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# Worldview and Culture

# Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa

Betsie Smith

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*The traditional worldview and culture of Africa was very different from that of the West today: man was at the center of a religious universe; time was generally felt to be under the control of man, not the reverse; the belief that the dead are able to influence the living enhanced reverence for the elderly; a belief in collectivism was far stronger than a belief in individualism. Colonialism, the Cold War, and three decades following independence upset the traditional African worldview and created bewildering frictions within the political, economic, and social wellbeing of the continent. The role of African leaders who have been exiled or have lived in the West is examined. Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki are regarded as contemporary African leaders who traverse the divide between the traditional Africa and the individualistic, materialistic, scientific West. For future African leaders, the test will be whether they are able to recognize and sustain the contradictions between the traditional and the modern. Finally, the author speculates that Africa's traditional worldview may enable it to make a valuable contribution to the world in the field of human relationship, giving the world a more human face.*

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Why did Charles Taylor, who has the blood of thousands on his hands, get a send-off that was fit for a holy man? Why do the Africans not condemn Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe in the strongest possible terms, invade the country, and affect a regime change, as was done in Iraq? These, and similar questions, are the daily bread of Africans who interact with non-Africans, particularly Americans, and these are legitimate questions. Why *was* Charles Taylor, president of Liberia until August 11, 2003, the man accused of causing constant instability and unspeakable suffering in his country and in the region for decades, allowed to resign? Furthermore, why, at the time of writing, has President Obasanju of Nigeria still ruled out his extradition to Sierra Leone to stand trial for war crimes?<sup>1</sup> Why did nobody mention anything about this ignominious record when his African counterparts took leave of him in a resignation ceremony<sup>2</sup> that was almost sacramental in character? The BBC reported that, "in a speech replete with religious and African imagery, he [President Taylor] described himself as a sacrificial lamb."<sup>3</sup> What motivated three other African presidents<sup>4</sup> to travel from all corners of the continent to preside over the ceremony as if they were his best friends? How could he be given the choice of asylum and exile in luxury<sup>5</sup> instead of meeting a fate similar to that meted out to Nicolai Ceaucescu?<sup>6</sup>

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Another situation begs similar questions. Why, until the time of writing this paper, have the leaders of Africa in one meeting after another and successive speeches, refused to reprimand their Zimbabwean counterpart publicly for the destruction of lives, livelihoods, and the economic well-being of his country? The heads of state of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in particular, have been accused of taking, what Brian Kagoro, Coordinator for the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, calls a “hear no evil and see no evil”<sup>7</sup> approach. Since President Mugabe accelerated his land reform policy, the calls for immediate and concerted action have become louder. The Commonwealth has suspended Zimbabwe indefinitely, Europe has come under scrutiny for allowing President Mugabe onto its soil to attend EU meetings, and differences between African and non-African leaders in how to tackle the issue have been played out with varying degrees of acrimony. Yet, with the exception of one or two, the African leaders appear to be bent on maintaining the non-confrontational course they have chosen. As recently as August 26, 2003, the SADC heads of state only “noted that the region continued to work with Zimbabwe to address its political and economic situation [and] reaffirmed the indivisibility of SADC and solidarity with Zimbabwe and that it will continue to work with the country in order to encourage and sustain the positive developments that are taking place in the search for lasting solutions.” The Summit also called for the lifting of sanctions and engagement “in a constructive dialogue with Zimbabwe.”<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, land owned by white farmers has been confiscated without compensation and with increasing violence, resulting in economic meltdown, unemployment, and human suffering.

Why the persistence in the collective, “soft” approach? Are there perhaps more than the very real geopolitical considerations to the pursuance by South Africa’s President Thabo Mbeki of a “quiet diplomacy” approach since the crisis started some four years ago? He has consistently refused to “issue instructions,” to “determine their destiny for them,” to “pose as high priests at the inquisition, hungry for the blood of the accused,” and to accept the position of “[r]ighteous and self-serving indignation, and the attitude of superior rectitude.”<sup>9</sup>

This paper is the result of reflections that started in a paper<sup>10</sup> I presented in 2000 at the last of three seminars that sought to learn lessons for dealing with conflicts in regions such as Africa and Asia. At issue was the NATO intervention in Kosovo in March 1999. I attempted to provide an insight into post-colonial, post-independence and post-Cold War Africa by looking into the role played by regional and sub-regional organizations to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. It soon became clear that the role of leaders within the context of African culture and psychology needed further analysis. Another paper followed in which more emphasis was put on the psychology of diplomacy in Africa.<sup>11</sup> A cursory exploration was done of African culture as backdrop to current methodologies of conflict prevention and resolution, both by organizations and a small sample of individual leaders. The article also contained the beginnings of a contemplation about the value, or liabilities, of including traditional methods in handling conflict situations in Africa.

It was Nelson Mandela himself who acknowledged that the structure and organization of early African societies (in South Africa) fascinated him and greatly influenced the evolution of his political outlook.<sup>12</sup> This paper is an attempt to explore this in some detail because I would suggest that there are sufficient indications that African leaders are increasingly sourcing their cultures and worldview to bring stability to their countries.

At issue here are questions like the following: What informs current leadership decisions and attitudes in Africa at a time when globalization seems to have infiltrated every aspect of ordinary life as well as the dynamics within and between states? Is the notion of a clash of civilizations applicable to Africa's dealings with the world and with the world's dealings with Africa? Where should the investigation start? Should contemporary Africa be placed within the context of colonialism and what followed, or should everything that came with and after colonialism rather be put within the context of what Steve Biko<sup>13</sup> termed "pure African culture," that is, the Africa that existed prior to colonialism? What *did* constitute "pure" Africa? Was Biko correct when he postulated: "in essence even today one can easily find the fundamental aspects of pure African culture in the present-day African"?<sup>14</sup> Could those remnants of culture and worldview that continue to manifest themselves in the way Africans think and behave hold the key to a more stable and prosperous continent? What underlies the African Renaissance?<sup>15</sup> Can Africa and its leadership be restored along the lines of practices and beliefs that appear to have survived many disruptions? In fact, is pre-colonial traditional culture not being reconstructed already? What are the prospects for success?

The "political interaction" method of analysis provides the most comprehensive and integrated, albeit complicated, approach to studying Africa's political life because it recognizes the importance of "official institutions," but casts the analytical net wider to examine the roles played by "individuals, social groups, traditional authority structures, trading networks, and multinational corporations" in political processes. And while "political factors account for many social and economic realities, [they are] themselves informed by historical, demographic, cultural, ecological, ideological, and international factors" that these analysts term a "set of transactions" by means of which "ongoing processes and future opportunities and constraints" can be uncovered and elucidated.<sup>16</sup> The implication should not be drawn that I am minimizing the importance of other factors, including those of more recent developments such as the war in Iraq, the American "war" on terrorism, and the outcome of the meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancun at the end of September 2003. Although I appreciate the entire scope of factors that impacts on leadership, for the purpose of this paper, the aspects of culture and worldview will receive most attention.

The cultural and philosophical composition of Africa is not monolithic, and generalizations about this continent are as unfair and unscientific as those made with respect to Islam, as Edward Said<sup>17</sup> argued so passionately and correctly. But the research for this paper has led me to contend that, despite obvious differences and even subtler peculiarities, Steve Biko's pronouncements remain legitimate in that there are certain characteristics of sub-Saharan African culture and worldview that are detectable in the approach by many of the continent's leaders to the dilemmas they face (or create).

Greater familiarity with the South African situation, as well as the undisputed if sometimes begrudged role it has assumed with respect to conflict resolution on the continent, has precipitated a preponderance of examples from this country to illustrate my hypothesis. An intriguing aspect of African leadership that will also receive attention and begs further enquiry is the impact that exile has had on the culture and worldview of the contemporary South African leadership.

If this paper contributes in some small way to a greater understanding of and perhaps appreciation for Africa's leaders and the many challenges they face, it will

have been worth the effort. And lest I be accused of being “Eurocentric”<sup>18</sup> and of judging in terms of standards that are non-African standards, I have taken pains to draw mainly from African sources to explain the central features of African worldview and culture.

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### **The Context: African Worldview and Culture**

In his highly informative book *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa*,<sup>19</sup> Jannie Malan advises that “[o]ne of the major lessons the rest of the world may learn from Africa is precisely *that social reality should be taken seriously*.”<sup>20</sup> So, in order to appreciate the realities that impact on African leadership, it is necessary to provide a general outline of traditional African philosophy or worldview and discuss how these views find expression in culture and the structures of society. It is also necessary to look at the responsibilities of individuals within these societies and see if and how they influence styles of leadership.

In its most elementary form, I would describe “worldview” as the answer(s) or response(s) that is/are given to the questions we ask about the universe, life, and all its contents. And the *New Penguin English Dictionary* defines “culture” as “the socially transmitted pattern of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, institutions, and artefacts.” This definition suffices for the purpose of this exploration. Whether worldview comes before culture or culture before worldview has been a matter of constant enquiry. One’s first instinct is that culture is the totality of responses we offer to the answers we develop about the questions we ask. In the African context, at least, the view is that worldview and culture shape each other in equal measure. Furthermore, in African discourse, a distinction is not always made between worldview, culture, and religion. John S. Mbiti, one of Africa’s most prominent philosophers and a former professor of religious studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, writes: “Religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life, while at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well.”<sup>21</sup>

Anybody who has spent some time in Africa will agree with Mbiti that the people of this continent are “deeply religious,”<sup>22</sup> irrespective of whether they adhere to traditional African beliefs, to Christianity, to Islam, or to the vast array of syncretistic faith systems that have developed over the centuries.

