CHAPTER 5: THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE'S RESPONSE TO DOMINANT WESTERN DISCOURSES ON AFRICA

5.1   THE NECESSITY OF A CHALLENGE

This dissertation argues that the African Renaissance should challenge dominant Western discourses. Discourses can both reflect and perpetuate power relations. Accordingly, the dominant Western discourses on Africa were shown to act to maintain current power relations between the West and Africa.   One of the components of the African Renaissance, namely 'The Empowerment of Africa in the Global Arena', as well as aspects of other components, indicates that the African Renaissance clearly aims to change global power relations. Given that dominant Western discourses serve to maintain current power relations, it is thus argued that the African Renaissance must challenge these discourses, if it is to achieve its goals. The extent to which this is indeed done, requires further investigation.

Concerning various dominant Western discourses on Africa, two broad categories of Western discourse were examined. Firstly, Western discourses on the African situation, including discussions of Africa as the ailing continent; a continent of chaos; a continent where hope is shattered by despair; a continent with inherent weaknesses; a continent crippled by poverty, conflict and poor leadership; and a continent that is reliant on the West for survival, were discussed. Secondly, Western discourses on proposed solutions to Africa's problems, including discourses on democratisation and on development were examined.

The subsequent assessment requires, firstly, an examination of the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses on the African situation, followed secondly by an analysis of its response to Western discourses on how Africa is to be healed.   In this context, the African Renaissance refers to the whole 'Renaissance package', including discussions about a Renaissance which have taken place from 1994 onward, the Millennium African Renaissance Programme (MAP), the New African Initiative (NAI) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

As a point of departure, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by 'challenge'. The argument that the African Renaissance should challenge dominant Western discourses on Africa, is not intended to be taken to mean that the African Renaissance should dispute every single proposition put forward by Western discourses, and deny every assumption inherent in these discourses. Rather, the African Renaissance should examine these discourses to reveal their biases, and then respond in a manner that is not merely a repetition of Western discourses. In the process, proponents of the African Renaissance must cultivate an awareness of the way that these discourses are intricately implicated in power relations in order to evaluate the assertions made by such discourses, then either accept or reject them.

It is, however, not argued that there is a set of 'incorrect' Western discourses on Africa which must be overthrown and replaced by a set of 'correct' African discourses on Africa. What is contended is that Western discourses cannot be assumed to be incontestable just because they dominate, and that African discourses should not be African echoes of Western sounds. Western hegemony needs to be challenged by African discourses that are premised upon African assumptions. African alternatives should not, however, simply deny every proposition put forward by Western discourses and present the exact opposite as an alternative. The latter will fail to emancipate African discourses from Western discourses, and rather reduce them to an inverse mirror image of dominant Western discourses by taking each discourse and turning it on its head. Hence, the argument is that an African Renaissance should scrutinise Western discourses and present alternative discourses that originate in Africa and are founded on African knowledge and assumptions. Preferable, this challenge must avoid being a single voice opposing everything Western, and rather provide an arena in which multiple discourses can emerge from Africans and where these discourses can converse with each other and with discourses of other origins.

5.2   THE RESPONSE TO WESTERN DISCOURSES ON THE AFRICAN SITUATION

The discursive élite in the West presents a picture of Africa as an ailing, chaotic and hopeless continent, dependent on the benevolence of the West for the survival of its inhabitants. Does the African Renaissance indeed challenge this discourse and provide an alternative interpretation (or multiple alternative interpretations) of the African situation?

5.2.1 Africa as a Recovering Continent

Similar to dominant Western discourses, the African Renaissance presents the African continent as a continent experiencing ill-health. However, unlike some Western discourses, the African Renaissance clearly sees this 'illness' as temporary. Writing on the African Renaissance, Reuel Khoza (1999:281) says:

> To be blunt, Africa is a pathologically diseased, drug-addicted, malnourished patient. ... We are a sick continent and we are largely to blame for it. We are a continent afflicted with war, famine, pestilence, incompetence, corruption, disease, crime and a generally declining standard and quality of life.

Khoza (1999:286-287) concludes that this assessment of Africa is not Afro-pessimism but 'is the admission of an alcoholic that he has a problem [and that] he carries a large measure of personal responsibility for the problem' and notes that there are African institutions which are serving as 'beacons of hope' and believes that these African (not Western) institutions must allow the Renaissance to be realised.

Other proponents of the African Renaissance also use the language of illness to describe Africa's condition. For example, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (2001e) contends that the New African Initiative is 'anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world'. This statement acknowledges that Africa is suffering from a 'malaise' but identifies Africans as healers of this malaise.

South African President Thabo Mbeki (1998c) refers to Western discourses describing Africa as a diseased continent and argues that Africans must throw off the image that the West has created of Africa. He says that Africa:

> can and must be its own liberator from the condition which seeks to describe our Continent and its people as the poverty stricken and disease ridden primitives in a world riding the crest of a wave of progress and human upliftment.

African Renaissance discourses thus reject the image of Africa as a continent dying of a seemingly incurable disease. While proponents of the African Renaissance do not suggest that Africa's condition is a condition of optimal health, they present Africa as a

continent that is recovering from any illness it is experiencing, and in this way challenge Western discourses.

5.2.2 Africa as the Continent of Hope

As previously indicated, many Western discourses depict Africa as a hopeless continent, or as a continent where hope is obstructed by overwhelming despair. African Renaissance discourses reject this depiction and present a picture of a continent of hope. For example, South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nkosozana Zuma (2001), expressed this viewpoint on Africa Day 2001, when she said that 'the Africa of hope is emerging like warming rays of sun' and that this situation 'challenges us to be warriors of the renaissance'.

Similarly, several of President Mbeki's speeches on the African Renaissance have proclaimed that Africa is a continent of hope, despite its image as a continent of despair. In an interview with *Siemensworld*, Mbeki contended that the perception that Africa is hopeless is not true, and listed a number of situations that he believes indicates that Africa is a continent of hope (Vilsmeier 2000:21). For example, in a speech in Chantilly, USA, Mbeki (1998d:9) speaks about how Africa has been perceived as 'home to an unending spiral of anarchy and chaos, at whose unknown end is a dark pith of an utter, a complete and unfathomable human disaster', but how this Africa is now challenging this image and becoming a continent of hope. In other speeches Mbeki (1999a) emphasises Africa's 'bright future' and predicts that while the struggle for a Renaissance may be long and hard, Africa will emerge victorious as long as Africans do not allow their hopes to be overwhelmed by the 'cynicism of the defeated' (Mbeki 1999b). Mbeki's speeches do not suggest the absence of despair, but rather suggest that hope can and must conquer despair so that the Renaissance can be realised.

The whole concept of the African Renaissance is founded on the idea that Africa need not resign itself to some terrible fate, but that Africans have the capacity to shape their own destiny and to ensure that this destiny is a favourable one. Writing in the *Mail & Guardian*, journalist Howard Barrell (1998) says that Africa has hit 'rock bottom' and now has two choices: 'to bounce along the bottom, which means to choose despair' or to develop a vision of a multi-faceted Renaissance and to get on with realising this Renaissance.

Supporters of the African Renaissance have chosen the second option, rejecting despair and setting about to transform a hopeful vision into a reality.

5.2.3 Africa as a Continent that is Addressing its Problems

Western discourses present Africa as a continent plagued with many problems, including appalling poverty, unending war, and corrupt leaders. How does the African Renaissance respond to this presentation of Africa? The African Renaissance recognises the many problems faced by Africa and acknowledges that these problems present obstacles to the realisation of the African Renaissance. South African Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad (2001) underlines about the importance of being realistic with regard to the problems faced by the African continent and acknowledges that Africa 'is still bedevilled by the persistence of the scourge of conflicts and underdevelopment'. Mbeki (1996) tells of 'the dismal shame of poverty, suffering and human degradation' in Africa, and in a statement on the African Renaissance issued by the Office of the South African Minister of Transport, Dullah Omar (2001), it is acknowledged that 'warfare, conflict and polemics' as well as inadequate resources are huge problems facing Africa.

