, R. 1995:58-59) says that '[t]here is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it' and 'we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one ...'.

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Nevertheless, other interpretations of Foucault and other postmodernist writers suggest that it is indeed possible to speak of a dominant discourse, while maintaining a postmodernist critical conceptualisation of power. For example, while Foucault (1980:98-99) rejects a conception of power being a sort of commodity which some individuals possess and others lack, he also emphasises that power is not fairly distributed. Power is not located at a particular point but is rather a network of relations. However, these relations are 'more-or-less organised, hierarchical, [and] co-ordinated ...' meaning that power is still hierarchically organised and that dominance is still possible (Foucault 1980:198). Dominance may be exercised more subtly, but it is still exercised! Foucault (1980:99) argues that power must be analysed from its infinitesimal mechanisms so that it becomes evident 'how these mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination'.

In a clear acceptance of the idea that dominance is possible, he argues that analyses of power should be based 'on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination' (Foucault 1980:102). These quotes suggest that the Foucauldian understanding of power and domination does not disallow the possibility of discourses which dominate.

Derrida, another postmodernist thinker, also allows for the idea of a dominant discourse. He argues in *Spectres of Marx* that while we may reject the Marxist concept of social classes fighting for hegemony, we can still speak of a dominant discourse using this term to refer to 'a hierarchized and conflictual field' (Derrida 1994:55). According to De Kock (2000:211) Derrida describes three points where dominant discourses are expressed: political discourse and culture; mass media; and academic culture. These three spheres cannot be dissociated from one another; all three are 'welded together' and co-operate in order to produce the 'greatest force with which to assure the hegemony or imperialism in question' (Derrida 1994:53).

Related to the idea of dominant discourses, is the idea of consensus and how it operates in a dominating way. Discourses can achieve their dominant status through consensus which allows for them to dominate in a way which is difficult to pinpoint and thus difficult to challenge. Coxian critical theory as discussed by Leysens (2000:267-269) illustrates the way in which discourses can maintain dominance through consensus. Cox (1983:170-

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172) does not see dominance as just being coercion, but argues that dominance also occurs when the interests of different groups are brought in harmony and are expressed in universalistic terms. Writers in the Frankfurt School expressed similar ideas regarding consensus and dominance, arguing that capitalism maintained dominance by encouraging the integration and assimilation of proletarians (Dubiel 1985:70-71). Self-preservation in the capitalist system can only be achieved through assimilation. Thus the proletarians produce discourse in agreement with the capitalists, rather than challenging capitalist discourses, which leads to an apparent consensus. An integration of the ideas of the Frankfurt School (in Dubiel 1985:70-71) and Cox (1983), suggests that when consensus is achieved, this consensus may be the result of a dominant discourse which has been exercised in such a way that assimilation and integration into the dominant discourse resulted.

If the above is related to the context of this dissertation, it can be argued that Foucault's reconceptualisation of power may have made it impossible to identify fixed, unchanging dominant discourses and opposing discourses running counter to them, but that it is still possible to speak of dominant discourses. These discourses are fields of hierarchically organised power relations rather than rigid, clearly defined bodies of knowledge. Proponents of the African Renaissance must examine their position in the network of relations which allow particular Western discourses to dominate, in order to see how Western dominance can be challenged. The understanding of power as a network of relations indicates that the dominance of Western discourses may operate insidiously rather than in a blatant way. This makes confronting dominant Western discourses more difficult, but no less necessary than if there was an explicit distinction between dominant Western discourses, and opposing African discourses.

Derrida's (1994:51-56) conception of the way that dominant discourses are expressed suggests that discourses which dominate the academic and journalistic world will have definite political implications, and that any attempt to challenge political dominance must therefore be accompanied by challenges to the discourses expressed in academic and journalistic publications. In application to the African Renaissance, this means that the African Renaissance's political objectives are unachievable if unaccompanied by a challenge to the discourses which dominate the Western academic and journalistic world.

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In terms of critical theorist's discussion of hegemony through consensus, it can be argued that when Africans agree with Western analyses of African situations, and Western prescriptions for African problems; domination may still be occurring. The achievement of consensus may be more sinister than it appears. An African Renaissance that concurs rather than disagreeing with Western discourses could be a surrender to Western dominance rather than a call for African renewal.

