# CHAPTER 6: EVALUATION

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

[The African Renaissance] must unleash a thorough interrogation of our own Eurocentric scholarship, to shake it from its contented hegemonic pose into an arena of meaningful contestation.

On the basis of this quote from Ntuli (1998:18) it was earlier argued that the confrontation of Western discourses ought to be part of the African Renaissance. This dissertation has carefully advanced this argument and then gone on to examine Western discourses and the African Renaissance's response to these discourses, in order to determine whether or not such a confrontation has truly taken place. In conclusion, an evaluation is now made of the response provided by the African Renaissance to dominant Western discourses on Africa.

## 6.2 SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENTS

Africa is a marginalised and exploited continent, pitied and ridiculed by the rest of the world. In comparison to other regions of the world, Africa has little power and influence. The overview of the relations between Africa and the West indicates that the last few centuries have been a period where the West has had considerable power and influence over the lives of Africans. Over the years, the relations between the West and Afica have changed considerably, but still today Africa remains a region with relatively little power. The idea of an African Renaissance acknowledges this situation.

The contemporary world with its sophisticated communication and travel systems have made it possible for academics and journalists to comment on the political situation of regions all over the world. Western academics and journalists do not limit their focus to the Western world, but also examine and analyse other regions of the world, including Africa. If discourse is taken to mean a body of knowledge, then these academics and journalists can be said to be producing discourses on Africa.

Critical theorists and postmodernist writers have provided insight into what the term 'discourse' can be taken to mean and how discourses function. Contributions made by

these thinkers challenge the idea that it is possible to provide factual, unbiased, neutral, empirical discourses. Rather discourses emanate from a particular position and are premised upon particular assumptions and ways of understanding reality. The contributions made by critical theorists and postmodernist writers also illuminate the relationship between knowledge and power, arguing that the two cannot be considered to be independent of each other. Rather, it must be accepted that power influences the production of knowledge and that knowledge can also affect power. Accepting this, discourses, as bodies of knowledge, can be said to be intimately related to power. In Foucault's (in Lemert & Gillan 1982:40) words 'It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together'.

An acceptance of this understanding of the relatedness of discourse and power, changes the way the question of Africa's relative powerlessness is approached. If discourses are related to power, then it can be argued that Africa's situation of relative powerlessness is both reflected and perpetuated by dominant Western discourses on Africa. This study accepts this understanding of discourse and power and so argues that a desire to change current power relations necessitates the expression of different discourses. If a movement wishes to challenge power relations, the movement must also challenge dominant discourses and promote the production of alternative discourses. The African Renaissance has as one of its stated goals the empowerment of Africa, and so it is argued that the African Renaissance must challenge dominant Western discourses which reflect and perpetuate current power relations, and encourage the production of alternative discourses.

Several dominant Western political discourses produced in Western academic and journalistic sources from 1990 to the present have been scrutinised. The examination of Western discourses begins with an analysis of Western discourses on the African situation. An assessment of these discourses brings to light certain themes. Firstly, Africa is presented as being an ailing continent. This labelling of Africa as diseased forms part of a dichotomy of sickness and health, where the characteristics Africa are seen as the characteristics of illness and the characteristics of the West as those of health.

Another theme evident in Western discourses is one that portrays Africa as a continent with various inherent weaknesses. Africa's situation of ill-health and inherent weakness is shown to result in a need for help from the West. These discourses are analysed and

problematised, showing how Western discourses on the African situation both reflect and perpetuate current power relations between Africa and the West.

Western discourses on democratisation and development are also examined and it is shown that these discourses are not neutral reflections of an empirical reality, but are founded on particular assumptions. Western discourses on democratisation and development indicate an implicit acceptance of empiricism, universalism, and the existence of a single value system applicable to all. The analysis of these discourses and their implicit assumptions illustrates the way in which discourse can serve as a juncture where power and knowledge meet.

The analysis of Western discourses on the African situation and on democratisation and development strengthens the argument that a challenge to Western discourses by the African Renaissance is necessary. The necessity of such a challenge is clearly evidenced, as it is shown that Western discourses do indeed not only reflect, but also perpetuate current power relations between the West and Africa.