While the problems facing Africa are acknowledged, African Renaissance discourse differs from Western discourses in that it does not see Africa's problems as a result of inherent inferiority, but blames Africa's current situation on a number of different factors, mostly of an external and structural nature. South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma (2000b) describes Africa's problems as being the Africa's legacy of subjection through the slave trade and colonialism must be seen as a causal factor which contributed to Africa's current problems. In African Renaissance discourse, poverty is not seen as being the result only of African government's poor economic policies, but is also seen as being a result of an inequitable global economic system. This idea is reflected in a speech by President Mbeki (1998b) in which he speaks of the 'strange situation' in which the increase in the wealth of the countries of the North has been accompanied by increased poverty in the countries of the South. The New African Initiative identifies internal and external factors that have resulted in Africa's current situation. Three reasons for Africa's problems are identified (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001b). Firstly, colonialism is blamed for leaving post-colonial Africa with inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies. Secondly, corrupt leadership and poor governance is described as having aggravated this situation, and thirdly, the Cold War is seen as having been an obstacle in the way of the

development of accountable government in Africa. Instead of implying that Africa's problems are a reflection of some kind of inherent inferiority, the African Renaissance recognises that there have been internal and external factors that can be blamed for the poverty, conflict and other unfavourable conditions in Africa.

Unlike Western discourses, the African Renaissance has faith that Africa is currently addressing the problems of poverty, conflict and poor leadership. This is especially true of the problem of poor leadership. Supporters of the African Renaissance believe that there is a new set of leaders who are committed to leading in the interests of the people. For example, South African Deputy Minster of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad (2001) says that a new African leadership is emerging and that this leadership is dedicated to African renewal. South African Minister of Foreign Affairs Nkosozana Zuma (2001) speaks about a new generation of African leaders who are enraged at Africa's current conditions and who are committed to a peaceful, stable Africa. Mbeki (1998a) identifies the emergence of this new leadership as being a result of the decision by African people that certain ways of governing are unacceptable, and have demonstrated unwillingness to tolerate corrupt leadership. African Renaissance discourse proclaims that there is a new breed of African leaders and that these leaders can lead Africa out of the current conditions of poverty and conflict. In this way, Western discourses on Africa are challenged.

5.2.4 Africa in Partnership with the West

Western discourses suggest that Africa cannot heal itself but will only be healed with the help of the West and by taking the advice given by the West. The African Renaissance's response to this is ambiguous, on the one hand suggesting that Africa holds the key to its future prosperity, but on the other hand continually referring to a need for 'partnership' from the West.

Some Renaissance discourse appears to see Africa as its own 'doctor', proclaiming that the healing of Africa will only take place through the efforts of Africans. In one of the first speeches making reference to an African Renaissance, former South African president Mandela (1994) describes the problems of Africa concluding that 'it is a matter of fact that we have it in ourselves as Africans to change all this'. In Mbeki's address at the Third African Renaissance Festival in March 2001, he warned that Africans must be the instruments of their own upliftment rather than 'wards of benevolent guardians' (Mbeki

2001b). The whole idea of Africa taking its destiny in its own hands implies that it is the activities of Africans themselves that will allow the Renaissance to be realised, and suggests that Africa should no longer depend upon the magnanimity of others for its survival.

However, some recent discourses on the African Renaissance have lost this emphasis on Africa determining its own destiny and have replaced it with the idea of 'partnership' between the West and Africa. This is especially evident in the MAP (which is sometimes even referred to as the Millennium *Partnership* for the African Recovery Programme), which became the New African Initiative and then NEPAD (New *Partnership* for Africa's Development). This initiative makes frequent mention of the partnership between African and the West that will drive the Renaissance.

A close examination of NEPAD (and its predecessors, MAP and NAI) suggests that this most recent articulation of the African Renaissance does not challenge Western discourses that depict Africa as dependent upon the West for any kind of pleasant future. NEPAD still plays lip service to the idea of Africans being masters of their own destiny, but appears to concede that Africa depends upon the West's assistance for its renewal. Commitments to African self-determination do appear in NEPAD, making it seem that NEPAD rejects Western discourses depicting Africa as dependent on the West to improve its current situation. NEPAD says that 'Africa recognises that it holds the key to its own development', and that Africans 'must be the architects of their own sustained upliftment' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). NEPAD says that it 'centres around African ownership and management' and that it is based upon 'the agenda set by African peoples through their own initiatives and of their own volition, to shape their own destiny'.

These assertions that NEPAD is about Africans determining their own destiny, are contradicted by other parts of NEPAD which suggest that Africa's renewal is dependent on actions taken by non-African powers. The whole initiative is clearly marketed as a 'partnership' between Africa and the world, especially the industrialised countries and powerful financial institutions. This 'partnership' is said to be one in which there are 'shared responsibilities and mutual benefits' - in other words, Africa's renewal is seen to be the responsibility of Africa and the West, and is seen to have the potential to yield benefits to Africa and the West. Frequent references are made to the responsibilities of both parties.

Section V - 'Programme of Action' - looks at various initiatives forming part of NEPAD, and identified 'Actions' that will have to be taken in each of these initiatives (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). Several of these initiatives include a list of 'Actions' that must be taken on an international level. Included here are numerous calls for quite substantial support from the international community. In terms of health, there is to be a campaign for 'increased international financial support'. With regard to information and communication technology NEPAD aims to work with multilateral initiatives, such as the G8 DotForce. In terms of agriculture, 'partnership schemes to address donor fatigue for ... agricultural projects' is called for as well as increased support in terms of investment and research. When discussing marketing, NEPAD calls for information-sharing between non-African and African firms and for the transfer of technologies to Africa. With respect to promoting the private sector, the international community is called on to mentor African firms and to provide them with technical assistance. In the 'Market Access Initiative' NEPAD says that developing countries 'could collectively call for structural adjustment by developed countries in those industries in which the natural competitive advantage now lies with the developing world'. In the 'Capital Flows Initiative' discusses Africa's need for a 7 per cent annual growth rate and says that 'the majority of the much needed resources will have to be obtained from outside the continent', and then continues with a discussion of the importance of debt reduction and increases in ODA flows. In Part VI - 'A New Global Partnership' - NEPAD gives a list of thirteen quite substantial responsibilities for the developed world, including material support, debt reduction, increased ODA flows, trade terms more favourable to African countries, investment and technical support.

It appears that NEPAD believes that Africa can plan and can lead its renewal, but that without international support the African Renaissance will not take place. Consider the following paragraph in Section VIII of NEPAD:

> The view of the initiating Presidents is that, unless infrastructure is addressed on a planned basis ... the renewal process of the continent will not take off. Therefore the international community is urged to partner Africa in accelerating the provision of infrastructure.

Thus, the African Renaissance is dependent upon improved infrastructure, and this in turn is dependent upon the assistance of the developed world. This implies that the African

Renaissance is dependent upon the activities of non-African states, Western states. This kind of assumption appears regularly in NEPAD.

This idea of partnership in the African Renaissance (and all its various initiatives and programmes) has been criticised. Even before the NEPAD discussion came into being, Moeletsi Mbeki (1998:215-216) noticed a tendency for African Renaissance discourse to doubt that Africa can bring about its renewal by itself and thus to look to the West for help. According to him, this signifies 'a resignation by Africa's leaders to the idea that, despite many words to the contrary, Africans are not capable, in the foreseeable future, of running their countries economies, nor of being able to master modern technology and management'. With the emergence of NEPAD, other analysts made similar observations. Friedman (2001) comments that one of the reasons that we should remain sceptical about the MAP (and thus also NEPAD) is that it appears to see the activities of rich countries as the key to economic growth. Malala (2001) notes that for many delegates at the World Economic Forum, where the MAP was presented, the MAP sounded like 'the good old begging bowl', even though Senegalese President Wade and South African President Mbeki insisted that Africa was asking for finance for a project, rather than for a generous donation to a cause. Seepe (2001) comments that although the MAP sounds like a fresh call to African recovery, it is betrayed by its misreading of humanity. According to Seepe (2001) the idea of this partnership for African recovery places blind faith on developed countries, but this faith is ahistorical and naïve. He argues that global economic inequalities are not accidental, but are a result of the political and economic interests of the rich. Seepe (2001) feels that history has shown that moral appeals for assistance are inadequate. Rostron (2000) expresses similar sentiments to Seepe and points out that profits can be made from poverty. He is cynical with regard to the likelihood that the West will support any project that is not in their own self-interest, and suggests that global inequities function to benefit the West, making it unlikely that the West will provide substantial support for any project that aims to reduce global inequities.