This dissertation involves the examination of dominant Western discourses on Africa in order to establish to what extent the African Renaissance challenges these discourses. This means that it is necessary to label particular Western discourses as dominant which is not an easy task. There are many different Western discourses on Africa and there is not always one discourse which clearly dominates. Despite this difficulty, this dissertation attempts to identify discourses which are well-represented and often articulated within the Western academic and journalistic sources. While there is a diversity of Western discourses on any particular issue of African politics, it is possible to identify particular discourses which appear to be more often articulated than others, and can thus be considered 'dominant'. This does not mean to imply that the Western discourses discussed in this dissertation are the only Western discourses being produced on a particular issue. The Western discourses that are chosen are those that dominate, but the existence of alternative Western discourses is acknowledged.

2.4 AFRICA AND THE WEST

Before embarking on a discussion of the Western discourses of Africa, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by 'the West' and what is meant by 'Africa'. This clarification is vital to the understanding of what can be considered to be a Western discourse of Africa. A brief overview of the history of the relations between the West and Africa is also useful as it provides the context for the rest of the dissertation.

2.4.1 The Concept 'the West'

'The West' is a convenient term used to describe a number of states with similar characteristics. This term refers to Western Europe, the United States and other states which are mainly populated by European settlers (McLean 1996:528). While Western Europe and North America are always included in an explanation of what is meant by 'the

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West', Japan, which is most decidedly not western in terms of geography, is sometimes also included in 'the West' (Safire 1993:867).

During the Cold War there was a clear distinction between the states which embraced capitalism, and those which favoured communism. This ideological distinction was echoed by a geographical division - the countries more or less to the west were capitalist, and the countries towards the east, communist (McLean 1996:528). Although this clear ideological separation is no longer evident, the term 'the West' is still used to refer to the countries which were united against communism during the Cold War.

It is possible to use the term 'the West' to refer to nothing more than the countries forming part of Central and Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and possibly Japan. However, it is also possible to distinguish certain non-geographical features which characterise the Western world. The part of the world referred to as 'the West' is seen as having emerged out of Christianity, and to have become more and more secularised through the Enlightenment (Scruton 1996:585). Some thinkers, such as Spengler (in Scruton 1996:586) have identified a particular spirit and destiny associated with the Western world. Spengler (in Sullivan 1970:175) saw the emergence of Western culture as beginning around 900 AD with the birth of the 'Faustian soul' in Europe. This soul is one of adventure and experiment and has also been associated with the ability to construct and to regulate society (Scruton 1996:586). Spengler (in Sullivan 1970:175-176) believed that this spirit would passed through a spring, summer and autumn, and that the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the beginning of the nineteenth century signalled the winter of the Faustian soul and thus the winter of Western Civilisation.

In addition to these connotations, the term 'the West' is also used to refer to states with the following characteristics: the rule of law, representative government, capitalist economy, universal education, alliances with other Western states, a large nominally Christian population, secular institutions of government, religious freedom, and other liberal freedoms (Scruton 1996:586). In addition to these empirical characteristics, some core values of the Western world can be identified: consumerism, economic growth and personal liberty (McLean 1996:528). These values have led some, especially those of the Islamist faith, to criticise the Western world for being materialistic and lacking in religious fervour (Safire 1993:867).

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In understanding what is meant by the term 'the West' it is also necessary to examine the related term 'westernisation'. According to Scruton (1996:586) 'westernisation' refers to two processes: the intentional adoption of particular aspects of culture or society generally seen to be characteristic of the Western world; and the unintended process whereby Western ways take root wherever they are not deliberately exterminated, and where this process while not seen as desirable, is viewed as difficult to resist. Thus people, institutions or practices in Africa, Asia and other parts of the non-Western world can be referred to as being 'westernised' in some way or another.

This dissertation takes 'the West' to mean the countries of Central and Western Europe, North America and a few others with similar characteristics. However, it also understands 'the West' to be more than just an empirical term describing a geographical reality, but also to be a term seen to be connected to a number of philosophical and ideological constructs such as capitalism, representative government, liberalism and consumerism.