### ***A Religious Universe***

Mbiti explains the worldview of almost all Africans<sup>23</sup> as one of a universe that was created by an eternal being called God (or the Creator, or various other names<sup>24</sup>). Because God created it, the universe automatically has to be looked at in a religious way<sup>25</sup> and treated as such. God is approachable through prayers, sacrifices, rituals, and intermediaries. Africans believe that the various parts of the universe are inseparably linked, populated, and composed of their own visible and invisible kinds of life in addition to such visible phenomena as the heavenly bodies, storms, eclipses of the sun, and the like, and that all populations have their own responsibilities. Former South African President Nelson Mandela talks about the traditional religion of his own tribe, the Xhosa, as “characterized by a cosmic wholeness, so that there is little distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the natural and the supernatural.”<sup>26</sup>

### ***No End to the Present***

Because the universe is seen as eternal, “African ideas of time concern mainly the present and the past, and have little to say about the future, which in any case is expected to go on without end.” In fact, as Erich Leistner writes: “perceptions of time are a central aspect of traditional African worldviews and have a significant impact on development efforts.”<sup>27</sup> He quotes John Mbiti, whose study of two Kenyan Bantu languages showed that “people have little or no active interest in events that lie in the future beyond, at most two years from now; and the languages concerned lack words by which such events can be conceived or expressed.”<sup>28</sup> According to Leistner, African scholars “are broadly agreed that, unlike present-day Western cultures, traditional African cultures — and more specifically those of Bantu-speaking peoples — do not perceive of time in an abstract, mathematical sense.” Furthermore, the absence in traditional African mythology about final things, such as there is in Christianity or Judaism, leads Leistner to conclude that Africans believe “the present world will last forever,” that there is no sense in African thinking about eschatology, a “world to come . . . or Doomsday.” Rather, traditional African orientation toward the past, history, time, and progress is linked up with tradition, which, according to Dominique Zahan, is “the sum total of the wisdom held by a society at a given moment of its existence . . . a means of communication between the dead and the living, as it represents the ‘word’ of the ancestors.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, traditional African worldview sees time as the perpetual, unquestioned present with greater emphasis on the past than the future, which in any case does not stretch too far into what is essentially an unfathomable reality “that is neither after nor before”<sup>30</sup> and within which the ideal state of affairs is the “indefinite repetition of the past”<sup>31</sup> and in which the concept of progress is also “intimately linked to the past.”<sup>32</sup> Within the context of this worldview, progress is “primarily the realization by a given generation of stages which others have reached before it.”<sup>33</sup>

Steve Biko brings another dimension to the African understanding of time in his comments on their approach to problem solving: “Whereas the Westerner is geared to use a problem-solving approach following very trenchant analyses, our approach is that of situation-experiencing.” He quotes then president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, who asserted that “Africans being pre-scientific people . . . any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise.”<sup>34</sup> The preference for a more holistic, and less Cartesian way of thinking is not restricted to Africans who are no longer on the scene. It is to be found in almost every statement that comes out of African governments and permeates the writings of contemporary intellectuals. As recently as 1999, the respected South African intellectual and Christian theologian, Professor Barney Pityana, wrote that there is a growing prevalence and self-conscious practice of African customs and traditions and that the cohesiveness of their societies is still derived from these beliefs and traditions.<sup>35</sup> Pityana’s selection of Steve Biko’s critique of Christianity and the inherently religious nature of African practices shows that we should take prevailing African ideas seriously when we reflect on African issues.<sup>36</sup>

### ***A Mysterious Universal Order***

Another feature of the African worldview is that the universe is orderly and operates at the levels of natural laws, morality, religion, and, crucially, that the universe has an order that is “hidden and mysterious.” It has a power to which spirits and certain

human beings have access, primarily through magic and other intermediaries, some of whom are human and others spiritual beings. Ordinary people know little about this mystical power of the universe, and the knowledge is often “safeguarded and kept secret.” As is true of the concept of time, the role of ancestors is uppermost in negotiating life, which is seen as one integrated whole, visible and invisible.

### ***The Ancestors***

Who are the ancestors and why do they play such a seminal role in African society? Simply put, the African sees the ancestors as the souls of the departed. As these souls are not immortal, they have to be kept alive by sacrifices and rituals, otherwise they will go into a state of non-existence<sup>37</sup> or become “ghosts.”<sup>38</sup> The ancestors must be kept alive because humans need their advice, support, and intercession with the gods to manage the problems of life.<sup>39</sup> “They are responsible for guarding the traditions that they once experienced and maintained. Therefore, if someone commits an offense that goes unnoticed among the living, the ancestors intervene, striking the sinner — or perhaps a relative, since they are all ‘one body,’ so that retribution could fall on them all — with sickness, a disaster, or a bad harvest.”<sup>40</sup> They are regarded as still being part of the family, until about four or five generations after their departure from “visible” life. Mbiti stresses that they are the spirits who matter most in African culture. Mutwa contends that to keep the souls of his ancestors alive is the greatest and most important duty a man has in life . . . a man who tries to live without his ancestors is like a tree struggling without roots.<sup>41</sup> When seen within this context, it is easy to understand the importance of funerals in African culture and why, by extension, they have political significance. Vast amounts of money, food, and effort go into a funeral in order to ensure continued “contact with the dead”<sup>42</sup> and to serve as a public display of a proper honoring of the ancestors. Nowadays, of course, elaborate funerals have become status symbols and are to be seen even in the squatter camps. I do not know of a single person who returned from decades of exile or long periods of political imprisonment, and had become largely secularized in other areas of life, whose first visit back in South Africa was not to the graves of his/her ancestors. And they all bemoaned their sadness at being unable, during their years in exile, to fulfill their obligations to their ancestors at the proper places because the belief is that the souls of the departed hover in the place where they died.

The connection between ancestors and land is of crucial importance almost everywhere in Africa because it is regarded as an insult to the ancestors to leave the land where they lived and died. One has to be able to “fetch his/her departed ones when s/he moves, so that when they wish to visit, they would know where to find their living family members.”<sup>43</sup> Not only will leaving the land induce the ancestors’ wrath; it will cut the living off from contact with the dead. Given this attitude, think how devastating colonial land policies have been to the fiber of African society, why land ownership remains such a politicized issue, and why it has been such an “easy” rallying cry for President Mugabe in the past few years.

### ***A Universe of Relationship***

The role of humankind in a religious universe, which is populated by the souls of the living, departed, visible and invisible creation, is of paramount importance. Uppermost in the African mind is *relationship — in all aspects of life*. The individual is seen to be the “link between earth and heaven,” “the centre of the universe,” “the

priest which links the universe with God the creator,” who “awakens the universe, speaks to it, listens to it, [who] tries to create a harmony with the universe. It is as if the whole world exists for man’s sake.”<sup>44</sup>

But it is not the individual that is important. In all of African society, the group is seen to be the custodian of life, of cultural well-being and survival. The role of the individual is not to serve himself, but always to strengthen the community. There is almost no sense of individual reward for excellence, except for the veneration of the chief as embodiment or symbol of the collective. “The oneness of community . . . is at the heart of our culture,” wrote Steve Biko.<sup>45</sup> Starting with the family, society is composed of a myriad of interlinked communities, patterns, and rituals that are designed to sustain life, the operative concept of which is “*ubuntu*.”

### ***Ubuntu***

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner and former Archbishop of Cape Town, translates *ubuntu* as “a central feature of the African *Weltanschauung* [worldview] . . . . It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. . . . It is not ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate, I share. . . . What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me.’”<sup>46</sup> In practice, *ubuntu* means that family boundaries are not limited to immediate blood relatives and that the notion of solitude and individual functioning as it is appreciated in Western culture is less important than functioning in and as a group. Nelson Mandela recounts that he could “hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one’s aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. . . . We have no half-brothers or half-sisters. My mother’s sister is my mother; my uncle’s son is my brother; my brother’s child is my son, my daughter. . . . Anyone who claims descent from a common ancestor is deemed part of the same family.”<sup>47</sup> Obviously, this notion of community manifests itself in the ordering of what the Nigerian thinker Claude Ake called the “organic character of society”: “[Africans’] sense of freedom is not framed by tensions between the individual and the collectivity or the prospects of securing immunities against the collectivity. Nor is it defined in terms of autonomy or opposition but rather in terms of co-operation and in the embeddedness of the individual in an organic whole.”<sup>48</sup> Every individual knows, as Mandela puts it, “his or her place” in the greater collective and takes his responsibility toward the group seriously. As Biko pointed out, there were never songs for individuals, but all African songs are group songs. The nonindividualistic nature of African society is seen in its attitude toward property where everything was jointly owned, jointly cultivated, and jointly protected. Biko also wrote that Africans are prepared “to have a much slower progress in an effort to make sure that all of us are marching to the same tune.”<sup>49</sup>

Of course, the value that Africans put in togetherness, in *ubuntu*, would have grave implications when capitalism and its alter ego, competition, were introduced to Africa.

### ***Leaders — Custodians of the Past***

The position of traditional leaders deserves special attention because it has often been asserted that African leaders after independence, while adhering to the colonial structures in name, have actually structured their governments according to their own traditional customs.<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey Brian Peires explains that, in many traditional

African societies, the head of the homestead was the eldest male. “He enjoyed a position of considerable power, including authority in the spheres of religion, economy, and social relations. His authority was derived from his genealogical seniority, and the status of the other males in the homestead likewise depended on their genealogical rank. Women, like children, had rights and obligations, but were regarded as perpetual minors and were excluded from a formal voice in homestead affairs.”<sup>51</sup> Chieftainship was a “system of hereditary devolution of power in which the right to rule was believed to be transmitted through the blood. It divided African society into two classes: chiefs of the blood destined to govern, and commoners, men of ordinary birth, who could not aspire to formal authority whatever their personal qualities.”<sup>52</sup>

Many African societies put primary importance on the collective strengths of the older generation and religious leaders because they are deemed to be imbued with divine authority, power, and wisdom. Those who possess religious knowledge range from the “trained [medicine men, diviners, ritual elders, priests] to those who only take the lead when the need arises [such as] rulers and national leaders.”<sup>53</sup>

### ***A Leader Must be Tough***

The downside of chieftaincy, which is not unique to Africa, was that control of the judicial apparatus enabled the chiefs to confiscate property (in many societies the cattle) of rich commoners through the manipulation of witchcraft accusations and inheritance laws. Commoners did not revolt against such “tyranny” because people believed that a powerful authority figure was required to adjudicate their lawsuits, invoke the spirits of their ancestors, protect them from their enemies, and shoulder the heavy responsibility of providing food in time of famine. They did not “expect such men to be friendly, soft-hearted fellows; on the contrary, they liked men with the cunning, magic, and majesty to overcome their foes and bend the universe to their will.” In return, the chiefs were “careful . . . to cultivate the dual image of being mighty and terrible, and yet at the same time the fathers of their people and the defenders of their hearths and herds.” And because the rewards of leadership were considerable, the pressures of rivalry were also significant and in succession wars “brother chief fought brother chief, while mothers and uncles intrigued on behalf of their candidates.”<sup>54</sup> Peires assures us, however, that most conflicts were bloodless and were amicably resolved by the loser seeking his fortune in a new place. A wise chief knew that he depended on a contented following who executed his orders voluntarily, and he interacted with them on a frequent basis through consultative meetings or “general assemblies.”

### ***Communalism***

Mandela’s description of the traditional leadership in which he grew up is as representative of the phenomenon as it is revealing and relevant to this paper. Chieftaincy was “the very centre around which life revolved [and] pervaded every aspect of our lives . . . and was the pre-eminent means through which one could achieve influence status.”<sup>55</sup> Meetings were called when the need arose and all members of the clan were allowed to attend. The regent was surrounded by a group of counselors of high rank who functioned as his parliament and judiciary. These counselors retained the knowledge of tribal history and custom in their heads. From the point where he had welcomed the gathering, the regent would remain silent until the meeting was nearing its end. Everyone who wanted to speak did so, without interruption, and with candor. All meetings ended “in unanimity or not at all.” Only at the end would the

regent speak, basically summing up what had been said and trying to form some consensus. If a conclusion were not reached, another meeting would be convened. At the end of the meeting, a praise-singer would “deliver a panegyric to the ancient kings” together with compliments and satire on the present chiefs.