5.2.5 Assessment

The discussion presented above indicates areas where African Renaissance discourse challenges Western discourses, and where African Renaissance discourse concurs with the West. It is evident that African Renaissance discourse rejects the Afro-pessimism of many Western discourses. While it does not present an unrealistically positive picture of

Africa's current situation, it suggests that Africa is a continent of hope and a continent that is healing, rather than a hopeless dying continent. Africa's problems are presented as obstacles that are gradually being overcome, rather than as insurmountable hindrances to the realisation of any favourable future. Africa's problems are seen as an outcome of many internal and external factors, rather than being an inevitable result of some kind of inherent weakness. In this presentation of Africa, African Renaissance discourse challenges Western discourses and provides an alternative interpretation of the African situation.

However, African Renaissance discourse falls short of adequately challenging Western discourses on Africa's need for 'help' from the West. The African Renaissance's response to Western discourses regarding Africa's need for help is ambiguous. While it appears that the African Renaissance regards Africa as a capable continent that must not rely on others for its well-being; it also seems that African Renaissance discourse, especially as articulated in NEPAD, regards the West's assistance as vital for African recovery.

The argument put forward by NEPAD appears very logical. It is argued that although Africa is a continent with a proud history, its current situation is unfavourable. This current situation is explained as being a legacy of both external factors; such as slavery, colonialism and the Cold War; and internal factors, such as corrupt governments and foolish economic policies. NEPAD suggests that the current African and global situation is conducive to an end to Africa's marginalisation and underdevelopment. It is believed that the recovery of Africa will benefit the world as a whole, and that for this reason it can be expected that the whole of humanity will unite in the realisation of Africa's recovery - thus Africa's recovery will take place by means of a 'partnership' between Africa and the rest of the world, especially the powerful West. The recovery of Africa will allow Africa to be integrated into a globalising world and will end Africa's marginalisation in world affairs.

This argument is well worked out and has an appealing logic. However, the argument implies that Africa's recovery is to some extent dependent on help from the West. The term 'partnership' sounds better than 'help' but amounts to more or less the same thing. A type of deal is drawn up between the West and Africa: if Africa makes progress with regard to democratisation, conflict resolution and the liberalisation of Africa's economies, the West will step in and provide aid, investment and trade opportunities so that Africa can develop. Stated differently, it is Africa's request for the West's help accompanied by a

promise that Africa will 'behave' - it will attempt to bring about the political and economic changes that the West has prescribed.

Embedded in the whole NEPAD argument are a number of points of debate. Firstly, NEPAD appears to assume that Africa would be a developed continent, much like Europe, if certain factors had been absent. But it cannot be said with certainty that Africa's current situation would be one of development and prosperity (as defined by the West) had there been no slavery, colonialism, Cold War, poor African leadership, failed economic policies, and so on. Secondly, NEPAD suggests that the current global and African situation is such that Africa's recovery can finally be realised, after many failed attempts. However, this is certainly disputable. Implied in NEPAD is that globalisation is a positive force which can be allowed to work in Africa's favour, but several analysts of the globalising world suggest the opposite. Thirdly, NEPAD believes that an African Renaissance will benefit the whole world. NEPAD is said to be a partnership based on 'mutual interests'. But is this so? Would a prosperous, peaceful Africa be in the interest of global economic powers? There are arguments supporting both sides of this debate. Finally, are the global economic powers willing to assist Africa in realising its renewal? The rhetoric of political leaders such as former US President Bill Clinton and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair may suggest that powerful Western countries are willing to be part of this 'partnership', but the long-term political and economic commitment may not be forthcoming. NEPAD speaks about this partnership as based on 'shared commitments and binding agreements' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d) - but how deep are any of the commitments the West has made to 'helping' African and how binding are any of these agreements? How is Africa to ensure that the West brings its side of the bargain? How have the events surrounding the attack on the US on 11 September 2001 affected Africa's position on the West's list of priorities?

Since these issues fall beyond the ambit of this study, all that must noted is that the various initiatives which have been proposed to allow the realisation of the African Renaissance, are premised upon a belief that Africa needs help from the West and that it can expect to receive help from the West. Western discourses also present the argument that Africa is in need of the West's assistance, but are less positive about the likelihood of the West providing this assistance. In campaigning for a global 'partnership' for Africa's development, NEPAD accedes that Western discourses are right to suggest that Africa cannot heal itself. It has been demonstrated that 'helping' can be an exercise of power,

but recent African Renaissance discourse does not provide a forum for debate regarding what kind of Western 'help' (if any) is beneficial and what kind involves an exercise of power. In addition, NEPAD argument may be naïve in its assumption that such help will be forthcoming.

5.3 THE RESPONSE TO WESTERN DISCOURSES ON DEMOCRATISATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Dominant Western discourses present democratisation and development as part of the 'cure' for Africa's 'illness'. The subsequent discussion will summarise African Renaissance discourse on democratisation and development. This summary is followed by an analysis of the response provided by the African Renaissance to the assumptions implicit in Western discourses on democratisation and development in Africa.

5.3.1 Democratisation

As previously discussed, Western discourses do not just promote democracy, but promote a particular kind of democracy - liberal representative multi-party democracy. This form of democracy is the form that has been adopted by most Western states, meaning that the West promotes its own form of government as a cure for Africa's ills. The African Renaissance makes frequent reference to democracy, but does not necessarily define democracy like the West does. As discussed, democracy is seen as one of the components of the African Renaissance. The word democracy surfaces repeatedly in African Renaissance discourse. But what is meant by the term 'democracy' when it is used in African Renaissance discourse?

The term 'democracy' when used in African Renaissance discourse appears to refer to multi-party competition and elections, at least when used by South African government officials. Consider South African Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad (2001), who speaks about the importance of the 'consolidation of multi-party democracies' for the realisation of the Renaissance. South African President Thabo Mbeki (1998a) discusses governance and the Renaissance and concludes that one party states will be obstacles to the Renaissance. He says that the consolidation of multi-party democracies and the holding of elections in several African states bode well for the Renaissance. South African Minister of Foreign Affairs Nkosozana Zuma (2001) speaks about the creation of multi-

party democracies as one of the conditions for the Renaissance and South African Minister of Public Service and Administration Geraldene Fraser-Moleketi (2001) refers to the legalisation of opposition and the holding of elections as being a positive sign for the Renaissance.

This enthusiasm for multi-partyism and the holding of elections may seem to imply that the African Renaissance supports the adoption of Western-style democracy in Africa, but other comments made by supporters of the African Renaissance suggest that this is not so. Botha (2000a) interprets the African Renaissance as supporting the establishment of political democracy while 'taking into full consideration African specific conditions'. South African President Thabo Mbeki (1998b) stresses that while he sees democratisation as part of the African Renaissance, he is not suggesting that there is 'any one model of democracy which we must copy', but rather that each country must adopt a form of democracy that suits its specific conditions. He reiterates this idea when addressing the joint houses of Parliament saying that the democratic political systems which must be adopted as part of the Renaissance must take into account 'African specifics' (Mbeki 1999a). When discussing democratisation and the African Renaissance, Guèye (1999:255-256) emphasises that Africans must question the presumed universality of the Western interpretation of democracy and should give some serious thought to what a genuine African democratic system should be. He points out that there are examples of African forms of democracy in Africa's history and that these forms of democracy should be considered when debating what contemporary African democracy should be.

The comments discussed above imply that the African Renaissance should provide a platform for debate regarding what is meant by democracy and what forms of democracy are appropriate in Africa. However, despite these isolated comments, there does not appear to have been much debate regarding the meaning of democracy within the context of the African Renaissance. While supporters of the African Renaissance suggest that democratisation is vital for the Renaissance and speak about the importance of establishing 'genuine' democracies, there has been little debate regarding how democracies should be consolidated and what is meant by 'genuine' democracy. This absence of debate weakens the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses on democratisation as there is little clarity regarding what kind of democracy is to be implemented as part of the African Renaissance. This has led some interpreters to view the African Renaissance as being supportive of liberal Western-style democracy.