2.4.2 The Concept 'Africa'

The terms 'Africa' and 'the West' do not refer to two equivalent but different entities. 'The West' originated as a term for an ideological entity which can be loosely related to certain geographical regions, while 'Africa' is primarily a geographical term, referring to a particular physical area. Nevertheless, the term 'Africa' has been invested with more than just a geographical meaning - the word has been associated with certain ideas and emotions.

In terms of the geographical meaning of 'Africa', the term refers to the continent south of the Mediterranean Sea and situated between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans (Hawkins 1988:13). Africa is frequently divided into two, with Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa seen as distinct from one another. In addition, Egypt, which is geographically part of Africa, is also considered part of the Middle East (Hawkins 1988:516). These classificatory distinctions are based on more than just geography: the people of Northern and sub-Saharan Africa are often considered to be distinct from one another, with Northern Africans referred to as Arabs and sub-Saharan Africans as Africans or Blacks. The fact that Egypt, despite its geographical location, is frequently not considered to be part of Africa, but rather part of the Middle East, or culturally and historically part of Europe

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or Asia has been related to an unwillingness on the part of Western scholars to allow the ancient Egyptian civilisation to be considered part of African history (Clarke 1986:111).

Just as certain features and values have been attached to the West, certain characteristics and values have been labelled 'African'. The first people to see Africa as a single entity with particular characteristics and values were the Europeans, rather than the Africans. The name 'Africa' orginates from a name Romans gave to their North African province (Mamdani 1999:52). It is only later that Africans themselves see their continent as having some kind of a common spirit akin to the idea of a spirit associated with Western civilisation. The labels the Western world has attached to Africa and those attached by Africans themselves differ greatly.

Western history has built a number of myths and stereotypes about African history, and has made it difficult for an alternative history of Africa to emerge (Harris 1998:1). These myths and stereotypes still pervade the consciousness of many, both Western and African, when they consider what is meant by the concept 'Africa'. Western conceptions of what 'Africa' means have been so dominant that Mudimbe (1988) has spoken of 'the invention of Africa' implying that what is seen as being 'African' is largely an invention of the Western world and that Western distortions make it difficult for both Westerners and Africans themselves to understand Africa.

Nederveen Pieterse (1992:23-29) discusses several of the images that the West has constructed of Africa over the years of contact between the two. He notes that the meaning attached to Africa by the Western world has to do with the self-image of Europe, rather than with Africa itself. According to Nederveen Pieterse (1992:29), Western images of Africa from antiquity to the early Middle Ages gradually changed from being fairly positive to being predominantly negative. During the Middle Ages, connotations of Africa became more favourable once again, but later developments led to very negative ideas being associated with Africa once again. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries images of Africa became increasingly condescending and denigrating (Nederveen Pieterse 1992:29). Africa was associated with savagery and 'beastliness', and Africans were seen as 'Children of Ham' - servants to the rest of mankind (Nederveen Pieterse 1992:34-51). The ideas associated with the term 'Africa' saw Africans as 'strange, barbarous, and subhuman' (Harris 1998:3). Africa was described as being 'filled with burning sands, savage beasts and almost uninhabited deserts' (Hallett in Harris 1998:9).

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The meanings assigned to Africa by the Western world have changed, but much of the legacy of these negative connotations remain, with Africa today being perceived as 'a basket case' and a place of 'perennial famine, recurrent economic crisis, dictatorship, blatant violations of human rights and carnage' (Adedeji 1993:3). Are these images all that different to earlier discourses? Still today the word 'Africa' conjures up images in Western minds of a dark and primitive place with uncivilised 'tribes' fighting each other, and wild animals stalking around (Hickey & Wylie 1993:1). Even though the academic and journalistic discourses of Africa no longer blatantly propogate the mythological view of Africa as the place of the savage, the strange and the uncivilised, 'the mythic Africa ... lingers at the edge of consciousness' (Hickey & Wylie 1993:1).