Mandela’s rendition of traditional leadership is a succinct distillation of how many Africans would characterize their worldview and culture and of how I have observed it since childhood. There is a fundamental reverence for tradition within a society that is based on communalism and that comprises both the living and the dead. Problem-solving in all aspects of life is done in a holistic, collective manner where the entire community is involved and a high premium is placed on leadership from above. These leaders are usually the most respected members of the community — the elders in all their personifications. “Consequently, it is also unusual to wash dirty linen in public and confront people causing, or involved in, a conflict [or other] situation directly, especially in front of outsiders.”<sup>56</sup> This is because the dignity of the person and his or her role in society is paramount. The inherent dignity of all persons, even if he is an adversary, is the undercurrent in Mandela’s autobiography, as well as in the writings of Steve Biko, Desmond Tutu, Mahmoud Mamdani, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and many other African commentators on African culture and history. It is this one quality that, in traditional African culture, should direct every interaction with a fellow human being. To illustrate: it is rare to hear one African leader attack the character or actions of another in public. If they do, it is usually done in veiled terms and often hardly detectable to observers who are not familiar with African values. It is more often a threat to their dignity than a particular action, that leads to resentment by Africans of people from other cultures, especially from the West.

In summary, although there is no such thing as a pristine worldview or culture that is uncontaminated by outside influences, many of the values, worldviews, and cultures that have informed Africa in the past remain in use and are receiving renewed recognition. In this section, I have tried to highlight what I regard as the most significant of these values. Any serious analysis of the dynamics within Africa and of its leaders will include Jannie Malen’s observations about the intricacies of African culture. Although he focuses on lessons from Africa to resolve conflicts, his is a useful point of departure. He compares the complexity of African culture with the intricate designs of a piece of cloth, the basic structure of which is formed by “two interwoven sets of threads, still called by their traditional names of warp and weft. . . . Throughout all the complexity and variety in Africa’s history of conflict resolution, there seems to be an elemental warp and weft: The one is the tradition of family or neighbourhood negotiation facilitated by elders. And the other is the attitude of togetherness in the spirit of humanhood [*ubuntu*].”<sup>57</sup> Like Mandela, he emphasizes the far-reaching implications of togetherness by describing the importance of “reaching out to the group or the individual farthest from the leader concerned.” The rationale behind it is that “the interests of the culturally or ethnically distant, even of strangers, should be considered.”<sup>58</sup>

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### **Colonialism and the Rest: Impact on African Culture**

The phenomena of war and conflict, the need for war tools, the rule of the strong over the weak, and bad leadership and management prevailed in Africa, as elsewhere, since time immemorial. Traditional Africa was not perfect and those who

would want to believe that it was live in as much denial as those who limit the effects of colonialism to absurd borders and the horrors of slavery, true though they are. This largely uncritical analysis,<sup>59</sup> or what Frantz Fanon called the “unconditional affirmation of African culture,”<sup>60</sup> applies in particular to those who have been singing the praises of African history and culture since Mandela’s speech<sup>61</sup> at the Organization of African Unity summit meeting in Tunisia in 1994 when he raised the need for an African Renaissance. Therefore, before commenting on colonial and post-colonial Africa, a few examples of the “imperfect” Africa before it was “corrupted” by the West and others are necessary.

Basil Davidson cites the development of iron tools, and eventually iron weapons, as an important stage in Africa’s development because it brought, “from about 600 B.C. onwards, a new source of *military power*.”<sup>62</sup> Those who first learned to use it were able to rule their neighbors. . . . Stronger peoples began to rule weaker peoples.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, if “pre-scientific”<sup>64</sup> Africa were as idyllic as the first part of this paper may suggest, the traditional leaders would not have become complicit in slavery<sup>65</sup> and other forms of exploitation that became prevalent during the colonial, Cold War, and post-independence period. Maier goes further: “If the precolonial order was so healthy, it should have stood up more effectively against foreign interference.”<sup>66</sup> Roland Oliver provides many examples of precolonial imperfection, especially with respect to slavery.<sup>67</sup> Long before Western powers arrived in Africa, the practice of slavery was well established among African communities. Furthermore, unlike in the Roman Empire where slaves had been freed under certain conditions, Africa, mostly south of the Sahara, did not make provision for manumission. In his seminal book, *The African Experience*, Oliver gives a fascinating account of the build-up of slavery and the “capacity for violence existing in the relations of large numbers of small societies” in Africa from pre-dynastic Egypt onwards. And he shows how local traditional leaders made use of the power that came from using newcomers as allies against their own rivals. This is vintage politics — also in Africa.

If the large kingdoms that existed prior to colonialism were as closely knit as their philosophers claim, the divisive effects of colonialism might have been reduced. Again, Oliver is insightful: “It becomes ever plainer that the largest states of pre-colonial Africa tended to have the fragility of card-houses: one unexpected challenge, and they would disintegrate into their component particles.” He gives more credence to “miniscule” states of ten to fifteen thousand people who seemed often to have had greater cohesion and durability, arguing that the first generation of professional historians of Africa tended to look at the few big states of the continent through “rose-colored”<sup>68</sup> spectacles, implying that they overemphasized their stability and cohesiveness.

Greed and self-aggrandizement were not restricted to Westerners only. The *impi* (warriors) of the Zulus of South Africa under Shaka (to cite but one example) commanded considerable fear and respect from rival nations, including the colonizing British and Afrikaners. Furthermore, the clientage system in some southern African communities give ample evidence of a pre-colonial African society that was as “normal” as any other in that it was based on social hierarchy, division, and domination. Clientage involved varying degrees of “labor exploitation, ranging from a voluntary and temporary status to a form of permanent servitude little short of slavery, some of which was hereditary.”<sup>69</sup> There is no sign of communal property rights and *ubuntu* in any of these systems.

What, then, distinguishes leadership, systems of government, and the trade networks of Africa before the 1870s from those traders and systems that came later? I propose that the most important factor is the West's ingenuity with and propensity for violence and its instruments. (Maier reminds us that future historians, if they are truthful, will "rate the violence of twentieth-century Africa as relatively mild indeed compared to the slaughter that Europe has experienced and imposed on others.")<sup>70</sup> In addition, whereas in the past, most expeditions that traded in Africa were under African leadership, they now went deeper into the continent, were under non-African leadership, and used force with weapons against which Africans had no defense.<sup>71</sup> There is no doubt that, as has been shown in recent history all over the world, the very presence of sophisticated arms is a primary cause of violence and division that may have otherwise been limited.<sup>72</sup> Oliver seems to agree at least in part when he poses that in eastern Africa colonialism introduced a process of political destabilization, "partly as a result of the general diffusion of trade muskets, and partly through the penetration of the interior by coastmen armed with superior weapons."<sup>73</sup>

Thus, when one compares post-colonial realities with those that prevail(ed) in traditional Africa, it is easy to understand why there is such a fundamental resentment against colonialism and all the other manifestations of outside interference in Africa over the centuries, and why a civilizational tension, and not an outright civilizational clash, persists.

Africans are frequently accused of being unreliable if not outright dishonest and stupid.<sup>74</sup> Although they might be the first to acknowledge that their traditional culture and worldview are rooted in a pre-scientific (that is, a pre-Cartesian) background, history shows that those Europeans who "scrambled"<sup>75</sup> for the continent were, and still are, as dishonest and unscientific as they accuse the Africans of being. As a result of the Conference of Berlin of 1884-85, "most Africans lost their independence without signing any treaties at all." The division of Africa took place "on the basis of maps that provided detailed information about the coastal regions, but very little about the interior, and on the assumption that all powers were seeking a reasonable allocation of African territory, which would reflect their general standing in world affairs as much as their already established interests on the ground." Most of the subsequent agreements were between European powers *about* African territories *without* Africans having any say in or control over it.

With respect to the partition of Africa, Oliver is of the view that, although it was not instant but rather "cumulative," it amounted to a "ruthless act of political amalgamation" whereby about ten thousand units were reduced to about forty. But the amalgamation brought more units of peoples together than it divided and, in the course of time, "greatly strengthened the sense of unity existing within the clusters, [which] had very little immediate effect on the peoples whose nationality was ultimately to be determined by it." I propose that he misses the point. History is replete with tragedies that resulted from both dividing *and* forcing people together, regardless of the size of the territory in which this happened, and Africa is no exception. Yugoslavia and Israel/Palestine are but two recent non-African examples.

Apart from the imposition of artificial and unworkable borders in which the Africans had no input, perhaps the most far-reaching impact of colonialism (and, for the most part, Christianity) on Africa must surely have been in the realm of consciousness, time, and identity. Those that penetrated Africa established "alternative systems of authority"<sup>76</sup> alongside the traditional ones. Two interpretations — African and

European — of the concepts of consciousness, time, and identity were therefore forced to function alongside and with each other. The notion of an end to time (and its scarcity), and of a finite universe (and the anticipation of a Judgment Day) as the West (used to) understand them, are diametrically opposed to the traditional African approach. So is the concept of the individual's responsibility for his/her own fate as distinct from that of the group. Western conceptions of time are also contrary to Africa's traditional management systems, which were centered around the community instead of the individual, were dependent on the guidance of leaders/ancestors/elders, and functioned within a consultative approach by the community.