Consider comments made by journalist Howard Barrell who wrote in 1998 that South African President Thabo Mbeki (who he sees as 'African Renaissance man') seeks to promote 'the spread of basically liberal democratic systems of government'. Two years later, Barrell remained convinced of this, saying that the form of democracy promoted by Thabo Mbeki was 'evidently liberal democratic' and referring to a number of Mbeki's speeches in support of this hypothesis (Barrell 2000:12).

The discussion of democracy in NEPAD supports Barrell's hypothesis. The NEPAD document devotes a sub-section to the 'the Democracy and Governance Initiative' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). This initiative is said to support 'principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights and promotion of the rule of law'. These values sound like those generally associated with liberal democracy, and NEPAD makes no reference to 'African specifics' or the need to devise an African form (or African forms) of democracy. Any commitment to thoughtful debate regarding democratisation in Africa appears to have been abandoned with the development of NEPAD.

5.3.2 Development

Western discourses repeatedly advise Africa that it needs to 'develop'. The term 'development' is a difficult one to define and has been related to various processes and various types of change. However, what is clear from Western discourses on development is that development is seen as change towards the better, and also as change to become more like the West, thus implying that Africa needs to become more like the West if its 'illness' is to be cured. Western discourses on development most frequently define development in economic terms and advise that economic changes be made in order for Africa to develop.

African Renaissance discourse also makes frequent references to development and clearly sees development as a key factor in Africa's renewal. What the African Renaissance takes development to mean is not clear, and some of the discussions on development that have formed part of African Renaissance discourse, appear to be contradictory.

5.3.2.1   Modernisation and the African Renaissance

Some African Renaissance discourse appears to embrace modernisation, speaking of how Africa is 'backward' and needs to become 'modernised'. The idea of 'backwardness' arises again and again in discussions on the African Renaissance. For example, in former South African President Nelson Mandela's statement to the OAU, which was one of the first examples of the use of the term 'African Renaissance', he refers to the need for African people to be emancipated from 'backwardness' (Mandela 1994). Thabo Mbeki (1998a; 1999a) describes Africans as being in a situation of 'backwardness' in his address to the United Nations University and in his speech at the launch of the African Renaissance Institute.   The NEPAD document also makes references to Africa's 'backwardness' which it says stands in 'stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d);   and at the African Renaissance Gala Dinner, Deputy President Jacob Zuma (2000b) spoke about the need to ensure that the next generation of African do not have to endure the 'ignorance and backwardness' experienced by the current generation of Africans. What does this frequent use of the term 'backwardness' mean? It appears to accept the assumptions of modernisation theory: that all regions in the world are somewhere along a line of development, with some 'backward' and some 'advanced', and that progress along this line is inevitable and unidirectional.

This impression is strengthened by other comments made in discussions of the African Renaissance. NEPAD emphasises the importance of narrowing the 'development chasm' between Africa and the rest of the world and about allowing Africa to 'rise to the level of developing countries' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001b).   When discussing the African Renaissance, Joel Netshitenzhe (1999), CEO of the South African Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS), said that Africa should try to 'leap-frog some of the stages through which the world has gone' so that it can reach the 'highest levels of human development'. In a discussion on the African Renaissance, Dr Tim Thahane (1999), Deputy Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, describes Africa as a continent that 'lags significantly behind' the rest of the world and in an address to the Association of African Central Bankers, Mbeki (2001c) discusses the need for the 'diversification and modernisation of African economies'. Howard Barrell (1998) interprets Mbeki's vision of an African Renaissance as being 'unobjectionable motherhood, *mieliepap* and modernisation' while Holiday (2001) regards it as 'a call for rapid

modernisation' which has been disguised as a plea for a return to Africa's ancient past. Vale and Maseko (1998:276) also relate the African Renaissance to modernisation theory describing South Africa's idea of an African Renaissance as being 'buoyed by modernisation theory'.

What these comments indicate, is that some African Renaissance supporters accept the concept of development as presented in modernisation theory and see development as linear and universal. These commentators imply that each region in the world is positioned somewhere along a continuum of development and that Africa is the region that is furthest behind and thus that Africa needs to try to 'catch up' by becoming more like the rest of the world. These assumptions are very problematic given the wealth of criticism that has been given of modernisation theory. Those who have closely scrutinised modernisation theory have concluded that there are several Eurocentric assumptions inherent in modernisation theory. Modernisation theory has been described as the 'Western capitalistic dream for development' and some of the criticisms directed against modernisation theory include that it never questions Western knowledge systems, that it represents Western experience as universal and that it encourages the rest of the world to emulate the West (Treurnicht 1997:18-21; Coetzee 1996:56-62). Despite these often-repeated criticisms of modernisation theory, it seems that some African Renaissance discourse include assumptions that are rooted in this Westerncentric model of development.

5.3.2.2   Globalisation, neoliberalism and the African Renaissance

What is the African Renaissance's perspective on globalisation, capitalism and all that go with them? Pritvorov and Shubin (2000:89) comment on globalisation, saying that it

> has been accompanied by an upsurge of the neoliberal ideology with its standard form of 'freedom' postulates: liberation of market relations from state regulation and even state boundaries, reduction of the state to a machinery that serves private business; democracy, civil society *and other attributes ascribed to the society of Western countries*. The paradox is that while neoliberalism is undergoing a crisis in the fields of social sciences and political practice in the West, at the same time it acquires the features of an almost authoritarian ideology, virtually a religion, which *leaves no room for objections and heterodoxy, when applied to non-Western countries and to Africa in particular.* (emphasis added)

This comment indicates the extent to which globalisation is the globalisation of neo-liberalism, which involves the promotion of Western concepts, and Western lifestyle. It also suggests that globalisation involves the stifling of alternatives. Pritvorov and Shubin's argument is supported by Robinson (1999:149-150) who argues that the increasing acceptance of neoliberal ideology has been accompanied by increased support within US academic discourse for the promotion of liberal democracy as part of the US's global strategy. It is believed that the adoption of neoliberal ideology by developing states will be beneficial both to those states and to America and other states promoting this ideology. This perspective also argues that the acceptance of liberal democracy and neoliberal economic practices are a response to empirical conditions emerging out of globalisation and are therefore objective and legitimate. Because of this, a response to globalisation and the neoliberalism that accompanies it should be a vital part of the African Renaissance, as the African Renaissance has to address the question of development within the context of globalisation and neoliberalism. What is the African Renaissance's response?

Before examining the African Renaissance's response, it is useful to clarify what 'globalisation' and 'neoliberalism' are generally understood to mean and how they are related to development. Hoogvelt (1997:67) defines globalisation as 'a new social architecture of cross border interactions'. Scholte (1999:10-11) provides a more detailed definition, examining three different usages of the word 'globalisation'. The first usage equates globalisation with universalisation, seeing it as the spreading and increasing acceptance of various objects and experiences worldwide (Scholte 1999:10). The second usage sees globalisation as internationalisation, and uses the word to describe cross-border activity between countries as well as increasing international interaction and interdependence (Scholte 1999:10). A third usage of the word understands globalisation to mean liberalisation, and sees globalisation as referring to the removal of restrictions on movements between countries to create a more 'open' world (Scholte 1999:11). Using these definitions it can be conclude that globalisation refers to increasing universalisation, internationalisation and liberalisation and that it has far-reaching social, cultural, political and economic consequences. This very broad definition of globalisation is accepted.

Neoliberalism is equally difficult to define. It evidently has its roots in liberalism, but is also different from liberalism. Liberalism itself is a confusing concept with many different connotations. Despite this wealth of connotations, Gray (1996:286) believes it is possible

to identify four key ideas present in all liberal thought. He identifies these as being normative individualism - the belief that the claims of individuals are more important than the claims of collectivities, institutions or other life forms; universalism - 'the idea that there are weighty duties and/or rights which are owed to all human beings ... just in virtue of their standing as human beings'; meliorism or progress - the belief that while human institutions may not be perfectible, they are certainly open to substantial improvement through human action; and liberal egalitarianism - 'the denial of any natural moral or political hierarchy among human beings'. Neoliberalism includes these ideas, but can be considered to be to the conservative side of liberalism (Sargent 1996:113). Neoliberals support fiscal conservatism and are slightly more conservative than other liberals in terms of social and foreign policy (Sargent 1996:113). This conservative aspect of neoliberalism has led some to remark that 'late twentieth century conservatives are often characterised "neoliberals"' (Ryan 1993:303).