Africans and people of African descent have given Africa another set of connotations. While not all Africans see Africa as having the same kind of unity of spirit as that of the West, some Africans identify several features which they believe characterise Africa. An example of an African thinker who has identified features which are common to all of Africa and thus characterise Africa, is Cheikh Anta Diop, the prominent Senegalese philosopher. Diop believed that Africa should be united and that through a rewriting of Africa's history, it is possible to identify certain characterising features of Africa (Jeffries 1989:147-160). Movements such as Pan-Africanism and Negritude have also attempted to establish the idea of a common African spirit, one which is favourable to Africa and which negates the image of Africa created by the West (Harris 1998:18-19). Some characteristics which are seen to be common to the whole of Africa are communal solidarity with the focus upon the community rather than the individual (Mulemfo 2000:52); *ubuntu*, which is related to communal solidarity and is a principle stating that one achieves one's humanity through other people (Pityana 1999:144); religiousness, and a life centred around a belief system (Pityana 1999:138); and a kind of African humanism which values justice, tolerance, compassion, and obedience to authority (Teffo 1999:153-159). While these and other characteristics of Africa have been identified by Africans, there is still much dispute among Africans as to what the term 'Africa' means.

There are also some problems in defining what is meant by the term 'African' and in distinguishing between 'Westerners' and 'Africans'. Are white South Africans African or Western? What about black people living in the West? There are a number of potential solutions to this definitional problem, but each has its own difficulties. Geographical location can be used to determine who is African and who is not, but this excludes the

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large number of black descendants of slaves, who consider themselves African. Alternatively, race can be used to distinguish between Africans and Westerners, but this suggests that being African is as superficial as skin colour and facial features, and ignores the possibility of the Westernisation of black people living in the West and the Africanisation of white people living in Africa. Another possible way to distinguish between Africans and Westerners can be according to how people describe themselves, but this allows for a multiplicity of definitions of what it is to be Africa. This dissertation will generally accept the latter way of distinguishing between Africans and Westerners, allowing for people who identify themselves as African to be considered African, but will also critically examine the writings of those calling themselves Africans in order to reveal ways in which their ideas may reflect Western rather than African discourses.

An attempt to define the term 'Africa' seems at the outset very easy - Africa is a continent, south of Europe, East of the Americas and west of India and China. However, the meanings and connotations which have been associated with Africa are so various that it is difficult to sum up what the term means. What is clear though, is that Africa as a geographical entity, has had and still has many emotive meanings attached to it. The Western discourses on Africa discussed in this dissertation reflect some of these meanings, and the African Renaissance reflects others. The dissertation investigates to what extent the meanings assigned to Africa by the African Renaissance provide a challenge to those of the West. Africa will be taken to mean the geographical entity and while several of the meanings attached to this entity will be examined, none will automatically be regarded as valid or invalid.

2.4.3 Brief Overview of Relations between Africa and the West

Relations between Africa and the West predate colonialism. For centuries there has been contact between the two regions, but the nature of this contact has changed several times over the years. The history of relations between Europe and Africa go back a few centuries before Christ. In some ways these relations can be considered to be the first between the West and Africa, but it should be noted that the West, as described above, can only be seen to have come into existence later. This discussion will however, look at the history of the countries now forming the West, and Africa.

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The colonial era was not the only era during which the West dominated parts of Africa. The first Westerners to control a part of Africa were the Romans who ruled Northern Africa in the first century BC (Akinrinade & Falola 1986:1). The Roman rulers conquered a large part of northern Africa (stretching from Mauritania to the first cataract of the Nile) and also had some contact with sub-Saharan Africa through trans-Saharan trade (Nothling 1989:85-56). Roman rule lasted until the third century AD when the Romans were displaced by other Europeans, known in history as the Vandals (Akinrinade & Falola 1986:2). European rule in North Africa declined and by the seventh century there was little trace of it, and Europe lost interest in Africa for a few centuries. During these centuries there was still some contact between Europeans and Africans through slave trade and through warfare (Bennet 1975:25).

European interests in Africa were renewed with the explorations of Portuguese mariners (Akinrinade & Falola 1986:2). The Portuguese had both material and spiritual interest in Africa, and established small cities along the Atlantic coast (Bennet 1975:27-28). The Portuguese extended their presence to other parts of Africa, but their influence remained limited (Bennet 1975:30-42). Gradually, other European countries became interested in Africa, mainly for commercial reasons (Bennet 1975:42-43). When the British colonies in the Americas was established, the need for labour was boosted and so the slave trade intensified, which also intensified the colonial efforts of the European powers (Akinrinade & Falola 1986:4-5). It is estimated that over 10 million Africans were removed from Africa as part of the slave trade (Freund 1998:43).

