

# Possibilities and Contradictions of the African Renaissance

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## ABSTRACT (one page)

The concept of the African Renaissance has a checkered history, between colonialism in Senegal/France of the mid-20th century (Diop) and the new, democratic South Africa of the late 20th century (Mbeki). In both cases the concept seeks to correct a negative images of Africa and Africans, and to fight pessimism about Africa's future, but in very different contexts, and with very different reasons. However, in both cases the concept of African Renaissance suggests

1. that 'Africa' is a viable unit of socio-cultural and political identity, agency and analysis;
2. that some historical greatness that once was, but has been lost, will be regained.

Both propositions will be dealt with, and (despite the need to qualify them) will be found to contain a kernel of truth. Among the contradictions to be examined are:

- somatic versus cultural;
- African Renaissance: product of globalisation versus valid rendering of time-honoured African culture;
- culture versus economics, technology and intercontinental power relations;
- mother of humankind versus disaster continent;
- continental versus national (specifically, Africa as a whole versus South African hegemony in new trappings)
- continental versus global.

Under today's globalisation (which is, with preparatory periods of proto-globalisation, largely the cause of Africa's devastation anyway) any positive future for Africa, any possibility for an African Renaissance, means a change of Africa's relations with the wider world, where all these contradictions need to be addressed and somehow attenuated. That will be a long way ahead, but obvious steps towards such an African Renaissance include that both Africans, and the rest of the world, realise

1. how much, really, modern humankind's shared past is situated in Africa or is intertwined with Africa;
2. how extremely relative and myopic, in that respect, continental and somatic distinctions are;
3. how Africa, despite all its decline and internal strife today, is still a storehouse of images and symbols, values and practices that, far from being obsolete, can help the runaway societies of other continents to articulate their own ills, as well as possible alternatives and remedies.