The contributions to liberalism made by Fukuyama (1989;1992) can be considered to have contributed to this new understanding of liberalism. Fukuyama explicitly links liberalism to the globalisation of the capitalist economy and to rights-based individualism (Robinson 1999:149). The result of this shift in the understanding of liberalism can be considered to have influenced the United States' global strategy of promoting liberal democracy and free markets. It must also be noted that neoliberalism is clearly associated with liberal economics. The liberal economic order generally refers to the market or capitalist economy and to the economic system promoted by the IMF and related institutions (Amacher et al. 1993:349). The quote from Pritvorov and Shubin (2000:89) at the beginning of this section clearly indicates this approach, seeing neoliberalism as being related to the promotion of a free market economy.

Development today takes place within the context of globalisation and neoliberalism. The assumptions inherent in globalisation and neoliberalism are also present in contemporary theories and policies of development. This makes it necessary to examine the African Renaissance's response to globalisation and neoliberalism as part of an examination of the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses on development. Taking the definitions of globalisation and neoliberalism discussed above as a point of departure, it is possible to examine African Renaissance discourse to see to what extent it challenges the prevalent Western discourses of globalisation and neoliberalism and the way in which these discourses have influenced Western discourses on development in Africa.

The African Renaissance's does not provide one united response, making it difficult to determine what its argument is with regard to neoliberalism and globalisation. Some African Renaissance discourse appears to challenge globally accepted economic paradigms, arguing that Africa should challenge the West's acceptance of both and the West's expectation that Africa too should accept globalisation and neoliberal reforms. The words of South African Communist Party General-Secretary, Blade Nzimande (1999) are an example of this approach. He says that 'any genuine attempt at the renewal of the African continent has to, in the first instance, challenge imperialism and its current neoliberal ideology' and must also explicitly articulate an alternative agenda. Vladimir Shubin's (2000:68-80) analysis of the African Renaissance in the era of globalisation, also suggests that the African Renaissance should challenge globalisation and capitalism, arguing that neoliberalism and a true African Renaissance are incompatible. He reaches this conclusion by examining neoliberal economics, which is premised upon privatisation, competitiveness and individualism. If the African Renaissance is supposed to be premised upon the rediscovery of African culture and values, and especially the reassertion of the principle of *ubuntu*, then the African Renaissance must be a challenge to neoliberalism and globalisation, because *ubuntu* promotes collectivism which is incompatible with privatisation, competitiveness and individualism (Shubin 2000:69). Murobe (2000:43-67) advances a similar argument. He maintains that neoliberalism and globalisation are premised upon the acceptance of self-interest as an unavoidable and necessary element of contemporary existence (Murobe 2000:46-49). However, Murobe (2000:56) believes that the African Renaissance is based upon, or should be based upon, the ethical values that form part of *ubuntu*. These values are not compatible with individualism and the pursuit of self-interest, and therefore the Renaissance can be said to be incompatible with globalisation and neoliberalism.

Harvey (1999) feels that the African Renaissance has not as yet provided enough of a challenge to globalisation and related economic philosophies and practices. He argues that such a challenge is vital for the Renaissance to succeed. Hence new macro-economic frameworks must be developed, and the models and programmes prescribed by the World Bank and IMF must be rejected. Dladla (1997) is another thinker who believes that the African Renaissance must consist of a challenge to globalisation and capitalism. He warns that care must be taken so that the African Renaissance does not become an 'externally driven consumerist movement that will leave us Africans continuing to be

"valued" only for our ability to absorb and popularise foreign ideas, trinkets and junk'. Instead he suggests that Africans should educate themselves regarding African culture and pursue a future that is based in this culture. In this respect, Dladla (1997) argues that '[m]erely repackaging trendy ideas from other dominant polities ... will not be enough'. This perspective concurs with that of Vale and Maseko's (1998:280-284) conceptualisation of an Africanist version of an African Renaissance which rejects modernisation and challenges dominant narratives regarding African development. This Africanist perspective challenges dominant discourses in international relations, opening up space for the articulation of alternatives. It is furthermore argued that a successful African Renaissance will be one which adopts an Africanist perspective and which rejects neoliberalism.

This understanding of the Renaissance contrasts with one that positions the Renaissance within the framework of globalisation and neoliberalism, and does not regard a challenge to globalisation and capitalism as a necessary ingredient of the Renaissance. This approach is reflected in discourses which see Africa's increasing acceptance of neoliberal economic practices as beneficial for the Renaissance, or which advocate the adoption of such practices if the Renaissance is to be realised. For example, Aziz Pahad (2001), the South African Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, stresses that Africa is part of the global economy and underlines the importance of trade liberalisation, privatisation and financial and budgetary discipline for the Renaissance. This implies that a neoliberal approach to the economy must be adopted if the African Renaissance is to succeed. The Omega Plan (one of the forerunners of NEPAD) openly supports the acceptance of globalisation and neoliberalism as part of Africa's rebirth. In the introduction to the Omega Plan (Omega Plan 2001), the issues of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation are discussed. The Omega Plan states that:

> African States insistently re-affirmed their adherence to the above mentioned options
> [globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation] and categorically rejected the idea of being
> marginalized in the process of world economic and commercial evolution.

Similarly, Kritzinger-van Niekerk (2000:34-35) identifies the embracing of 'modern market economies' and the deepening of reforms so as to make the private sector the main engine of growth, as being promising signs for the African Renaissance. Cleary (1998:22) sees the revival of African history and culture as part of the Renaissance as only being

useful to the extent that elements of Africa's history and culture can be used to improve Africa's 'competitive advantage'. He argues that the African Renaissance can only emerge if it is 'founded squarely in the realities of the global environment' and says that the success of the African Renaissance depends on macro-economic stabilisation, privatisation, increased economic growth rates and increased economic activity (Cleary 1998:22;26). Deputy Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Tim Thahane (1999), compares African development with Asian development, and concludes that 'a robust embrace of globalisation is not inconsistent with African culture, values and norms'. This perspective is also adopted by the NEPAD document which contends that there are already positive signs regarding African Renewal, and identifies one of these positive signs as being the spread of market-orientated economies in Africa. These and similar comments imply that Africa must not challenge the neoliberal orthodoxy and the current trend of globalisation, but must try to realise the Renaissance within this framework.

The position of Mbeki and the ANC-led South African government on this issue is difficult to decipher. In Mbeki's speech at the African Renaissance conference in 1998, he stressed that it is necessary to challenge the idea of the market as a modern god - 'a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates everything human must bow in a spirit of powerlessness' (Mbeki 1998b). Mbeki (2000) argues that globalisation holds certain threats to Africans: it encourages Africans to succumb 'to the pervasive dominant culture' at the expense of African culture, identity and heritage and 'denies that there are other solutions to our challenges other than those imposed by the dominant cultures'. These statements appear to suggest that he would reject any scheme of development that involved an emulation of the West. This perspective is supported by the ANC's 1997 discussion document *Developing a Strategic Perspective on South African Foreign Policy*. According to Botha (2000a:10), this document campaigns against globalisation, arguing that South Africa and other African countries must not become 'municipalities' in the 'global village'. The document goes on to contend that globalisation contradicts the agenda of the Renaissance, and that 'the success of the Renaissance depends on the depth of and extent to which it challenges globalisation' (ANC 1997b).

This stance is difficult to reconcile with other speeches of Mbeki and with the promotion of documents like NEPAD by the ANC. An examination of Mbeki's speeches allows Cleary (1998:22) to argue that Mbeki understands that Africa must be integrated fully into the global economy. Howard Barrell's (2000:8;15-16) analysis of the ANC and Mbeki's stance

regarding globalisation and neoliberalism, leads him to conclude that a neoliberal strategy is being pursued by Mbeki. This assessment of Mbeki's approach is supported by the ANC's introduction of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) as the strategy for development in South Africa and by some statements by Mbeki. When addressing the Corporate Council Summit in Virginia, USA, Mbeki (1998d) stressed that the struggle for Africa's development must take place within 'the context and framework of the world economy'. Mbeki's (1999b) address at the Millennium Debate of the joint houses of Parliament in 1999 also supports integration in the global economy. In this speech Mbeki (1999b) says that development cannot take place outside of the context of the global economy.