During the nineteenth century European trade in Africa increased, but it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the colonial conquest of Africa truly came about (Freund 1998:63-65). The quest for colonies became so intense that it has been referred to as the 'scramble for Africa'. The reasons given for this increased interest are varied. Some see the scramble for colonies as being motivated by the economic reasons as part of capitalism (Akinrinade & Falola 1986:13). Others argue that strategic concerns were most important, and still others relate it to the European balance of power at the time (Bennet 1975:84-87). At the Berlin conference in 1884-1885, Africa was divided up into 'spheres of interest' and the European powers then set about conquering their respective spheres (Davidson 1994:5). By the beginning of the twentieth century, the partition of Africa was more or less complete.

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The colonial powers followed different strategies in their governance of the conquered regions. The French followed an assimilation policy - Africans were encouraged to adopt French culture and religion, in exchange for which they could be given the rights accorded to Frenchmen, and could even gain French citizenship (Bennet 1975:125-126). However, fewer than 100 000 Africans actually became 'assimilated' according to this policy (Davidson 1994:38). The Spanish, Portuguese and Italians had a similar approach, but they had even less success than the French in assimilating their subjects, and were very brutal towards the unassimilated majority (Davidson 1994:39). The British approach was one of indirect rule - Africans were governed through African rulers, although ultimately it was the British who were in control (Bennet 1975:144-145). The Belgian colonial policy was one of strict dictatorship (Davidson 1994:39). Belgian rule was so brutal that even the other colonial powers criticised them for their 'serious excesses' against the Congolese (Bennet 1975:160).

Colonialism could not be sustained. The two most important events in Western twentieth century history, the depression and the World Wars, while having little to do with Africa, ultimately signalled the end of colonialism. Along with these events in the West, the development of Pan-African patriotism, the success of Asian nationalism, the increasing anti-colonial sentiments among educated Africans, and the emergence of militant trade unions and inspirational political leaders, ensured that colonialism could not endure (Davidson 1994:93). The era of blatant Western dominance over the entire African continent had to end.

Most African states achieved their independence between 1955 and 1975, which was a period dominated by the Cold War (Thomson 2000:143). The Cold War saw the dawning of American interest in Africa (Clough 1992:193). During the Cold War, Africa had some strategic significance. While it was peripheral geographically, economically and politically, it held at least some importance, in that neither side wanted to see the other side increase in size and so both the capitalists and communists sought allies in Africa (Harbeson 1995:4-5). During this period the former colonial powers also had some influence in Africa. Britain intervened to help the newly independent governments of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda against rebel forces, but was otherwise reluctant to be actively involved in post-colonial Africa (Thomson 2000:146). Since the 1970s, Britain's role in Africa has been minimal (Young, C. 1995:29-20). France on the other hand, maintained close relationships with its former colonies (Thomson 2000:147). Much of this involvement

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centred upon a French desire to export what it saw as its rich civilisation to Africa. Belgium played a stable and fairly important role in Rwanda and Burundi, but its post-colonial relationship with Zaire was characterised by crisis (Young, C. 1995:28). Italy, Portugal and the other minor colonial powers, played relatively minor roles in post-colonial Africa (Young, C. 1995:28-29).

The end of the Cold War saw a change in the relations between the West and Africa with Africa being downgraded strategically (Thomson 2000:151). There is a so-called 'new world order' (or some would say 'new world *dis*order') in which Africa may find itself more marginalised than before (Cheru 1996:44-72). The characteristics of the 'new world order' include ideological consensus, advancement in technology, increasing differentiation in and between countries, globalisation, the emergence of new states, and an increase in the number and influence of transnational organisations (Cheru 1996:45; Harbeson 1995:14-15). The relations between the West and Africa in these circumstances are likely to be very different to those of the past. Some analysts, such as Cheru (1996:44-72) feel that the consequences of the new world order are overwhelming negative for Africa. The trends associated with the new world order will result in Africa as a whole attracting less foreign investment, and some African states attracting almost all the investment flowing to Africa, leading to greater regional disparities (Cheru 1996:48-49). In addition, African states will receive less aid, as much of the aid previously directed to Africa may now be used to benefit Eastern Europe. According to Cheru (1996:49-50), Africa will receive a smaller share of world trade, Africa will be marginalised in the diplomatic arena, and the global consensus regarding liberalisation will disadvantage developing countries. These negative sentiments are echoed by Callaghy (1995:42-45) who sees Africa's position in the new world order as being one of increased political and economic marginalisation, with Africa being downgraded strategically and receiving a declining share in trade and investment. However, in other ways the new world order may mean that Africa is more tightly linked to the world economy, because of its dependence upon external actors in the determination of the economic policies of African countries, and because of the new economic policy conditionality, which pushes Africa towards integration with the world economy (Callaghy 1995:45).