Once the argument that the African Renaissance should challenge Western discourses has been put forward and reinforced by the analysis of Western discourses; it is necessary to carefully explore the concept 'African Renaissance'. The various meanings and components of the African Renaissance are discussed. This is followed by an assessment of the degree to which the African Renaissance challenges Western discourses. The discussion and assessment of the African Renaissance begins to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the dissertation. Using this discussion and assessment, it is now possible to comprehensively address the research questions.

## 6.3   RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research question put forward at the outset was 'What is the African Renaissance's response to dominant Western political discourses on Africa?' It is assumed that the Renaissance by its very nature provides some kind of response to Western discourses, whether implicitly or explicitly. What the research question seeks to discover, is the nature of this response. A number of further research questions arose out of the original question, namely: 'Does the African Renaissance challenge Western discourses?'; 'Has the African Renaissance the potential to provide a sustained, critical challenge to Western

discourses'; and 'How can the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses be improved?'

In setting out to answer these questions, a particular process was followed. Firstly, the argument that the African Renaissance should challenge Western discourses was presented. Secondly, several Western discourses on Africa were examined so as to support the argument that Western discourses on Africa need to be challenged, and so as to provide some examples of the type of discourse which needs to be challenged. Thirdly, the African Renaissance was carefully examined. Finally, Western discourses and discourses produced by the African Renaissance were compared in order to establish the extent to which the African Renaissance challenges Western discourses. On the basis of this analysis, the research questions as posed can be answered.

## 6.3.1  Does the African Renaissance Challenge Western Discourses?

The African Renaissance has responded to and challenged certain dominant Western political discourses on Africa. The African Renaissance rejects the pessimistic outlook provided by many Western discourses, and asserts that Africa is a continent of hope and a continent with a bright and prosperous future. It also rejects the idea that Africa is inherently inferior and believes that Africa has the potential to find a way out of its current dismal situation and to chart a course to an auspicious future.

Although the African Renaissance confidently challenges certain Western discourses, it is silent on some discourses; provides ambiguous responses to others; and appears to agree with the West on several discourses, even though it could be argued that such agreement is disadvantageous to Africa.

The African Renaissance appears to be silent, or at least quiet, in its response to the Western assumption of empiricism inherent in many Western discourses. This is a serious shortcoming of the African Renaissance. The African Renaissance provides ambiguous responses to Western discourses on 'helping' Africa and on the Western assumptions of universalism and the appropriateness of the Western value system for all. It is not clear to what extent its proponents believe that Africa is capable of being its own saviour and master of its own destiny. On the one hand, Renaissance discourse asserts that Africans must put an end to years of submission and subjugation to the West, and

must determine its own future. On the other hand, Renaissance discourse, especially the recent articulation of the NEPAD, regards Western help as vital for the success of the Renaissance. The African Renaissance's response regarding the Western assumption of universalism and the existence of a single value system appropriate for all, is also ambiguous. While some comments made by African Renaissance proponents appear to challenge universalism, the discourse also implicitly accepts universalism. In terms of the African Renaissance's response to the Western assumption of the appropriateness of one value system for all, the African Renaissance promotes *ubuntu* as the value system underlying the Renaissance, but the implications of *ubuntu* do not appear to be carried through to all aspects of the Renaissance and Western values appear to be implicitly accepted by some readings of the Renaissance, making the Renaissance's response to the idea of a single value system ambiguous.

The African Renaissance essentially agrees with Western discourses on democratisation and development. It is agreed that Africa must democratise and develop, and the definitions of democratisation and development accepted by the West, appear for the most part, to also be accepted by African Renaissance discourse.

Thus the question 'Does the African Renaissance challenge Western discourses on Africa?' can be answered by saying, 'Yes, the African Renaissance has challenged some Western discourses, but not all, and the challenge provided is not always coherent or adequate'.

## 6.3.2  Has the African Renaissance the Potential to Provide a Sustained Critical Challenge to Western discourses?

The African Renaissance, like several of its predecessors, has considerable potential to become an arena for the challenge of dominant discourses and the articulation of alternatives. However none of the Renaissance's predecessors managed to reach their potential, and the African Renaissance is also not currently realising its potential in this respect. Considering the various readings of the African Renaissance, Reading A begins to realise the Renaissance's potential to provide a comprehensive and courageous challenge to Western discourses. The other two readings of the African Renaissance compromise this challenge by acceding to Western discourses. The recent promotion of NEPAD is a worrying sign in terms of the African Renaissance's potential to challenge

Western discourses. The NEPAD appears to place far more value on winning the West's approval (and the accompanying investment), than on challenging Western discourses which perpetuate a power structure in which Africa is disadvantaged.