By way of illustration, and as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>77</sup> colonialism had a “deconstructive” effect on African culture and identity. It also deconstructed other African concepts. What Bernard Lewis<sup>78</sup> wrote about identity in the Middle East as compared to Europe is equally relevant to Africa: with a few exceptions, the names of European states are derived from their ethnic group, from the language they speak and from their cultural and territorial identities that have existed for centuries. But in Africa, despite identities, cultures, languages, and territorial designations that had developed over millennia, a line was drawn across all of it with the stroke of a pen at the Conference of Berlin and a division and renaming of people and places ensued, which Karl Maier has termed “international piracy.”<sup>79</sup> Alien cultures and religious systems were introduced with the utmost cruelty (slavery and misguided missionaries), which ultimately made themselves felt in the very core of African consciousness, as articulated through language and manifested through alien educational systems. Mahmoud Mamdani makes similar points, more forcefully.<sup>80</sup>

Not only was there a replacement and displacement of people, all African languages were affected. Those that have not been almost totally obliterated became subservient to the languages of the colonizers, so much so that in the Organization of African Unity, and since 2002 the African Union, not a single sub-Saharan language is recognized as the official language of the organization. (The official languages of the AU are English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic.) As the very vehicle by means of which any human being gives expression to his/her consciousness, the effect on African consciousness and learning was devastating. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for whom language is the “location of memory itself,”<sup>81</sup> notes that “the imperialist West . . . planted their memory on our intellect through language. Writers, artists, musicians, intellectuals, and workers in ideas are the keepers of memory of a community.” What fate, he asks, awaits a community when its keepers of memory have been subjected to the West's linguistic means of production and storage of memory — English, French, and Portuguese? He accuses the keepers of the African's memory of not storing their knowledge, emotions, and intellect in African languages. It is like having a granary but at harvest you store your produce in someone else's granary, he says. The result is that 90 percent of intellectual production in Africa is stored in European languages. Like Ngugi, Pitika P. Ntuli pleads for a decolonization of the African's mind by means of a “detailed analysis of culture as ideology.”<sup>82</sup> Steve Biko puts it more simply by saying the forcing of foreign languages onto indigenous communities caused them to develop an inferiority complex,<sup>83</sup> which needed to be rectified. Coming from a country where the issue of language has always been politicized, the timidity to use one's own language is all-pervasive, especially in the cities. Even now, in a country where the majority of the population can speak or at least understand a minimum of four or five of the ten indigenous languages, leaders still give their speeches mostly in English. President Mbeki has received much criticism for not speaking his mother tongue, Xhosa, more

often and for using a type of English and employing concepts that are far beyond the comprehension of the ordinary citizen, even to the point of being accused of failing to relate to his constituency and contributing to nation-building.

But there is another aspect to the issue of language. Local rulers adopted the methods and tools of foreigners to gain more slaves and power for their own benefit. What prevented them from exploiting the introduction of new modes of communication to serve their indigenous languages? Very few post-colonial leaders — politicians, church leaders, scientists, or business people — have made the concerted effort to codify their own languages to ensure that they grew and retained their relevance. Policies to reintroduce indigenous languages are a relatively recent phenomenon.

If the forced imposition of foreign languages had such an adverse impact on the sense of identity of Africans and is still being felt throughout the continent, also among its leaders, surely, the imposition of foreign religions had an impact, too. Leistner is correct when he says that, through the introduction of Christianity and, to a lesser extent Islam, traditional Africa was introduced to a worldview that was no longer focused “on the past,” but on a “new, linear conception of time, particularly future time.” The new approach to time had indeed led members of indigenous African churches not only to have “a more advanced work philosophy than members of the historic churches, but also [to] a more modern attitude towards time.”<sup>84</sup> But as people become more self-confident in expressing their “Africanness,” there is still a tendency by many to manage their professional lives along the more linear, Christian notion of time and their private lives along the more cyclical concepts of time. Ultimately, it has led to a paradoxical way of living for many Africans because traditional African belief has it that there is no practical distinction between the physical and metaphysical aspects of existence, while in Western culture, there is a definite distinction between the two. Furthermore, this difference in worldview has led to unimaginable suffering for Africans because policies that were deemed as purely rational and “common sense” by colonizers (for instance with respect to land use, health matters, and family arrangements), still have an intrinsic spiritual value for Africans, as has been shown earlier. It is therefore no wonder that Africans have chosen to adopt Christianity and Islam on their own terms. With respect to Christianity, the behavior of the colonial powers is instructive. At the time of the colonial conquests, the British, Portuguese, and French preached a faith which is supposed to speak of grace, mercy, and concern for the neighbor. These are also values that are intrinsic to traditional African belief systems. But the unspeakable savagery and individual enrichment of the colonizers belied their confessions of faith. It was as if they themselves did not believe in any god to whom they were accountable and as if there were no Day of Judgment, as if there were no end to time — which one could argue was an almost “African” conception of time and morality, but was particularly brutal in its practical implication. One visit to any of the slave castles that litter the west coast of Africa will prove the point. At Gorée Island (off mainland Senegal), the dungeon where captured Africans were held prior to their dispatch to all parts of the world is right next to the chapel where the Portuguese governor worshipped! It is no surprise then that those Africans who adopted Christianity refused to be molded into the West’s image of that faith, but rather syncretized Christianity into their own traditions in order to domesticate it according to their understanding of the universe and man’s role in it.

Colonialism, the rivalries that pertained during the Cold War, and the “first fruits” of independence also impacted on the structuring of society, as well as on

administrative and legal systems. With respect to the structuring of society, impersonal bureaucratic administrative and legal systems were imposed that completely disregarded and denied the validity of personalized indigenous systems and structures that had served Africans well for thousands of years. Local arrangements such as chieftaincies were relegated to barely tolerated or manipulated appendices of foreign processes. More cynically still, power and government constructs were established that, on the one hand, reduced well-functioning arrangements to paralysis but, on the other hand, instilled notions of personal advancement that may not have been completely absent, but became destructively prevalent. An even more fundamental disruption was the superimposition of individualism and its offshoot, unadulterated capitalism, on societal and economic systems that were (and still are) inherently communal in nature. All areas of life were permeated by Western philosophies, ideologies, and the cultures that had their origins and that were contrary to everything that Africans had developed over the centuries and by which African societies prevailed. In the end, Africa and its people were saddled with the fatal combination of a monumental identity crisis and a new type of egoism that led them to allow the continent to become the philosophical, economic, educational, and developmental laboratory (if not playground or even dumping ground) of the Euroamerican world. Sadly, all these foreign notions were rooted in notions of individualism, capitalism, and consumerism. I suggest that there is not a single government, economic, health, or developmental system that has not been “tried out” in Africa. As Steve Biko pointed out, with “new styles of clothing, new customs, new forms of etiquette, new medical approaches, and perhaps new armaments, it has always been the pattern throughout history that whosoever brings the new order knows it best and is therefore the perpetual teacher of those to whom the new order is being brought.”<sup>85</sup>

Much has been written about the macro-effects of colonialism. What is less common in public discourse, and is the purpose of this exploration, are what effects it colonialism had on Africa’s political and social order and economic well-being at the level of the individual because it continues to have a direct bearing on leadership style. Christianity brought with it the idea that each individual is personally responsible for survival, place in society, and destiny. With the West came such conflicting concepts as individual ambition instead of conforming to the group, the promotion of individual self-interest instead of the preservation of the interests of the community, and the individualization of income, lifestyle, and decision-making as opposed to sharing of everything.

With the advent of independence, leaders were supposed to lead so-called nation-states that were not “nations” in the sense of a shared language and heritage nor states with long-accepted and evolved identities. These leaders, while having much experience in fighting colonialism but no exposure to managing a modern state, had to take over responsibilities that used to be shared by respected individuals in their communities, within the collective framework of the homestead. As happened elsewhere in the world, many leaders equated the states over which they presided (to which they felt no loyalty because their boundaries and state systems were decided upon by outsiders) with their personal identities, much Louis XIV did by claiming “L’etat, c’est moi.” In addition, models of government were introduced that contradicted age-old notions of unity and humanity. Crucially, the role of the elderly was disturbed. Elderly people are now being left to fend for themselves, which used to be completely unthinkable in traditional Africa. As “ancestors-in-waiting,” they had been treated with utmost reverence and care by the extended family and never had to make plans for old age. There was only one plan: “Africa devised a privatized social

security system and positioned it where it could be most effective and most caring: in the family and community.”<sup>86</sup> As a consequence of “modernity,” traditional concepts of leadership were affected because older people no longer had their traditional place in society. That is why, in the words of Chinua Achebe, much of Africa “fell apart.”<sup>87</sup>

The disastrous outcome of colonial politics and postcolonial leaders are taken up by Mahmoud Mamdani. In the conclusion to his *Citizen and Subject*, he ascribes the excesses of colonialist and post-independence states to a deliberate shift in their perspective toward the customary. Applying lessons from India and Indochina, the colonial powers shifted from being “torchbearers of individual freedom to being custodians protecting the customary integrity of dominated tribes, the central tenet of which was “an expanded notion of the customary.” Britain, was “the first to marshal authoritarian possibilities in indigenous culture, . . . the first to realize that the key to an alien power’s achieving a hegemonic domination was a cultural project: one of harnessing the moral, historical, and community impetus behind local custom to a larger colonial project.” The practical implication was that “custom was defined and enforced by customary Native Authorities, backed up by the armed might of the central state.” Post-independent leaders applied a variety of methods to reform the states they had inherited from the colonial powers. Their “core agenda” was threefold: “deracializing civil society, detribalizing the Native Authority, and developing the economy in the context of unequal international relations.” Few of their methods, which included “mainstream nationalism” and “radical nationalism,” succeeded because they failed to link the “urban with the rural” in a democratic and sustainable manner, of which the “rural is key.” Both methods led to various forms of “decentralized despotism” and “centralized despotism,” sharing one axis: despotism.<sup>88</sup> In most cases, Mamdani argues that, although the rural communities were “in” civil society, they were not “of” civil society. This dilemma was a particular one for the migrant workers of the past. “They shared a common social position: they lay beyond the reach of customary law and yet had few entitlements to civil rights.” I suspect that this alienation from their cultural roots and the impersonal nature of urban existence is also a shared feature of a significant number of unemployed workers all over contemporary Africa who still flock to the cities for a better life.

Another factor that seems to have received little attention when analyzing contemporary African leadership is the consequences of the interventions made by Africans into the politics of their countries after they had been in exile in various parts of the world, but primarily the West. I would propose that there are mainly three categories of returning African exiles. The first include the “recaptured” slaves that were set free from slave-smuggling ships and taken by the British to Sierra Leone from 1807 onward, and later by the Americans to Liberia. They will not concern us here except to mention their rejection of the leadership of acknowledged African chiefs (in this case the Gold Coast “settlements”).<sup>89</sup> Their argument was that that subjection to these local chiefs would be tantamount to condoning “the unrepentant savagery which . . . had delivered their parents to slaving ships and enslavement in the Americas.”<sup>90</sup> They further rejected the notion that their countries could be entrusted to “tradition” and insisted on the establishment of leadership positions above the traditional leaders who had remained behind.