Africa emerged from the colonial period in which it was dominated by Western powers, entered into the Cold War period in which it had some influence in relations with the West, and is now just beginning to experience the 'new world order'. In this order it seems

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unlikely that overt Western domination of Africa will continue; however, the West still yields considerable power over Africa in that it determines the conditions upon which Africa interacts with the rest of the world, in an era where isolation from the rest of the world seems impossible. In reflecting upon the definitions of power discussed earlier, it is evident that the West still exercises power over Africa in several ways. As a result of Africa's debt and Africa's dependence upon the West for aid, the West can influence Africa to act in particular ways - thus the West exercises power over Africa. In addition, the network of relations operating in the post Cold War era are ordered in a way that allows the West to maintain dominance.

As discussed above, postmodernists have argued that the way in which power is exercised has changed, with power being exercised more subtly today. If this is applied to power relations between Africa and the West, it is clear that while the power relations in operation during the colonial era were clearly evident, the way that the West exercises power over Africa today is more subtle. Power relations between Africa and the West today operate as a network of alliances which not only prohibits, but also produces and encourages. Western discourses regarding Africa are part of this power network, and thus an attempt to reorganise the power relations described above (which would clearly be a goal of the African Renaissance), requires an examination of Western discourses of Africa and a careful scrutinisation of the nature of African responses to these discourses.

2.4.4 Decolonisation of the Mind and Discourse

In assessing the impact that colonialism has had upon Africa society, Boahen (1987:107), a leading African historian, concludes that 'the most serious negative impact of colonialism was psychological'. Colonialism resulted in the development of a 'colonial mentality', a mentality which condemns what belongs to African traditions, and mimics the West, a mentality which generates a feeling of inferiority and a loss of human dignity among Africans (Boahen 1987:107-108). Sogolo (1995:135) contributes to this argument saying that the most severe damage done by colonialism was on the intellectual life of Africans. Africa may have won political independence, but it 'remains under the influence of Western values and ideological biases that tend to undervalue the people's sense of self-esteem' (Sogolo 1995:137). What worsens this situation is the fact that this 'affliction is not recognised for what it is, and has therefore remained unchecked' (Sogolo 1995:135). The prominent African writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:1-3) concurs, saying that the

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biggest weapons of imperialism was the 'cultural bomb' which destroyed people's belief in their past, in their heritage, in their abilities, in themselves. This 'cultural bomb' makes Africans want to identify with what is Western and makes them shrink away from what is African. Because of this, Ngugi (1986) advocates a 'decolonisation of the mind'.

Decolonisation and discourse can be related. Socio-political events like colonisation cannot be separated from their impact on knowledge (De Beer 1995:38). Colonisation did not only bring people, soldiers and systems of rule to Africa, but also brought to Africa discourses about why Africa should be colonised and why Europeans were entitled to rule over Africans. Colonial discourses changed the way Africans thought about themselves and their futures (Cooper 1996:9). The Western colonisers 'taught lessons of power' and societies in Africa were 'bent and shaped along the lines of colonial imaginaries' (Nederveen Pieterse & Parekh 1995:3). Colonisation institutionalised certain knowledges and certain practices. It involved strategies of subjection which persuaded people to accept particular truths about themselves (Hattingh 1995:43). To decolonise the mind is to try to identify the ways in which African minds have been affected by Western discourses, and to try to undo the damage that the Western colonisation of African minds has brought about. Decolonising the mind means thinking locally, it means discrediting ideas purporting to be universal (Van Staden 1995:150). It is 'an act of exorcism .. a process of liberation' (Mahrez in Nederveen Pieterse & Parekh 1995:4).