An analysis of a lengthy and very complicated speech given by Thabo Mbeki (2001b) on the occasion of the Third African Renaissance Festival, provides some clarity on his position on the African Renaissance's response to globalisation and neoliberalism. In this speech, Mbeki speaks about the 'constraints and possibilities imposed on us by contemporary global reality' and the importance of placing discussions on the African Renaissance within this context. He describes these constraints and possibilities. Based on the assumption that the modern world is defined by liberal democracy, capitalism and globalisation, he argues that the West (which he defines as including North America, Western Europe and Japan) illustrates the success of these political and economic systems and that the West is the 'decisive and independent centre of the universe of human society'. Because of this, Mbeki argues that the West plays a decisive role with regard to even the cultures and value systems of the rest of the world. He calls the rest of the world 'the hinterland' and describes it as being dependent on the centre (i.e. the West) 'for its progress, *consistent with the needs of the centre*' (emphasis added). Mbeki stresses that the cooperation of the centre is vital for the hinterland, but that the centre will only act in its own interests. He says:

> ... the centre sets the rules of behaviour in the global village and reserves for itself the right to decide what the correct outcomes should be ... the hinterland has no choice but to fall in line with what the centre demands.

Mbeki goes on to argue that Africa needs the support of the West to succeed and thus needs to convince the West that it is in their interests to support Africa. From this starting point he argues that Africans must throw off the negative image that the West has of

Africa, and Africans must assert their value and their importance in the world. The West is now beginning to realise that Africa's current situation of dependence and relative destitution is not in the West's interests because it threatens the West's economic interests in Africa and weakens the political allegiance of African countries. This, Mbeki concludes, should lead the West to realise that it is in their own interests to assist Africa to 'take the next step in her political evolution' and discusses a variety of ways in which the West and Africa can work together to transform Africa.

An analysis of this speech illustrates Thabo Mbeki's perspective on the current global situation and the best way to respond to it. Given that he has been at the forefront of the promotion of the concept of an African Renaissance, an understanding of his perspectives is vital in order to understand the Renaissance. Mbeki evidently sees the current global power distribution as inequitable and disadvantageous to Africa, but sees no way in which Africa can avoid or fundamentally challenge this 'global reality' and therefore seeks to chart a way in which Africa can become more 'developed' and less marginalised. He encourages Africa to play according to the rules set by the West and to accept that the West will only act in self-interest, but to try to manipulate the situation so that it can work for Africa's advantage. Mbeki regards globalisation and neoliberalism as inevitable, and as a result encourages Africa to make the best of the harsh reality of today's globalising world, rather than to try to mount a radical resistance to this world.

An analysis of NEPAD suggests that this latest articulation of the African Renaissance also accepts globalisation and neoliberalism and sees Africa's revival as rooted within the context of globalisation and neoliberalism. The introduction to the NEPAD document speaks of 'signs of progress' in Africa identifying one of them as a commitment to 'market-orientated economies' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). When discussing Africa and the 'global revolution', the NEPAD document proclaims that globalisation presents 'the best prospects for future economic prosperity' in Africa (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). The NEPAD document goes on to commit African leaders to the restoration and maintenance of 'macroeconomic stability' and to the development of 'standards and targets for fiscal and monetary policies' (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). NEPAD's *Programme of Action* is filled with references to cross-border cooperation, the promotion of the private sector, the diversification of exports, trade liberalisation and improved market access - all of which are concurrent with the acceptance of globalisation and neoliberalism.

This apparent acceptance of globalisation and neoliberalism has led to the criticism of the African Renaissance by Africans who do not support globalisation and neoliberalism. An example is the criticism given by Bankie (1998:16) who calls the Renaissance a 'capitalistic messianic Concept' which indicates that the ANC has 'given up the struggle and embraced capitalism'. Kornegay and Landsberg (1998:36) observe that critics of the African Renaissance feel that the concept of an African Renaissance is a cover for emerging black liberals. They quote Siyabonga Mahlangu, leader of the Pan-Africanist Student Movement as having described the African Renaissance as a 'dilution of the struggle' (Kornegay & Landsberg 1998:36). Liebenberg (1998:45) considers the possibility that the African Renaissance could be an 'élite plot, a vital lie to recruit the masses into neoliberal (multiparty) politics, élite entrenchment and [the disempowerment of] the poor through Western mantras'.

The African Renaissance's response to globalisation and neoliberalism must be the subject of debate by all who support the idea. This debate should set out to clarify the Renaissance's stance on globalisation and neoliberalism. Those who believe that the African Renaissance should challenge globalisation and neoliberalism need to debate the way in which such a challenge is to take place. Those who believe that the African Renaissance must take place within the context of globalisation and neoliberalism must debate how the African Renaissance is to advance its goals within this framework. Thus far, there has been more rhetoric than debate. Some questions that need to be debated are the following:

- Is it possible to challenge globalisation and neoliberalism?
- If so, how should this challenge take place?
- If Africa chooses to challenge globalisation and neoliberalism, what kind of development path, if any, should Africa follow?
- If Africa is to develop within the context of globalisation and neoliberalism, is it possible for Africa to abide by the rules of an inequitable system, but still manage to slowly make the system more equitable?

The limited scope of this study makes it impossible for these questions to be addressed, but the African Renaissance should surely be investigating questions such as these and putting forward various answers which can vie for acceptance. There is no evidence that

any concentrated attempt to answer these questions is being made by those at the forefront of the call for an African Renaissance.

5.3.3 Challenging the Assumptions Implicit in Western Discourses on Democracy and Development

Previously it was indicated that there are certain assumptions implicit in Western discourses on democracy and development. Three assumptions were discussed: empiricism, universalism, and the idea that there is one value system appropriate for all. If the African Renaissance is to challenge Western discourses, it must challenge not only the content of these discourses, but also the assumptions inherent in these discourses.

5.3.3.1   Empiricism

There is no evidence that the African Renaissance challenges empiricism. This lack of a challenge of empiricism means that the Western understanding of democracy and development as measurable and quantifiable, is not challenged. The absence of a challenge implies acceptance of the methods by which the West measures democracy and development, even though these methods can be shown to have Western biases. Without such a challenge, the African Renaissance cannot open space for the articulation of different types of democracy and different ways of measuring democracy, nor for the articulation of different understandings of development and different ways of measuring development. If the empirical indicators used to measure democracy and development favour the West, then African countries are only likely to score better on such measures if they become more Westernised. Thus the absence of a challenge to empiricism as part of the African Renaissance is a serious shortcoming.

Some African Renaissance discourse uses the empirical indicators accepted by the West in assessing Africa's progress towards the realisation of the Renaissance. The NEPAD document serves as an example (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). It uses empirical measures to compare Africa to the West and to conclude that Africa is in a disadvantaged situation. For example, in the introduction, poverty in Africa is defined as living on less than US $1 a day, and when discussing *The Strategy for Achieving Sustainable Development in the 21st Century*, NEPAD's goals are indicated as being the International Development Goals (IDGs) which are all empirical measures.   While

statistics may have some utility in measuring progress towards a particular goal, the question is what goal do they measure progress towards? If the measures mainly relate to empirical measures of individual material well-being, then an acceptance of the understanding of development as being the achievement of material well-being is implied by the use of these empirical measures. No empirical measures can be drawn up to accurately measure spiritual, cultural, social or emotional well-being. This means that the reliance upon empirical measures implies a belief that material well-being is more important that other types of well-being and that development is primarily the improvement of the material well-being of individuals. The African Renaissance's acceptance of empirical measures as indicators of levels of development thus implies an acceptance of a particular type of development.

5.3.3.2 Universalism

As indicated, the promotion of certain understandings of democracy and development as universal, inevitably implies that to become more democratic or more developed is to become more Westernised, as the West is already democratic and developed and there is only one way of understanding democracy and development. This makes a challenge to universalism vital for the African Renaissance.

Certain advocates of the African Renaissance have stressed the importance of an African form of democracy and an African form of development, implying that there is no universal form of democracy or development. For example, Kwaa Prah (1999:60) warns that Africa's development cannot be based on 'unbridled cultural borrowings' from outside, but that development in Africa will only be meaningful if it is based upon African history and culture. As indicated, Mbeki and others have argued that democracy in Africa must be adjusted to African specifics, implying a rejection of the idea that there is one universal form of democracy.