For the purposes of this article, some reflection on the second wave of returned exiles is pertinent. They are those Africans and their supporters who, during the colonial period, had gone abroad for study and/or political exile, returned, and

became leaders with ideas, mostly gained from exposure to socialist doctrines prevailing in Western and Eastern Europe. These ideas satisfied the intellectual and political appetites of independence leaders. In the long run, however, it left their countries destitute. These post-exile leaders spoke in modern terms, but their political legacies indicate otherwise and point to a more traditional approach to leadership. The gravitation toward tradition should not be surprising because the notion of opposition as it evolved into multiparty politics in Europe and the United States over centuries is completely different from traditional African social constructs. Jannie Malan explains this tendency for a more traditional approach as “an allergy to foreign and imperfect models of democracy and a desire to reinstate a traditional African model oriented towards consensus and unity.” Had states developed along the age-old preference for consensus and unity, the one-party state model of governance would have been “justified” because, as he sees it, “the founding fathers . . . praised it as a return to the happier past, when the elders used to sit under a big tree, and talk until they agree,” Malan concedes that these one-party states became “authoritarian and conflict-generating centers.”<sup>91</sup> George Ayittey is much more scathing of these leaders. To cover up for “inadequacies,” the “Big Man” “is often weak internally or psychologically. An economic illiterate, he cannot distinguish between a budget deficit and a trade deficit. To cover up his inadequacies, he craves — and demands — veneration, adulation, and obedience. He surrounds himself with followers who constantly reaffirm their faith in his exceptional wisdom and generosity.”<sup>92</sup> One needs to ask whether these tendencies developed out of the blue, or whether, because of their insecurities in the face of modern government systems, these leaders “went traditional” and found refuge in the cultural systems they had known, but then took them to the extreme.<sup>93</sup> Of course, Charles Taylor from Liberia fits well the category Ayittey describes. Robert Mugabe is the last of the older generation of post-independence leaders. Until fairly recently, he managed his country well, at least economically. But it has been interesting to note that, from a political perspective, he has increasingly exploited traditional values, such as the importance of land, to further his own agenda, thereby also destroying his country economically.

The third and probably last wave of political exiles that returned is more relevant to South Africa and less so to the other African countries that gained their independence<sup>94</sup> much earlier. These were the members of the African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation movements who returned from about 1990 to 1994. Many of them had been in exile for thirty years or more, while a larger, younger group had left South Africa after the Soweto uprising of June 1976. There were two categories. First there were the intellectuals who had been based in the capitals of Europe (both Eastern and Western Europe) and later in the United States of America. They were driving the anti-apartheid movement. Then there were the soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, and members of armed wings of other South African liberation movements, who had fought the South African regime in the countries that were being destabilized by South Africa at the time, and by means of guerilla warfare inside the country. Most of them had left as young people and returned as adults. The soldiers came back and were mostly integrated into the South African National Defense Force of the new South Africa. They had their own problems. But what is more relevant for the purposes of this paper is the role played by the intellectual exiles, many of whom subsequently became leaders. They have impressive qualifications from many prominent academic institutions all over the world. They are well-traveled and street smart. Their

knowledge and insight into world affairs are authoritative. In sum, they have had the best political and academic exposure and contacts one could dream of, and they interact with self-confidence with world leaders in many fields. Of the twenty-seven members of the South African cabinet (including the President), thirteen have spent considerable periods of their lives in exile.<sup>95</sup> Many have senior positions in public and private companies and academic institutions. Alas, Allister Sparks, one of South Africa's most prominent commentators, has noted recently:

They were tough, smart, and dedicated, but none had the skills required to run a complex country with a sophisticated economy. Thanks to the restrictions imposed by apartheid on people of color, and the limited opportunities in exile, none had in fact run anything at all except of the most rudimentary kind. Now they were confronted with this enormous challenge, having to learn on the job while an expectant nation and a whole world beyond kept a critical watch on their every move.<sup>96</sup>

The question arises whether those countries that had supported the exiles and anti-apartheid organizations in South Africa and elsewhere should not also bear some responsibility for the dearth of management and administrative skills among this group of exiles. Few countries demanded strict accounting of and accountability for the funds that were provided to the exiles. To my knowledge, only Denmark eventually demanded legal responsibility from individuals and organizations for funds they had received.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps this laissez faire attitude in the provision of funding and other means by those countries that provided support to the exiles led to an attitude of entitlement that was not fully relinquished after the exiles returned and had to assume the responsibilities of real government. Policies, legislation, and statements are well-argued but implementation is a constant challenge. As Sparks noted, the development of management and administrative skills, which is so crucial for the functioning of a modern state, was certainly not seen as a priority.

An equally pertinent question is how did, or do, these returned exiles really "fit" into South Africa after so many years out of the country? Do they perhaps have the same attitude towards "the locals" as their forbears in Sierra Leone had? Did they have what Basil Davidson calls that same "acute experience of alienation" that the recaptives had felt but is also a common feature of culture shock? Did their time outside South Africa, and the moral and material support they had received from their countries, make them look to these countries as "the shrine of salvation," and to the people who had not gone into exile as people who "knew and could know little or nothing"?<sup>98</sup> Or have they perhaps developed the opposite attitude: "We lived outside and have had all the experience, the locals and the rest of the world can teach us nothing"? Have they also formed a "sub-elite whose interests generally coincided with, and were in fact protected by, the foreign rulers they were agitating against"?<sup>99</sup> Do they feel "in place," a state of mind that escaped Edward Said,<sup>100</sup> also an exile of sorts for all his life; or are they perhaps, subconsciously, hankering back to the days in exile where their responsibilities were mainly fighting apartheid, studying and traveling from one conference to the next to state their (important) case (perhaps even in relative luxury)? Have they retained the traditional sense of *ubuntu* or have they, or at least some of them, succumbed to the trappings of individualism and power? Have they returned with the Western appreciation of time or are they still more comfortable with the traditional attitude that they can make as much time as they need? Has exile induced in them the capacity to take decisions and assume responsibility for those decisions, or is the "collective" still so much part of them that delegation, and with it individual decision-making, is not the preferred option? In fact, did the imperative of a strong cohesiveness in exile induce an even

stricter sense of collectivity and need to consult before anything is said or done? What are there relations with each other and with other South Africans, both black and white?

These questions are pertinent because the answers will provide an indication of the type of leadership they may espouse. Mandela provides some guidance when he alludes to the effect of exile on the returnees. He states that they were “unfamiliar” with present-day South Africa. It was as “new-found” a land as it was for him after his release from prison and the old habits and techniques of an underground movement functioning clandestinely were “deeply ingrained.”<sup>101</sup> Sparks provides an excellent illumination on life in exile.<sup>102</sup> Whereas political prisoners were thrown together in close proximity for years on end, the exiles lived a “peripatetic and often precarious existence scattered around the globe.” It meant that, in order to live relatively comfortably in London or Stockholm, one would have to stay in the “good books” of an individual leader. If you did not cultivate a good relationship with someone in a decision-making position, you got a designation “somewhere in the African bush.” And because the military wing, MK, played such a dominant role in the ANC, and most ANC leaders were also expected to undergo military training, the exile community took on more of a “commandist culture” than either the prisoners or the activists back home.<sup>103</sup> “More important still, the exiles were vulnerable to infiltration by agents of the apartheid regime and over time the devastating success of these spies engendered a paranoia within the exiled leadership that discouraged openness and led to a more centralized command structure. Indeed, for the exiles, paranoia was common sense.” Sparks contends that while the paranoia was understandable, it was also damaging because it resulted in “some leading figures forming intelligence networks of their own, which fostered mutual suspicions and rivalries and tended to produce a manipulative political culture. Although Oliver Tambo, the ANC’s leader in exile, managed to keep the movement together, “the rivalries and suspicions left their stamp on the exile culture.”<sup>104</sup>

To provide a comprehensive perspective, it is necessary to juxtapose the behavior of the exiles against those who remained to fight apartheid inside South Africa. Of the mainly two groups of South African-based activists, the first was the older generation who spent long periods in prison. They are mostly retired by now. While I will deal with Mandela more specifically below, suffice it to say that he himself has often stated that prison taught him to hate the system but not to hate the perpetrators of the system themselves. Most of those ex-prisoners who got senior positions in the 1994 elections, gained respect from ordinary South Africans for their humility and down-to-earth interaction with people. Sparks<sup>105</sup> is again a keen observer. Prison gave Mandela his “remarkable resilience but it humanized him, taught him patience and gave him a much deeper insight into human nature. It also gave him time . . . to better understand his adversary and how best to deal with him.” The second South African-based group was the younger group of “internals” who continued the struggle after the 1976 Soweto riots and “took the streets and confronted the apartheid regime’s security forces during the climactic years of the 1980s.” They formed the United Democratic Front (UDF), a loose alliance of more than a thousand community organizations, with the trade unions providing the “organizational” spine. Sparks recounts that, because of the looseness of their alliance, in which each affiliated body retained its own identity and autonomy, the activists formed an “elaborate system of collective decision-making and developed a strong aversion to any cult of personality or any individual having overriding authority.” As a reporter, he found dealing with them a nightmare because you could never get a statement from

anyone: there had always to be a meeting to produce a collective mandate. Nor was it easy to interview individual leaders, since it was considered unacceptable for any individual to presume to speak on behalf of the alliance. You would have to meet with a representative group all of whom would have a say. According to Sparks, it became more than a political culture but an “ideology” and was taken to “impractical extremes.” But in light of the traditional preference for consultation, and group actions opposed to individual action, as related above, I would assert that these “internals” were just implementing their traditional culture in a more modern, and therefore obviously more elaborate but decidedly dedicated manner under conditions of extreme pressure. But many South Africans regard this category of activists as the more practical bunch of leaders, in contrast to the “exiles,” whose approach to leadership is often seen as remote, ideological, and bent on change for its own sake.

From my own experience of living abroad for extended periods, and from observations I was able to make over three years in the former Czechoslovakia after their “Velvet Revolution” of 1989 when many Czech exiles also returned, I contend that effect of exile on leadership is an important issue to examine.<sup>106</sup> Many Czechs who had encountered the returnees (and they were everywhere) told of their frustrations with the exiles. They were seen to be domineering, out of touch with local conditions, dismissive of systems that had been developed and were working in their absence, wanting to change everything (policies, structures, and the like.) because they “knew better.” In addition, the returnees were subtly reproachful of those who had not made “the sacrifice” of leaving and had become addicted to traveling. The returned exiles insisted on telling the stories of exile and the dangers they had faced, but were bad listeners when those who had stayed behind wanted to tell their own stories about the sacrifices that had to be made while the exiles were away. Similar sentiments have been expressed about some of South Africa’s contingent of returned exiles after they assumed responsibility in important portfolios issues such as health, education, language and other social services. Their styles of management and some of the policies pursued have been perceived as being out of step with the realities of South Africa because they were essentially presiding over a country they no longer knew.

By reviewing the worldview and culture that was operative before non-Africans discovered and made themselves “at home” with Africa’s abundant resources, one gets a sense of where the continent comes from. By evaluating the colonial, Cold War, and post-independence history of Africa against the background of the values that prevailed before the tumultuous developments of the last three or four centuries, one gets a better understanding, and hopefully better appreciation, of the odds against which Africa has had to survive and find its feet. Maier is therefore correct when he postulates that, just as it would be unrealistic to argue that the nations of Africa should attempt to turn back the clock to some past idyll to seek their salvation in the past, it would be unrealistic to maintain that future generations have nothing to learn from their forefathers.<sup>107</sup> Africa is finding new ways in which to link the old with the new. This process of rediscovery and reconstruction is the focus of the next section.