Postmodernist critical theory has a significant contribution to make to this idea of decolonising the mind. Both decolonisation and postmodernism are about revolting against hegemony (Louw 1995:69). Although European postmodernists appeared to focus their attention on the West, their ideas, especially those of Foucault, have been applied to the colonial context by other thinkers writing from a postmodernist perspective. Hattingh (1995:43) argues that Foucault shows that colonisation of people takes place through a colonisation of their minds and that the emancipation of a group of people takes place when this group rejects the identities placed upon them by others and creates their own ideas. Thus, even though Foucault had little to say directly about the colonisation of Africa, his ideas can be effectively applied to the colonial context. Edward Said (1978) adapts Foucault's ideas to make them relevant to the colonial contest. In *Orientalism*, he uses the Foucauldian concept of discourse in order to analyse the way in which the West developed a discourse regarding the East, and to examine the consequences of this discourse (Young, R. 1995:57-58). Said (in Young, R. 1995:57-58) argues that

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Orientalism produced a discourse rather than a body of objective knowledge, and that this discourse was the cultural equivalent of colonialism. While Said's (1978) analysis focuses on Asia, he says that he hopes that his study will show how formidable the structure of cultural domination is and will indicate to formerly colonised people the 'dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others' (Said 1978:25). Said's *Orientalism* can easily be applied to the African context allowing for the argument that the discourses that the West produced and still produces about Africa, colonise African minds and African cultures in much the same way as European imperialists colonised African lands. Mudimbe (1988) is another thinker who has used the ideas of postmodernist critical thinkers in discussing what he calls 'the invention of Africa'. According to Hattingh (1995:43), Mudimbe's work emphasises that forms of Western domination and 'bits of power/knowledge' as described by Foucault, must be identified and contested in the African context. Mudimbe (1988:5) argues that colonialism is accompanied by modes of thinking which impose themselves upon the dominated nations. Western discourses have not been entirely thrown off by African thinkers and many African thinkers, supposing themselves to be rejecting the colonial project write a 'literature that flatters condescending Western ears' in which they try to prove that Africans are intelligent and have achieved things which the West would consider great and worthwhile (Mudimbe 1988:36-37). The path to true knowledge is still a Western path, and the rules which decide what is true and what is good are still Western imposed (Mudimbe 1988:41).

The project of decolonising the mind recognises that the impact of colonialism lives on in African minds. Colonialism imposed certain values and norms upon Africa and even today there is a tendency among many Africans to overvalue Western institutions and to undervalue their own traditions and ways of doing things (Sogolo 1995:137). Western discourses have been accepted by African minds and decolonisation remains incomplete until these discourses are recognised and challenged. In addition, the colonisation of the African mind continues in many ways. Sogolo (1995: 135) argues that the new world order being championed by the West represents a new form of colonisation. Contemporary Western discourses continue the colonisation of African minds in that knowledge about Africa is still to a large extent produced by the West, and is often accepted unquestioningly by Africans who have not yet rid themselves of the belief that Western ideas, Western knowledge, and Western ways of doing things are superior to African equivalents (Van Staden 1995:147-148). In order to decolonise the African mind

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and prevent its continued recolonisation, Africans must develop a critical attitude that discourages the acceptance of Western discourses and develops alternative African discourses (Sogolo 1995:139).

2.5 CONCLUSION: WHY CHALLENGE WESTERN DISCOURSES?

The discussion above leads to the conclusion that Western discourses of Africa exist, are related to power, and dominate; but does this necessarily mean that they should be challenged? Should the African Renaissance accede to these discourses and promote the rebirth of Africa within their confines, or should the African Renaissance try to challenge these discourses? This dissertation argues that the African Renaissance certainly should challenge these discourses.

Africa has been dominated by the West. This domination has taken many forms, including political, social, intellectual and cultural forms. Western discourses on Africa have been part of this domination. From the perspective of postmodernist critical theory, it can be argued that this Western domination of Africa through discourse must end if the African Renaissance is to succeed. Two broad reasons can be given for this argument.