The question regarding the African Renaissance's potential to provide a challenge to dominant Western discourses can thus be answered by saying that the African Renaissance has some potential to provide such a challenge, but currently does not appear to be realising this potential.

### 6.3.3  How can the African Renaissance's Response to Western Discourses be Improved?

In answer to this question a number of suggestions are made. Firstly, the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses could be improved by a recognition of the necessity of a challenge to Western discourses. Currently, there is little explicit recognition by promoters of the African Renaissance of how necessary it is to carefully analyse Western discourses and then challenge these discourses where they are shown to stand it the way of the goals of the African Renaissance.

Secondly, the African Renaissance's response could be improved by the cultivation of a critical stance towards Western discourses. The way in which power and knowledge are inter-related is not self-evident. The ways in which Western discourses reflect and perpetuate power relations are, therefore, not immediately obvious and so careful critical analysis of discourses produced by Western academics and journalists is necessary. The African Renaissance could be improved if such a critical stance was encouraged.

Thirdly, the African Renaissance's response could be improved if it strove to provide an arena where alternative discourses can be produced and debated. The African Renaissance has not thus far provided such an arena. The challenge to Western discourses must include a confrontation of Western discourses with African alternatives. It is not argued that a single, comprehensive alternative plan for Africa's future should be formulated but rather that space should be created for the production of several alternatives, which should be examined and debated. Thus, the argument is not that the dominant discourses on Africa emanating from the West should be shown to be 'incorrect' or 'false' and then replaced by a 'true' representation of Africa and the African situation.

Rather, it is stressed that a variety of alternatives should be cultivated and then critically debated. The African Renaissance would be greatly improved if it provided the space for the cultivation and critical debate of such alternatives.

Finally, the African Renaissance's response to Western discourses on Africa would be improved if a more self-critical stance was adopted by its proponents. The African Renaissance should be reflexive by continually examining the discourses it produces and assessing the extent to which it remains true to its ideal concept. This would mean that the African Renaissance could continually improve and adapt to changes occurring in Africa and the world. The African Renaissance must not adopt a defensive approach which rejects any criticism given of it, but rather should embrace any criticism which can assist in improving the its ability to realise its goals and perhaps even in the reformulation of these goals.

## 6.3.4  <u>What is the African Renaissance's Response to Western Discourses?</u>

Having answered the research questions which flow out of the main research question, it is now possible to attempt to answer the main research question by providing a description of the African Renaissance's response to dominant Western discourses. In answering this question, it is evident that there is not really one single response to Western discourses provided by the African Renaissance. Three alternative readings of the African Renaissance were provided each of which provides a different response to Western discourses. Thus the answer to the main research question depends upon which reading of the African Renaissance is most prominent. If Reading A is most prominent then the African Renaissance provides a courageous challenge to Western discourses. If Reading B is most prominent then the African Renaissance is a travesty. If Reading C is most prominent then the African Renaissance has compromised its goals out of doubt that they can be fully realised, but not completely forgotten these goals. Unfortunately it seems that Readings B and C overshadow Reading A at the moment, meaning that the response currently provided by African Renaissance discourse, does not provide sufficient challenge to dominant Western discourses on Africa.

The African Renaissance could be described as a variety of voices some of which provide a limited challenge to Western discourses, while others accede to Western discourses. The challenge provided by the Renaissance is thus a faint, ambiguous and compromised

challenge. Pitika Ntuli (1998:18) calls on Africans to 'shake [Eurocentric scholarship] from its contented hegemonic pose', but thus far the African Renaissance has not even caused Western discourses to tremor, and has certainly not shaken them from their position of hegemony. The tensions, ambiguities and compromises in the Renaissance need to be dealt with in order to allow the Renaissance to provide a clear, confident challenge to Western discourses.