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### **The African Renaissance: Restoration or Reconstruction?**

The route chosen by the current set of African leaders, or which has perhaps foisted itself upon them by virtue of those African values that have prevailed, is the subject

of this final section. Africa's "burden" after colonialism, the post-independence period, and the Cold War is multidimensional. The continent's current leaders have to undo gruesome mistakes that were made by both outsiders *and* insiders during all the phases of the Africa's modern history while at the same time earning confidence by the investor community and maintaining the support of their citizens. The challenge was merely intensified, and not altered, with the acceleration of globalization.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the world's hyperpower, the United States, now also now expects African nations to fall in line with its ever more diffuse "war" against terrorism. More fundamentally, however, and yet interlinked with all the other expectations, there is the challenge that each nation has of managing cultures and worldviews that are no longer alien to each other, but not yet fully integrated into a single understanding of how the world works. Amid the persistence (or survival) of particular worldviews there is the pressures of a United States-dominated worldview, which brings one back to the cardinal question of identity.

Probably the most important expression of the need for Africa to reaffirm its own identity came in the form of the speech that former president Nelson Mandela made to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1994. He started by recalling the decision of a Roman that Carthage, the ancient city in Africa, should be destroyed. The city was indeed destroyed. Mandela continued by saying that all human civilization rested on foundations such as the African city of Carthage, but that the African contribution to civilization was destroyed as well because of slavery, occupation by colonial powers, and the stealing of Africa's resources. Africa, he said, had become nothing but beggars. But the ancient pride of the peoples of Africa had asserted itself again in the persons of the various intellectual and political giants that came from the continent. By their deeds, they had shown that, just like Carthage, Africa could not be destroyed completely and that, with the liberation of South Africa, the time had come for a new African Renaissance.

Significantly, Mandela applied typical African rhetoric, almost a traditional praise song, by referring extensively to Africa's glorious past prior to colonialism and to the collective solidarity, destiny, and dignity of Africa. He used the destruction of Carthage to indicate the destruction of other African bastions of civilizations such as Egypt, Mali, Benin, Zimbabwe, and so on. With the attainment of South Africa's freedom, the "total liberation of Africa" was ensured. Africans, he said, had it in them to bring about an *African Renaissance* and ensure the metaphorical rebuilding of Carthage and actual rebuilding of Africa. And while he did not say so explicitly, his reference to the ancient civilizations of Africa's past must have implied that he also meant that Africa should be drawing from its cultural and philosophical past to remedy the continent's afflictions. It was in essence a clarion call for identity, which, in fact, had commenced before that pivotal speech.

Actually, Mandela had said something new. What made the speech so important, though, was that he had synthesized various trains of thought that had been circulating in the continent over a number of years and then chose to articulate them at the highest gathering of African leaders immediately after he had become president. Mahmoud Mamdani confirms the fact that the rebirth of Africa has been a process long in coming. By making a comparison with the European Renaissance, he asserts that the African Renaissance does not have a central parentage, that its genealogy is as continental as its claim, that it has its roots in pan-Africanism, which in turn was born of the experience of slavery and colonialism. The African Renaissance was Africa's attempt to "go beyond its Dark Ages, to dig deep into its own past, so as to sculpt it — even mythologize it, but creatively — in order to turn it into a resource

for a forward movement so decisively so as to cut itself adrift from the Dark Ages.”<sup>109</sup>

I propose that an important element of the African Renaissance can be found in South Africa almost fifty years ago. In the 1960s and 1970s when there was an almost catatonic desperation in Africa about the continent’s fate, a new voice, sadly silenced too soon, arose to enunciate these sentiments. Steve Biko’s philosophy of “black consciousness,” which eventually became the Black Consciousness Movement, strove to inculcate in Africans an awareness that they were not the sub-humans that Westerners had made them to believe. In an article in 1970 where he pointed to the dehumanization to which Africans had been exposed and the fact that they were beginning to “yearn” for the white man’s existence, he defined “Black Consciousness” as follows:

All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. This *is* the first truth, bitter as it may seem, that we have to acknowledge before we can start on any programme designed to change the status quo. It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realise that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of “Black Consciousness.”<sup>110</sup>

I quote the full text because, seen in the light of everything that went before and the current developments in Africa, it becomes clear how relevant it still is. Biko’s insistence that the African could only affirm his own identity by affirming his inherent dignity as inheritor of a great heritage is the same as Mandela’s call for the resurrection of Carthage and is therefore a precursor of the African Renaissance.

After Mandela’s speech in Tunis, volumes were written and many conferences were held about the meaning of the “African Renaissance.” The pessimists ridiculed Mandela’s vision as a “return to the round huts and footpaths.” The opportunists saw in it an unbridled sanctioning to “get even” with the perpetrators of everything that had made Africa the miserable place it had become. The realists thought the speech was more metaphor than blueprint. Perhaps all the philosophizing about the speech was a bit overdone, but it started a vigorous debate all over Africa about what it meant to be African and to be responsible for one’s own destiny now that the outside powers had actually left the continent and Africa had to fend for itself.

When one analyses the speech, especially in light of Steve Biko’s writings, it is clear Mandela meant it to be both metaphor *and* a blueprint. While academics and civil servants try to figure out what he meant, Mandela himself continues to be a living example of this vision. He encapsulated the totality of Africa’s traditional values in the speech: the view of humankind and the rest of the universe as one integrated whole; the solidarity of its people; the imperative for collective, unanimous action and assumption of collective responsibility; the reverence for the ancestors, famous and unknown; and the absolute insistence on human dignity. The latter, as has been said before, is a recurring theme in Mandela’s speeches and writings. Crucially, the speech also included a reality check, which was an entirely new phenomenon amongst Africa’s leaders. He reminded his counterparts that the genocide in Rwanda had happened just a few months earlier and stood as a “stern and severe rebuke” to all for having failed to address the issues of economic self-reliance, gov-

ernance, and stability. And he admonished his counterparts that “we have also spent time discussing the equally complex questions that bear on the nature and quality of governance . . . we surely must face the matter squarely that where there is something wrong in the manner in which we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are ill-governed.”

It fell on Thabo Mbeki, then still deputy-president, to carry Mandela’s call forward. He made it his mission to popularize the concept of the African Renaissance as widely as possible. All government departments had to “think strategically” and submit reams of proposals on how to implement the vision. In his now famous “I am an African” speech,<sup>111</sup> Mbeki implicitly enunciated the vision of Biko and responded to Mandela’s call from two years earlier. Repeating the phrase “I am an African” five times, he alluded to his African ancestry which by now included the migrants who had left Europe in search of freedom and the Malay community whose forefathers had come to Africa as slaves. He remembered the tragedies of the Boer War of 1899-1902 that inflicted such devastation on the Afrikaner community, the laborers who had come from India and China, and the entire African history in all its diversity. Significantly, he saw the adoption of the new South African constitution as the amelioration of “the destruction of all sense of self-esteem, the consequent striving to be what one is not” by a people who were “determined to define for themselves who they are and who they should be . . . to formulate their own definition of what it means to be African.” I am convinced that, by this speech, he intended to give all South Africans, irrespective of their color or political history, a new sense of identity, deeply rooted in Africa.

A comparison between the leadership styles of Mandela and Mbeki reveal that they may have started from different points of departure, but that being leaders in Africa have molded the one to transcend strictly “tribal” constructs and the other to “Africanize” Western dictates.

The uniqueness of Nelson Mandela’s leadership lay in the fact that he managed to translate the traditional values to function in a completely changed environment. In his autobiography, he devotes considerable space to his concept of leadership. I have already referred to some, but a few more points will complete the picture. By virtue of his father having had four wives, he learned the basics of courtesy and fairness. He also learned that life was shaped by custom, ritual, and taboo; that neglect of the ancestors could bring ill-fortune, and that virtue and generosity will be rewarded. For a leader, listening was more important than talking. Mandela saw himself more as a shepherd: “He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go on ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind. For a nation to move forward, it has to believe in itself.”<sup>112</sup> A leader should never take a morally superior tone, that people should not be forced to support him or her, that he should be a unifier and peacemaker. Probably in line with traditional African thinking that the individual is there to support the group, Mandela also believed that for a mass movement to succeed, the individual should not put himself above the movement. Critically, an opponent could be defeated without dishonoring him and in order to make peace, your enemy should become your partner.<sup>113</sup>

By considering the elements of traditional African leadership, as well as the speeches Mandela made in his self-defense during the Rivonia Trial of 1964<sup>114</sup> Andrew Nash<sup>115</sup> offers a critique of Mandela’s rule. He describes it as a “tribal model” of democracy that was essentially pre-capitalist in character.<sup>116</sup> This was a model which was “radically democratic.” Despite Chief Albert Luthuli’s<sup>117</sup> claim

that “tribal organisation is outmoded, and traditional rule by chiefs retards my people,”<sup>118</sup> Nash claims that Mandela’s exposition of the tribal model transformed it in such a way as to make it an ideological instrument for a democratic accommodation of capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Second, his evocation of the tribal past is made to serve as the basis for the moral stance he took as an individual and forms part of a moral dramatization of the South African conflict of which Mandela is both a central protagonist and an active interpreter. Third, through all Mandela’s statements, he extended the “tribal model” significantly in such a way as to make it a model of the democratic virtues. Fourth, by constantly referring to the collective context within which he put his speeches, Mandela stressed the need for the democratic virtues he stood for, but moved further away from the hereditary notions of leadership toward an interpretation of the collective that was larger than in the tribal model. Furthermore, Mandela’s model of the past differentiated the initial notion of Africanism (for blacks only) to one that included other communities as well. For Nash this distinction was significant because it left space for an account of the role of the democratic leader in enabling different communities to reconcile their differences harmoniously. While the ANC never explicitly articulated a tribal undertone to their “inclusive nationalism,” Nash argues that it increasingly formed Mandela’s role within it and, through his example, the model of democratic leadership within the ANC. I would go further: this was in all likelihood also the type of leadership he had in mind when he addressed the African leaders in Tunis. Finally, and most significantly, Mandela’s transformation of the tribal model was to create a moral framework for South African (and I propose, African) politics in which “African and western liberal elements were integrated in so instinctive and original a way that Mandela himself could probably not have said where the one ended and the other began.” One of the limiting effects of this transformation, Nash feels, was that it set limits to political clarity. He reminds us that there is no reference to a tribal model in the constitution of the new South Africa, nor in the program and policies of the ruling ANC. “But it informs many of the institutions of the new South Africa, and, above all, the real relationships of power behind the facade of formal democratic procedures.”