Firstly, postmodernist critical theory argues that all forms of dominance should be challenged. Dominance is an attempt to establish consensus or hegemony . Dominance involves the assertion of one *grand narrative* at the expense of others. Postmodernism resists all forms of totalisation or attempts at establishing hegemony, and suggests that a plurality of 'truths' and 'realities' exist at any given time (Ermarth 1998:589). Rather than trying to suppress pluralities as modernism does, postmodernism celebrates these pluralities (Louw 1995:68-69). Thus the fact that Western discourses dominate is enough reason to resist them and confront them with alternatives.

A second reason why the challenge of Western discourses is necessary, is directly related to the goals of the African Renaissance. When drawing up an inventory of sóme of the key elements of the African Renaissance, Botha (2000a:12) identifies 'the need to break neo-colonial relations between Africa and the world's economic powers' as one of these key elements. The preceding discussion regarding the intersection of power and knowledge in discourse, leads to the realisation that these neo-colonial relations cannot be broken if no attention is given to the role played by discourse in reflecting and perpetuating

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a relationship between the West and Africa in which the West is dominant. Thus an analysis of discourse is indispensible if the African Renaissance is to succeed. In addition, the African Renaissance has been explicitly linked with the project of decolonisation. Ntuli (1998:18) states 'The African Renaissance discourse is a process towards the decolonisation of the mind. We, as African 'intellectuals', have been produced and reproduced within Eurocentric incubators'. He adds that the African Renaissance 'must unleash a thorough interrogation of ... Eurocentric scholarship, to shake it from its contented hegemonic pose into an arena of meaningful contestation' (Ntuli 1998:18). These quotes indicate that a goal of the African Renaissance is the critical examination of Western discourses and the challenge of these discourses through the production of alternative African discourses. Decolonisation will remain incomplete until this process of interrogation and challenge has taken place.

Although it can safely be maintained that for the African Renaissance to achieve its goals, Western discourses need to be challenged and alternatives put forward; a cautionary observation with regard to this project need to be recognised. The wholesale rejection of Western discourses and an unquestioning adoption of discourses produced by the African Renaissance or another African movement is not an appropriate solution if the whole question of Western discourses on Africa is approached from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory. In tackling the problem of responding to Western discourses about Africa, it is tempting to speak of 'true' and 'false' discourses. This would involve identifying certain bodies of knowledge that are 'false' and in their place suggesting different bodies of knowledge that could be said to be 'true'. Discussions of discourse from a postmodernist critical theory indicate the danger of this. Discourses do provide representations of reality, but the term 'discourse' also refers to the conditions which both limit and enable the production of these representations of reality (McHoul & Grace 1993:34). Postmodernist critical theory suggests that different representations can occur under the same conditions and that these representations can compete for dominance, but that no particular representation 'truthfully' represents reality, while the others represent a 'false' reality. In order to determine which reality was 'true', it would be necessary to compare each discourse with the 'real' object, but this 'real' object is not available outside its discursive construction (McHoul and Grace 1993:35). In terms of the topic of the dissertation, this means that rather than denying the 'truth' of a particular Western discourse and positing in its place a 'truer' African discourse; the differing discourses and the conditions of their appearance should be examined and any discourse

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which is posited as being undeniably true should be challenged by the presentation of alternatives. In accordance with this, this dissertation does not mean to suggest that Western discourses are all erroneous and should be replaced by discourses produced by the African Renaissance or any other movement, but rather questions the often automatic acceptance of Western discourses as unequivocal truths, arguing that Western discourses must not be assumed to be 'true', and should be contested by other discourses.

Whether they are 'true' or not, Western discourses dominate. Western discourses dominate because they bring together knowledge and power, allowing the powerful to produce discourses which in turn reinforce their position of power. Western discourses dominate because the West is dominant in the hierarchised networks of power in existence today. Western discourses dominate by encouraging consensus - when the oppressed are made to agree with the discourses of their oppressors, dominance has truly been achieved. This dominance cannot go unchallenged.

This Chapter has argued from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory, that Western discourses on Africa need to be challenged. Building upon this foundation, the next Chapter explores selected Western discourses found in recent academic and journalistic sources. These discourses are critically examined and a brief discussion of their role in the power relations between Africa and the West is given. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the meaning, intentions and assumptions of the African Renaissance. Finally, the extent to which the African Renaissance challenges Western discourses by providing alternative discourses on Africa, is assessed.