## 6.4 <u>LIMITATIONS</u>

It is necessary to acknowledge several possible limitations of this study. The identification of such limitations is necessitated by the choice of postmodernist critical theory as a theoretical framework. Five limitations are identified. No doubt several other critical comments can be made, but the identification of these five limitations and the explanation as to why it was impossible to avoid them, is necessary in order to provide some defence of the obvious criticisms that can be made of this dissertation.

The first limitation relates to the use of postmodernist critical theory in this dissertation. There is a degree of irony in the choice of postmodernist critical theory as a theoretical framework for this topic. This dissertation argues that the African Renaissance should challenge Western discourses and present African alternatives. However, this argument is advanced by making use of a set of theories which emerged in the West and which have primarily focused on the Western situation. Using a collection of Western theories to encourage the challenge of Western discourses is certainly problematic. In defence of the use of postmodernist critical theory, it must be said that despite the irony in the selection of a Western theory to present the argument that Western dominance must be resisted, this dissertation has demonstrated the usefulness of postmodernist critical theory in application to the African situation. Without the perspectives provided by postmodernist critical theory on discourse, it would not have been possible to effectively present the argument that has been put forward here. The Western origins of postmodernist critical theory do not invalidate the usefulness of this theory outside of the Western context, just as it can be hoped that the perspectives provided by the African Renaissance could at a later stage be useful in analysis of regions of the world other than Africa. Nevertheless, a theoretical perspective originating in Africa may have been more appropriate.

A second limitation also relates to the use of postmodernist critical theory. This dissertation asserts that the African Renaissance should put forward a particular response to dominant Western political discourses - one which calls these discourses into question and challenges them. By saying this, it is implied that a particular type of Renaissance discourse (one that challenges rather than accedes to Western discourses) should dominate. It can be argued that from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory, the dominance of any reading of the African Renaissance in any context, must be resisted, just as the dominance of Western discourses must be resisted, because dominance of any kind, stifles the development of alternatives. This means that there is an unavoidable tension in arguing that one set of dominant discourses should be challenged by another discourse, which could in turn become the dominant discourse which would need to be resisted by a new alternative. Any dominant African Renaissance discourse could be subjected to the same kind of critical review as has been adopted here in examining dominant Western discourses on Africa. This tension is unavoidable, but must be acknowledged.

A third limitation is that only a limited overview of Western discourses on Africa has been provided. The overview is limited in that only written academic and journalistic discourses produced from 1990 to the present are examined. It is also limited in that its assessment of the discourses chosen could have been more extensive. A very comprehensive overview of Western discourses on a variety of aspects of African politics would certainly have been useful and could further illustrate the extent to which Western discourses on Africa reflect and perpetuate power relations between the West and Africa. Since there is little research on Western discourses from a postmodernist critical theory perspective, it was not possible to draw on already existing analyses in order to present the argument that Western discourses reflect and perpetuate current power relations. Consequently, a brief analysis of Western discourses on Africa from a postmodernist critical theory perspective was provided. Although this analysis is not as comprehensive as would have been ideal, it provides enough support for the argument advanced here.

A fourth limitation relates to the timing of this research. The current articulation of an African Renaissance is still relatively new. The idea of a Renaissance is still in its formative years with different versions vying for acceptance. The relative newness of the concept means that there is not a wealth of critical analyses to draw upon in this research. It also means that the Renaissance is being analysed without the wisdom of hindsight. It

may have been easier to have waited and then to have analysed the African Renaissance retrospectively.  Future analyses of the African Renaissance may be able to better answer the research questions posed in this dissertation.  However, the advantage of doing this research now is that its findings could still contribute to the path taken by the Renaissance rather than just retrospectively suggesting what should have been done.

A fifth limitation is this dissertation's dependence upon the speeches of South African government officials in defining and describing the Renaissance.   If the African Renaissance is a continental movement then surely an analysis of the Renaissance should depend on the writing and speeches of African philosophers, academics, government officials and others from across the whole continent.  However, the current call for African renewal originated in South Africa and has most often been articulated by South African government officials.  The speeches of South African government officials regarding the Renaissance are also more readily available than the speeches of government officials of other African countries.   These are the reasons for the dependence on the perspectives of South African government officials.  The lack of available documentation on the Renaissance from non-South Africans also reflects a lack of continent-wide support for the Renaissance which is a shortcoming of the Renaissance. However, the dependence on South African government officials can still be criticised for narrowing this analysis and its relevance.   Hence, an analysis of non-South African Renaissance discourse should be a future research agenda.