Against the background of Mandela’s leadership that was clearly fashioned long traditional lines, it has been fascinating to watch Thabo Mbeki, who assumed the office of president in 1999, as he tries to bridge the divide between his Western education with its emphasis on individualism and secularism and his African constituency with its religiosity and collective way of operating. He has guided South Africa into becoming one of the best-managed economies in the developing world and is in his element when required to philosophize. But also, from the start, he has been a torchbearer for the ideals of Steve Biko to inculcate into the African a sense of his own worth. His famous “I am an African” speech on May 8, 1996, is but one example. But being “back in Africa” has had surprising spin-offs. In good African fashion he has had to increase his public profile by interacting in a more personal manner with his constituency in the preferred way: having regular *imbizos* where every member of the public can ask him questions and voice their problems, often without diplomatic reserve.<sup>119</sup>

On the other hand, through sheer individual tenacity, Mbeki has also brought his African counterparts on board to adopt the vision of the African Renaissance as a continent-wide program. Underwritten by the newly established African Union and supported by the United States, EU, UN, and G8, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) has prioritized the needs of African development also in the

international arena.<sup>120</sup> Various projects are being planned for which finance will be provided not through aid, but through partnerships with the rest of the world. The African leadership will also subject themselves to an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) through which the “policies and practices of participating states conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes, and standards, and achieve mutually agreed objectives in socio-economic development.” As part of ensuring the proper functioning of the APRM, the participating states also “accept that constructive peer dialogue and persuasion would be exercised, where necessary, in order to encourage improvements in country practices and policies in compliance with *agreed African* and international best practices where recommended.”<sup>121</sup>

Mbeki’s combination of traditional customs with modern, Western imperatives of governance, has been truly remarkable. When he returned from exile, Mbeki was seen to be the urbane, Westernized African leader who would “modernize” South Africa and African politics. Initially, he was described as an enigma. Later on, he was accused of being aloof, distant from the people.<sup>122</sup> He was also seen as being too academic. These may be seen to be his “Western” attributes. But there is the other side, to which I have alluded before, namely that the liberation movements in Africa had become their followers’ “tribe” and that traditional customs found their way into the functioning of these movements. Allister Sparks contends that Mbeki’s development as a leader is the result of him having been “brought up more by the movement than by his parents, that he was educated for a role that he himself was never allowed to choose or define, and whose whole life was controlled and directed and dedicated for him with little thought for his own wishes. He became in every respect an instrument of the movement.”<sup>123</sup> But, as the examples above illustrate, Mbeki is obviously managing to bridge the divide between his Western liberal education and his African roots. He has become, like Mandela, the personal example of the vision he stands for.

But Mbeki lives in what Sparks calls a “bad neighborhood.” Although he himself has never articulated which way he prefers, Mbeki’s Western mind may prefer the “quicker” (but, history shows, not necessarily tidier) recipe. But his tireless efforts to bring peace to Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire and, yes, Liberia and Zimbabwe undoubtedly have had to take into account the reality of the African worldview. As has been seen earlier, this means that the resolution of problems should be managed collectively; that the person you regard as instrumental to change should not be humiliated, that he/she should not be blamed or attacked in public; and that consensus-seeking should be paramount. So far, the results have begun to show everywhere. Progress in Zimbabwe is still outstanding. But when analyzed within the context of the different worldviews that Mbeki has to placate while at the same time ensuring ultimate success, his scope of choices is far more limited than his critics presume. And it is against this background that his handling of Zimbabwe, and Mugabe in particular, becomes clearer. Western demands are that he act more forcefully, while the African mind dictates veneration of tradition, of elderly people, of the consensus-seeking model, and of the spiritual connections to land. If he followed the Western pattern, especially the American way, Mbeki would be expected to launch vitriolic diatribes against his neighbor, implement sanctions, close the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe, switch off the lights,<sup>124</sup> and ultimately invade the country militarily. He has refused to do so. I submit that, apart from the realities of Zimbabwe’s political situation,<sup>125</sup> Mbeki is consciously affirming the African values I have endeavored to explain in this

paper. And if the other examples and news reports at the time of writing are anything to go by, the next president to be given a ritualistic and dignified send-off into exile could be Mr. Mugabe.

Since Mandela delivered that speech in Tunis, the transformation of leadership and society in Africa has continued. It is everywhere to be seen and the application of African methodologies, infused by the traditional worldview, is evolving with increasing boldness. Yet, practices that are traceable to Western origins are equally discernable. This paper would be incomplete if I failed to cite some important examples where a compelling (some call it enchanting) convergence is emerging between the traditional African worldview and the Western values of rationality, linear thinking, trust in the discoveries of the natural sciences, and the preeminence of individual effort. This accommodation between the two cultures is seen from the leadership through to ordinary people.

An integral part of the political settlement that led to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 was the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that would investigate the human rights abuses perpetrated during the apartheid years. Desmond Tutu ascribes the eventual functioning, report, and outcome of the commission, and the legal framework within which it functioned, to the influence of *ubuntu* and the values that came from it: the inherent dignity of every individual as part of humanity; the spiritual nature of the TRC's work through continuous prayer and intercession; the imperative for collective forgiveness in order to heal the entire nation; proper burial ceremonies for the bodies of those who had been killed in the struggle against apartheid; the public nature of the proceedings and the catharsis it had brought about in the victims who testified; and the need for consensus all through the commission's work. Tutu often described the Commission's *raison d'être* as "justice with mercy."

It is not only in South Africa that African traditions are serving to heal trauma where other methods have failed. Very often, it is not only leaders who pave the way to reconciliation, but ordinary professionals. Newspapers, academic journals, and books are full of the re-emergence of traditional Africa, albeit mediated through modern concepts. Already in 1996, Palesa Makhale-Mahlangu<sup>126</sup> has pleaded for a "relevant interpretation of Eurocentric based models" in the African context. African characteristics have been eroded but are not "totally extinct"; they are "deeply and innately embedded in the African persona" and should therefore serve as a basis for social and psychological counseling and conflict resolution. Some of the challenges faced by psychologists in Africa include language, time, and the age of patients. Makhale-Mahlangu sheds light on the therapeutic models that have had to be adjusted to the African context. More often than not, the traditional customs of ritual cleansing, reconciliation, burial, and prayer are more successful and enduring than the individualistic, impersonal Western methods such as medicines (antidepressants, and the like), individual counseling, psychoanalysis, meditation, and group therapy among strangers in an impersonal environment. Social workers, psychologists and religious leaders that were trained in Western methodologies all report that their "scientific" training may help them to analyze a problem, but that their African roots help them to devise a more holistic solution. They also find themselves approaching issues from a much broader frame of reference. Similar tales of healing appear in Maier's *Into the House of the Ancestors* in which the scenarios range from restoring village peace in Mozambique and treating returning child soldiers all over Africa, to involving traditional healers in South Africa to address the scourge of AIDS. These remedies are found from the San people of Botswana and Namibia<sup>127</sup> to Angola

where returning combatants undergo cleansing rituals to receive them back into their communities.<sup>128</sup> It is striking how many prominent Africans turn up at these rituals. It goes further: the Africanization of Christianity has long been a fact, but in 2000, the Roman Catholic archbishop in South Africa suggested that a libation of blood (a ritual pouring as a symbolic sacrifice honoring the ancestors of black Africans), should be incorporated into the local Catholic liturgies such as the mass as a way of “inculturation” according to which indigenous culture and values are a means of presenting, reformulating, and living the Christian faith.<sup>129</sup>

Combining capitalist imperatives with the philosophy of *ubuntu* is also now being tested in African commerce. Many entrepreneurs are finding new ways to secure capital while developing skills by interacting with communities (societies or clusters of investors) instead of with individuals only.<sup>130</sup>

The whole repertoire of methods that are being employed to deal with Africa’s challenges and opportunities, of which only a few were touched in this section, directs the analyst to review the history and present realities in Africa. If we want to be true to the Western requirement for basing conclusions upon verifiable facts, we need to factor the *fact* of the reassertion of traditional African worldview and culture into our studies. I would contend that, by examining more current African leaders from the perspective I have advanced, it would become evident that Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki are not the only representatives of the African Renaissance as described in this section. While “old,” traditional Africa can never be resurrected, there is ample evidence that the core values of its worldview and culture are indeed being restored, yet in a creative manner which also recognize the value and utility of the Western frame of reference. African leaders in all walks of life are paving the way for a new identity where the *ubuntu* spirit of “I am because we are,” meets “Everyone for himself.”

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## Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to present Africa’s heritage through the prism of the worldview and culture that existed prior to colonialism, the Cold War, and the three decades following independence. I have highlighted the traditional belief that man is part of a religious universe; that time is controlled by man and not the other way around; that reverence shown to the elderly is fundamentally linked with the belief that the departed still have an interest in the living; that the individual is subject to the interests of the group; and that the collective approach to life is dominant. I have also elected not to revert to more contemporary, “politically correct” terms such as “Euroamerican” for “Western,” “unfortunate policies towards Africa” for the “scramble for Africa,” and so forth. I have done so deliberately because political correctness often leads to meaningless platitudes that may be soft on the conscience but that dim the facts.

In the second section, the colonial, Cold War, and post-independence history of Africa was placed within the context of traditional African worldview. I sought to indicate how this period brought about a bewildering friction of ideologies, systems, and practices and what effect it had on the political, economic, and social wellbeing of the continent. The impact of exile on the leadership of Africa was appraised in some detail with a call for further study in this regard. In the third section, the examples of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki were forwarded as role models for the way in which contemporary African leaders are traversing the divide between traditional Africa and the individualistic, materialistic West. I submitted that Africa’s

traditional worldview, while not being resurrected in total, was being reconstructed to answer to post-traditional demands but that scientific analysis that originated in the West was being reconstructed as well to suit African sensibilities. It should be apparent that I don't subscribe to the notion of a clash of civilizations. Rather, I suggest that, at least in Africa, there is the concerted meeting of minds that should be taken seriously.