However, resistance to universalism by the African Renaissance is very faint. While comments like those mentioned above are few and far between, as previously indicated there are many comments regarding the importance of democracy and development in Africa which do not add any comments regarding the type (or types) of democracy and development which is suitable for Africa. Support for the democratisation and development of Africa within the context of the African Renaissance, is thus rarely

166

associated with a challenge to the universalism implicit in Western discourses. In fact, many African Renaissance discourses imply some kind of universalism.

There is an implication of universalism in the choice of the term 'Renaissance' by current advocates of African renewal. The assumption is that Europe had a Renaissance with particular characteristics and particular results and that Africa must emulate this Renaissance to achieve what Europe achieved. Thus European experience is made universally applicable and universally desirable. When addressing the United Nations University, Mbeki (1998a) said that the African Renaissance hopes 'to *emulate* the great human achievements of the earlier Renaissance of the Europe of the 15th and 16th centuries' (emphasis added). This hope that Africa can copy European experience, suggests that Africa will experience what Europe has experienced, albeit several centuries later - Africa is on the same path (a universal path) as Europe, but it is a few centuries behind. Ramose (2000:56) strongly criticises this approach saying that it opens up the possibility for the West to argue '"You are still in the renaissance. We have long made the transition to man as a rational animal .... We are entitled to universal leadership"'. Ramose (2000:58) goes on to say that the idea of a Renaissance denies Africa the right to its own terms and its own experiences, and is a 'covert adherence to the linear interpretation of history' and 'concedes prominence and leadership to the North'.

As shown earlier, the assumptions of modernisation theory frequently appear in African Renaissance discourse. The acceptance of the assumptions of modernisation theory also reflects a concession to universalism, as modernisation theory presents a universal path of development, with Western countries leading the way.

The understanding of civilisation inherent in many African Renaissance discourses, and especially in NEPAD discourse, is another example of the acceptance of universalism. According to the NEPAD document, Africa is the 'cradle of humankind' - thus the beginning of civilisation was in Africa (Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). However, because of various factors, Africa's contribution to 'world culture' has been limited. NEPAD proposes that this period of Africa being unable to contribute meaningfully to 'world culture' has now come to an end, and that Africa is now going to be placed 'on a pedestal of equal partnership in advancing human civilisation'. South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma (2000c) also embraces this idea of a world civilisation, describing the African Renaissance as 'a historical movement that has the potential to restore Africa

to her former glory, at the cutting edge of world civilisation.' The implication in all of this is that while world civilisation began in Africa, Africa has fallen behind and now needs to be revived so that Africa, like the other continents, can contribute to the single universal 'human civilisation'.

While there is some suggestion within African Renaissance discourse, that Africa should find its own path to an improved future, there is also much to suggest that the African Renaissance seeks to imitate Western experience, and thus implicitly accepts universalism, seeing only one route to democracy and development, and only one acceptable type of democracy and development. The African Renaissance must provide a forum for debate regarding Africa's development and democratisation, rather than just pushing for African to follow the path of regions seen as more democratic and more developed. The African Renaissance has not as yet provided such a forum.

5.3.3.3   One value system for all

Western discourses ignore alternative value systems in their assumption that the Western value system is appropriate for all. This assumption is not always immediately evident, but as shown, it is implicit in many Western discourses on Africa's democratisation and development. This assumption acts in such a way as to maintain current power relations between the West and Africa, and must therefore be challenged by the African Renaissance. Is such a challenge apparent?

On the surface it appears that the African Renaissance does present at least some challenge to the idea that there is one value system which is appropriate for the whole world, and that this value system is the Western value system. The stress that is placed upon the importance of *ubuntu* in the African Renaissance is an example of an apparent challenge to this idea. As previously indicated, *ubuntu* is seen as an important part of the African Renaissance. This embracing of *ubuntu* can be seen as a challenge to the attempted hegemony of the Western value system.

This challenge must be commended, but at the same time it must be acknowledged that this challenge has sometimes been only superficial. It is not enough to make some statement of loyalty to a particular value system, if the implications related to that value system are not carried through. Several discussions on the African Renaissance suggest

that African values and Western values can co-exist unproblematically. Deputy Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Tim Thahane's (1999) address to the African-Asian society compares Africa to Asia. He admires Asian countries for managing to maintain their cultures while still embracing globalisation and concludes that Africa too can embrace globalisation without having to sacrifice its culture (Thahane 1999). This argument is illogical: just because *Asian* countries did not find their culture incompatible with globalisation does not automatically mean that *African* culture is compatible with globalisation and the values being promoted by globalisation.

As mentioned earlier, Murobe (2000:43-67) regards neoliberalism and African cultural values as incompatible. He goes on to suggest that the African Renaissance must then be seen as being incompatible with the acceptance of globalisation and neoliberalism. He argues that globalisation promotes neoliberalism which leads to a 'perpetual state of competition in pursuit of self-interest'. Through careful arguing, Murobe suggests that neoliberalism is premised upon the promotion of self-interest, individualism and competitiveness. But this approach is not compatible with African tradition, based on *ubuntu*. Taking this argument a step further, it is possible to contend that the African Renaissance, if it is understood to involve the revival of African culture, is not compatible with neoliberalism and thus, also not with globalisation because globalisation promotes neoliberalism. Despite this, many African Renaissance discourses embraces both African culture and neoliberal reforms, apparently not seeing this as problematic. Such African Renaissance discourse does not acknowledge any tension between the value system being promoted by neoliberalism, and African value systems.

Obviously, there are many questions that can be raised here. Is the successful adoption of neoliberal practices dependent upon the concurrent adoption of a particular value system? Is it necessary for a culture to promote individualism, the pursuit of self-interest and competitiveness, in order for neoliberal reforms to be successful? Can a single African value system be postulated and if so what are the values promoted by such a value system? What is *ubuntu* exactly: does it apply to all African societies and does it really reject individualism, the pursuit of self-interest and competitiveness? These questions should be debated within the context of the Renaissance, but this debate is not taking place. The African Renaissance began as a call for Africans to be proud of their heritage, history and culture, but subsequent to this call, the Renaissance began to speak about Africa's economic and political revival and began to shape this revival within the

context of globally accepted norms. NEPAD appears to unproblematically accept certain tenets of neoliberalism and to endorse neoliberal values. There is no indication that this may be incompatible with African culture or that this involves a submission to a value system not premised on African history or African experience.

5.4 ALTERNATIVE READINGS OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

Examining the African Renaissance is a confusing and difficult task, enhanced by the fact that there is a diversity of ideas and emotions attached to the African Renaissance. The African Renaissance is not a coherent response to Western discourses, but a variety of different responses grouped around the vague idea of Africa's renewal. Because of these different ways of seeing the Renaissance, several 'readings' of the Renaissance are identified so as to provide some clarity to the broad discourses being voiced within its context. Three readings are identified here, although it may be possible to identify several more.

5.4.1 Reading A: A Courageous Challenge to Western Discourses

This reading of the African Renaissance sees it as a movement which rejects the image that the West presents of Africa: an image of a useless, helpless, hopeless continent and draws on Africa's proud past to assert that Africa has its own strengths and that Africa's future can be a future filled with opportunities. Reading A of the African Renaissance challenges Western values and Western social, economic and political narratives, and encourages Africans to forge their way to a future situation that is uniquely African. Writers who encourage the promotion of African culture and a future based on African history and traditions, can be considered to support this reading of the African Renaissance. Some advocates of this reading include Ntuli (1998; 1999), Dladla (1997) and, arguably, Vale and Maseko (1998).

Earlier, the multiple conceptualisations of the African Renaissance such as the globalist, Africanist, Pan-Africanist and culturalist conceptualisations of the African Renaissance were examined. The Africanist and culturalist conceptualisations can both be considered to be examples of Reading A of the African Renaissance. These two conceptualisations reject Western dominance and argue for the development of African alternatives to the social, economic and political paradigms being promoted by the West. Various

components of the African Renaissance were also identified. The components which form the core of Reading A are the rediscovery of African history and culture; and African self-definition and self-determination. This reading of the African Renaissance is overshadowed by the readings discussed below, especially with the articulation of NEPAD, but the existence of Reading A is encouraging and shows that there are Africans who are brave enough to encourage the whole of Africa to choose a destiny, or several destinies, different to that being promoted by the West as universally suitable and desirable. Reading A, however, runs the risk of being usurped by those who lack the courage to challenge the West.