## 6.5   RESEARCH AGENDA

There are a number of research questions arising out of the argument presented in this dissertation.  These questions could provide avenues for further research.

One question that could provide a further avenue for research is 'How useful are other aspects of postmodernist critical theory to the African context?'  The usefulness of postmodernist critical theory's conceptualisation of discourse to the African context has been demonstrated.  Further research should be undertaken to determine the usefulness of other aspects of postmodernist critical theory, such as textual strategies and discourse ethics, in the analysis of the African continent.

Another research avenue would be a more comprehensive analysis or analyses of Western discourses on the African situation. Little, if any, research has been done on how discourse (as defined by postmodernist critical theory) is related to power in the context of relations between Africa and the West. Analyses of Western discourses on a number of aspects of African politics could be undertaken to determine the role played by discourse in reflecting and perpetuating current power relations between Africa and the West. Since this study was limited to Western academic and journalistic discourses produced between 1990 and the present, the analysis of other types of discourse (such as public opinion, television discourse, cinema discourse, etc.) as well as discourse from different time periods should be pursued.

A variety of additional research questions regarding the African Renaissance could also provide avenues for future research. There has not yet been sufficient commentary and analysis of the Renaissance. The roots of the Renaissance, its goals and components could all be the subjects of extensive research. The recent articulation of the NEPAD introduces several new questions.

A further avenue relates to the argument put forward in this dissertation regarding the importance of confronting Western discourses with alternative discourses. If alternatives are to be presented, then more research will have to be done regarding the articulation of alternatives. If Western discourses on the African situation are to be challenged, then research needs to be done on alternative ways in which the African situation can be interpreted. If Western discourses on democratisation and development are to be confronted with African alternatives, then extensive research also needs to be done regarding what forms of government and socio-economic change are best suited to the African continent.

## 6.6  CONCLUSION

Today's world is one where the powerful appear to be wielding increasing influence over the fate of the powerless. The phenomenon of globalisation sees the increasing acceptance of one style of government, one economic system and one life-style. Resistance to this situation cannot only come from angry fundamentalists who have the courage to challenge Western hegemony by obliterating buildings but lack the compassion to care about the people who are destroyed in order to make this statement.

Africans can bear testimony to the destruction which earlier Western hegemony has brought as they struggle still to overcome the legacy of the slave trade and colonialism. The experience of the past should urge Africans to recognise the poverty of the 'solutions' the West urges them to accept, and to challenge contemporary Western hegemony by confronting it with alternatives. The production of these alternatives is vital not only for Africa's future, but also in order to create space for the production of further alternatives which are applicable to other regions and for the rejection of an understanding of reality which implies that all other interpretations of reality are illegitimate and untenable.

The calls for African renewal which have been made over the last century have all shown the potential to confront Western discourses with African alternatives, but none of these movements has managed to realise this potential. Once again, an idea which attempts to lift Africa out of subjugation to the West and see Africa's confidence restored has emerged. Unfortunately, the current idea of an African Renaissance seems to have been compromised by movements within it which appear to regard Western approval and Western investment as more important than any attempt to provide a substantial challenge to Western hegemony and to restore African dignity. The articulation of the NEPAD appears to accept Western assumptions and the superiority of Western life. The extent to which African Renaissance discourse appears to accept the desirability of the adoption of Western-style government, Western-style economic systems, and Western lifestyle in general indicates the incompleteness of the process of decolonisation in Africa. Africans may ostensibly have their own governments and their own states, but it seems that not all Africans have managed to discard the belief that what emerges from outside of Africa is superior to what originates within Africa, and that the more Africa becomes like the rest of the world (through industrialisation, modernisation and the like) the better for Africans.

This compromise of the goal of African renewal must be resisted. The African Renaissance needs to be led by Africans who have the courage and vision to see a way in which Africans can be pioneers of a path which leads to a future in which the lives of Africans can be lives of spiritual, cultural, social, emotional, political and material fulfilment. This path should be one that shows up the inadequacy of the 'cure' the West offers for Africa's 'illness' and rejects the meaningless, materialistic, spiritually void life being marketed as the only good and desirable life by Western discourses.