5.4.2 Reading B: A Weak Echo of Western Sounds

Some critics read the African Renaissance as being a weak echo of ideas originating elsewhere. This version of the African Renaissance can be considered to be a disguised effort to Westernise Africa. As mentioned earlier, some critics - amongst others, Bankie (1998) and Mahlangu (in Kornegay & Landsberg 1998:36) - feel that the African Renaissance is a dilution of the struggle. It is a resignation to the superiority of Western culture, Western forms of government, Western economic systems and the Western lifestyle in general. If this is what the African Renaissance is, then talk of rediscovering African culture and of encouraging Africans to be proud of being Africa, is only a superficial attempt to make the Renaissance project sound more politically correct. The implicit acceptance of modernisation theory and universalism as well as the open promotion of political and economic structures originating in the West, suggest that this particular reading of the African Renaissance is nothing more than the acceptance that the West is the model to the rest of the world of how to develop, how to govern and how to achieve prosperity.

There are several critics who have believe that the African Renaissance is nothing more than an echo of sounds emerging in the West. For example, Ramose (2000) calls the African Renaissance 'a northbound gaze' saying that it is an example of 'the fixation of the African gaze to the North' and that this fixation implies a concession of prominence and leadership to the North. Other critics have noted the ease at which the goals of the African Renaissance match Western countries' policies towards Africa. A case in point is Christianson (1997:27) who contends that the African Renaissance 'meshes comfortably

with [the vision for Africa] of the US' and notes that many critics are perplexed by the closeness with which the African Renaissance matches US policy.

It has been noted that sections of NEPAD are disturbingly similar to documents and policies originating in the West. Mbeki (2001c) insists that MAP is the 'product of independent African thought' rather than a perspective 'elaborated by consultants from the developed world', but an examination of Western policy documents on Africa suggests otherwise. In 1997, the US launched the Africa Trade Initiative. There are several similarities between the US's Africa Trade Initiative and Africa's NEPAD. A comparison of a speech by former US President Bill Clinton in which he announced the Africa Trade Initiative, and the NEPAD document indicate these similarities (Clinton 1997; Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa 2001d). Both speak about partnership. Both identify democratisation and the increased acceptance of market economies as positive developments on the African continent. Both see increased market access, the provision of technical assistance, increased private investment, continued aid, and debt relief as vital for African renewal. Both initiatives see partnership as involving shared responsibilities and mutual benefits, and the benefits for the West are seen as the same: increased markets and decreased risk of disease, terrorism and environmental degradation.

A critical examination of the MAP conducted by *Noseweek* (2001:12-13) suggests that British political advisors played an integral role in the formulation of the MAP. *Noseweek* reports that some of Tony Blair's top advisors were apparently involved in the drafting of the MAP, and also suggests that there are significant similarities between a British government paper entitled *British Africa Partnership - Informal Paper* and the MAP. The reading of the African Renaissance being promoted by NEPAD may be nothing more than a weak echo of Western sounds.

5.4.3 Reading C: An Attempt to Make the Best of a Bad Situation

The two readings discussed above are two extremes, but there is a third reading which fits somewhere in between. This reading sees the African Renaissance as an attempt to make the best of a bad situation. Africa is marginalised and exploited and has been for centuries. The emerging new global order does not appear to be making the world any more equal or fair than it was in the past. Global inequities are increasing along with

global integration. Given this reality, it seems that some advocates of an African Renaissance have observed that Africa's options are limited and that the old idiom of being caught 'between the devil and the deep blue sea' may appropriately describe Africa's current situation. Some supporters of an African Renaissance appear to see Africa as having two choices: remain on the margins of a global world (and continue being exploited and excluded); or accept the global 'rules' articulated by non-Africans and conform to these in exchange for the opportunity to attempt to fight its way from the periphery towards the centre in a world where the odds appear stacked against Africa. Reading C accepts the inevitability of globalisation (broadly defined) and believes that Africa cannot extricate itself from this process and all that accompanies it (including neoliberalism, capitalism, and increasing global inequities). Africa's best option, then, is to try to make the best of a bad situation.

Arguably, much of the South African government's discourse on the African Renaissance may fall under Reading C. Even NEPAD could be read to be an example of an approach which grudgingly accepts the inevitability of Westernisation, rather than an approach which eagerly encourages Westernisation. It could be that NEPAD only grudgingly accepts global rules, but disguises this reluctance because the West's support for NEPAD is essential for its success. The best example of Reading C of the African Renaissance is the speech given by Thabo Mbeki (2001b) at the Third African Renaissance Festival. This speech clearly illustrates the reluctant acceptance of 'global rules' out of a belief that Africa has no better option. It is possible to read NEPAD as being part of this version of the Renaissance or as part of Reading B.

5.4.4 Assessment of the Readings

What all three readings above have in common is that they seek to achieve the renewal or rebirth of Africa - the African Renaissance. Where they differ is in their interpretation of what is meant by the renewal or rebirth of Africa, and in their proposed route to the Renaissance. Reading A sees rebirth as involving a renewal of interest in Africa's past and the use of this past is shaping a future for Africa that is true to African traditions and cultures. Reading B takes the renewal of Africa to be the process of encouraging Africa to achieve what the 'superior' regions of the world have achieved. The route to renewal is seen as dependent upon the help of these regions and the following of a path similar to the path already followed by these regions. Reading C takes the renewal of Africa to be

an ending of Africa's situation of marginalisation and exploitation. This reading believes that in this globalising world, the empowerment of Africa can only occur according to the global rules dictated by the West, and so Africa must try to best play at these rules, and only later, if at all, try to change these rules. The existence of these very different readings, and possibly other readings as well, indicates that the African Renaissance is an umbrella concept which has various connotations. Currently, it seems that the first reading is receiving less attention, while the last two readings appear to dominate. Recent discourse on Africa's renewal appears to abandon any sustained, comprehensive challenge to Western discourses, in favour of trying to win the West's approval and achieve success as defined and epitomised by the West. This is especially evident in the NEPAD document which appears to accept Western definitions of democracy, development, success, progress and related concepts and which depends upon the West's support for its success. Supporters of Reading A of the Renaissance need to become more vocal in their support for a Renaissance which recognises the importance of a challenge to Western discourses and which courageously pioneers a path to a future which allows Africans the opportunity to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

5.5   CONCLUSION

The African Renaissance's response to dominant Western discourses is difficult to determine. While there is some challenge to some Western discourses, many discourses are left unchallenged. When responding to discourses on the African situation, African Renaissance discourses challenge the idea of Africa as a hopeless, ailing continent, plagued by problems it can never address. In place of the image of Africa presented by dominant Western discourses, the African Renaissance posits a hopeful, healing Africa, which has the capability to overcome the obstacles in its way. This challenge to Western discourses on the African situation is, however, compromised by the African Renaissance's ambiguous response to whether or not Africa is dependent upon the West for a propitious future. Talk of 'partnership' appears to suggest a degree of dependence upon the resources and ideas of the West for Africa's recovery. This concurs with, rather than challenges Western discourses.

When responding to dominant Western discourses on democratisation and development in Africa, the African Renaissance falls far short of challenging these discourses or their underlying assumptions. As shown, almost all African Renaissance discourses on

democracy and development endorse Western conceptualisations of democracy and development and do not see this endorsement as in any way problematic. The assumptions of empiricism, universalism, and the universal appropriateness of one value system are implicit in dominant Western discourses on democracy and development, but none of these assumptions are adequately challenged by African Renaissance discourse.

When assessing the African Renaissance's response to dominant Western discourses on Africa, various readings of the African Renaissance can be identified. Three readings are identified and the extent to which each provides a challenge to dominant Western discourses is indicated. Reading A provides a challenge to Western discourses, but it is this reading which is least dominant in understandings of the Renaissance today. As long as this Reading is overshadowed by Readings B and C, the Renaissance's challenge to dominant Western discourses will remain inadequate.