Finally, if we believe that conflict starts in the minds of people and that it can be stopped only in the minds of people, it is vital that we take cognizance of what informs those minds and work with what people believe, not with what we want them to believe. By providing some insight into the worldview and culture of Africa, as it is being reconstructed, I hope to have prompted a more realistic approach to the continent and its leaders. For Africa's leaders, the ultimate test will be whether they will be able to emulate Mandela's success in what Nash termed the formation or recognition of contradictions between the traditional and the modern, and sustain them. It should be evident by now that, by having reviewed traditional African culture, what was true for Mandela,<sup>131</sup> is equally true for today's African leaders: their greatness and limitations stem from the same source. There is enough evidence that Steve Biko's prophecy may indeed be fulfilled: despite all the atrocities it has been subjected to *and* party to, Africa's contribution to the world will be in the field of human relationship, giving the world a more human face. Z <sup>132</sup>

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## Notes

1. The indictment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone states 17 counts against Taylor, including terrorism, collective punishment, unlawful killings, a host of crimes against humanity, use of child soldiers, attacks on the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, etc. See United Nations Document UN SCSL-2003-01-1, The Special Court for Sierra Leone, March 7, 2003, Par. 32,10-18 [www.sc-sl.org](http://www.sc-sl.org)
2. The ceremony took place in the executive mansion in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. It took the form of elaborate speeches, prayers, a farewell address by the president (dressed in white with a green presidential sash), which was full of Biblical imagery and the promise/threat that he would be back, and the swearing-in of the interim president. Anybody who watched the proceedings, broadcast live on BBC and CNN would have thought they were witnessing a church service. Also see article by Stephan Faris, "Charles Taylor Leaves Liberia, The President's Term Ends in a Shabby Mansion in Monrovia," TIME Online Edition, August 11, 2003. [www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,474987,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,474987,00.html).
3. "Liberia Leader Defiant Till the End," BBC News World Edition, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3140417.stm>), August 11, 2003, 17:03 GMT, 18:03 UK.
4. Presidents Thabo Mbeki from South Africa, Joaquim Chissano from Mozambique, and John Kufuor from Ghana presided.
5. Elizabeth Blunt, "Taylor's New Nigerian Home," BBC News World Edition, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3142101.stm>), August 11, 2003, 15:37 GMT, 16:37 UK.
6. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, President Nicolai Ceausescu of Romania and his wife were executed by firing squad on Christmas Day 1989.
7. Brian Kagoro, "The Opposition and Civil Society," in *Zimbabwe's Turmoil: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Richard Cornwell (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, Monograph Series No 87, June 17, 2003), 12.
8. 2003 SADC Summit Final Communiqué, August 26, 2003, par. 23, 24, 25.
9. Thabo Mbeki, in "Letter from the President," (*ANC TODAY, Online voice of the African National Congress*, Volume 3, No. 18, May 9-15, 2003, <http://>

- www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2003/at18.htm).
10. Betsie Smith, "The Role of Subregional and Regional Organisations in Preventing African Conflicts" in *A Continent Apart: Kosovo, Africa and Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs with the assistance of the Ford Foundation and The Independent International Commission on Kosovo, April 2001), 37-59.
  11. Betsie Smith, "The Psychology of Diplomacy, as Manifested in the Role of Sub-Regional and Regional Organizations in Preventing African Conflicts," in *The Psychology of Diplomacy*, in press.
  12. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Randburg, South Africa: Macdonald Purnell, 1994), 317.
  13. Steve Biko was one of the most prominent leaders in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He is acknowledged as the father of the "Black Consciousness" movement that propagated the psychological independence of the black person in South Africa from his white masters. He died, aged thirty, on September 12, 1977, while in South African police custody.
  14. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (London: Bowerdean Press, 1978), 41.
  15. The vision of an "African Renaissance" was first invoked by President Nelson Mandela shortly after he became president of a democratic South Africa. In his maiden speech on June 13, 1994, to summit meeting of the Organization of African Union (OAU) he talked about the glory of the ancient city of Carthage and challenged Africans to contribute to the continent's new birth. Since then, it has become a catch phrase for the regeneration of Africa in political, economic, cultural, and social terms.
  16. Naomi Chazan, Robert Nortimer, John Ravenhill, and Donald Rothschild, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 2nd edn. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 23, 24.
  17. The writings of Edward Said on this topic remain instructive, especially his book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine how We See the Rest of the World*, rev. edn. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).
  18. Mbulelo Mzamane, "Eurocentric and Afrocentric Perspectives on Ancient African History," in *African Renaissance*, ed. Malegapuru William Makgoba (Sandton/Cape Town: Mafube and Tafelberg, 1999), 173.
  19. Jannie Malan, *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa* (Durban: African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes [ACCORD], 1997), 19.
  20. Emphasis in original text.
  21. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), 9.
  22. Ibid., 30.
  23. This excludes the tiny minority of intellectuals who have abandoned their traditional or other beliefs in favor of philosophies from the West.
  24. Mbiti, *Introduction*, 32-39, 42.
  25. Unless otherwise indicated, this whole paragraph is paraphrased, or has quotations direct from Mbiti's *Introduction*, 32-39.
  26. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 12.
  27. Erich Leistner, "African Perceptions of Time and Economic Development," *Africa Insight* 28 (1998): 36.
  28. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 17, as quoted by Erich Leistner in *African Perceptions*, 36.
  29. Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 47. The impact of Christianity in particular on African perceptions of time and traditions will be discussed below.
  30. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 17, *Perceptions*.
  31. Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, 47.
  32. Leistner, *African Perceptions*, 37.
  33. Zahan, *Religion, Spirituality*, 51.
  34. Biko, *I Write*, 43, 44. The quotation of Kaunda is not referenced.

35. Barney Pityana, "The Renewal of African Moral Values," in *African Renaissance*, ed. Malegapuru William Makgobba (Sandton/Cape Town: Mafube Tafelberg, 1999), 138, 145.
36. With these references, I am not making a value judgment about the validity of a "scientific" or "pre-scientific" approach to life; I am merely quoting what prominent Africans themselves have to say about the Western way of solving problems as compared to the traditional way of thinking.
37. Credo Mutwa, *Indaba, My Children, African Tribal History, Legends, Customs and Religious Beliefs* (Edinburgh: Payback Press/Canongate Books, 1998), 568-69.
38. Mbiti, *Introduction*, 121.
39. Mutwa, *Indaba*, 569.
40. Klaus E. Müller Ute Ritz-Müller, and Henning Christoph, *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions* (Cologne, Könnemann, 1999), 19.
41. Mutwa, *Indaba*, 570.
42. Müller and others, *Soul of Africa*, 180.
43. Palesa Makhale-Mahlangu, "Reflections on Trauma Counselling Methods," presented at the South African Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Seminar No. 6, July 31, 1996, <http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artpales.htm>, Internet version, September 21, 2003.
44. Mbiti, *Introduction*, 33, 38.
45. Biko, *I Write*, 30.
46. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, (New York: Doubleday/Random House, 1999), 31.
47. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 9, 386.
48. Claude Ake, *Democratization of Disempowerment* (Lagos, Malthouse, 1994), page not cited, as quoted by Karl Maier in *Into the House of the Ancestors: Inside the New Africa* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 8.
49. Biko, *I Write*, 40-43.
50. See my "The Psychology of Diplomacy."
51. Jeffrey Brian Peires, "The Emergence of Black Political Communities," in *A New Illustrated History of South Africa*, ed. Trewhealla Cameron and S. B. Spies (Johannesburg, Southern Book; Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), 45.
52. Ibid., 47.
53. Mbiti, *Introduction*, 150.
54. Peires, *Emergence*, 47.
55. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 19, 20.
56. Smith, "Psychology of Diplomacy."
57. Malan, *Conflict Resolution*, 17.
58. Ibid., 22.
59. "Critical analysis" is used here as most Westerners would understand it. Analysts from an Africanist persuasion may see it differently.
60. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 213.
61. See note 15.
62. Emphasis in the original text.
63. Basil Davidson, *West Africa before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850* (London: Longman, 1998), 13.
64. Steve Biko's quotation of Kenneth Kaunda, *I Write*, 44.
65. Stanley Crouch, "Truth, at Last, About African Slave Trading," *Daily News* – Online edition, July 23, 2001, <http://www.lorenzenfamily.com/crouch/> retrieved November 5, 2003.
66. Karl Maier, *Into the House of the Ancestors: Inside the New Africa* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 8.
67. Roland Oliver, *The African Experience: From Olduvai Gorge to the 21st Century* (London: Phoenix Press, 1999), 218, 219.
68. Ibid., 132-47, 148, 181.
69. Peires, *Emergence*, 47, 48.
70. Maier, *Into the House*, viii.
71. See Oliver, *African Experience*, 183.

72. I recognize this is a generalization. The Rwanda genocide of 1994, for example, was not perpetrated by modern weapons but by traditional machetes and its causes are to be found in factors other than the presence of weapons, the most important of which were political machinations, both internal and external.
73. Oliver, *African Experience*, 187.
74. As recently as September 26, 2003, a respected political economist from the London School of Economics gave his view on the African part in the failed talks of the World Trade Organization in Cancun, Mexico, when some 20 developing nations refused to introduce new items on the agenda until they had dealt with agricultural subsidies. For him, they should be forgiven "for they knoweth not what they were doing." Seminar: *The Failure at Cancun*, under the auspices of the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies and Singapore Business Federation, September 26, 2003.
75. Taken from the title of Thomas Pakenham's book, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1992).
76. Oliver, *African Experience*, 183, 204, 211, 212.
77. Smith, "Preventing African Conflicts," 37.
78. Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 1998), 59-60.
79. Maier, *Into the House*, 4.
80. Mahmoud Mamdani, *There Can Be No African Renaissance without an Africa-focused Intelligentsia* (Cape Town: Sandton, 1999), 125-34.
81. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "African Renaissance Begins with Languages," *Sunday Times* (South Africa), September 14, 2003, 19.
82. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (London: Heinemann, 1990), as quoted by Pitika P. Ntuli, "The Missing Link between Culture and Education: Are We Still Chasing Gods that Are Not Our Own?" in *African Renaissance*, ed. Malegapuru William Makgoba (Johannesburg: Mafube; Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1999), 187, 189.
83. Biko, *I Write*, 107, 108.
84. G. C. Oosthuizen, "Africa's Social and Cultural Heritage in a New Era," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, October 1985, 77-113, 107, quoted by Leistner, *African Perceptions*, 38.
85. Biko, *I Write*, 56.
86. Maier, *Into the House*, 29.
87. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor, 1994).
88. Mahmoaud Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press, 1996), 286, 287, 289-91, 297.
89. David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 207-08, as quoted by Basil Davidson *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1992), 31.
90. Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, 29.
91. Malan, *Conflict Resolution*, 34.
92. George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 158, 159.
93. The pictures of Saddam Hussein after his capture by the American forces on December 13, 2003, perfectly illustrate the inherent weakness of the "Big Man" and prove the point that this "strongman" phenomenon is not exclusive to African leaders.
94. Although South Africa has been a republic for many years, the first democratic elections of 1994 are seen by many South Africans as its actual date of independence.
95. While my count refers to the number of former exiles in the cabinet while this paper was being written (the "second generation" ministers of President Thabo Mbeki's government), Sparks was referring to Mandela's first cabinet. But the question remains because similar observations have been made about the current leadership.
96. Allister Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003), 29.
97. I refer to the highly publicized court case in which the Reverend Allan Boesak, that fiery man who had claimed moral superiority over his oppressors, was convicted of fraud and sent to prison. The explanation of his supporters was that they had to apply "struggle accounting" in order to function during the apartheid years.

98. Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, 26.
99. J. Auodele Langley, *Pan Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 133, as quoted by Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, 28.
100. Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage, 2000).
101. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 584.
102. Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle*, 255-59.
103. For instance, "deploy" or "redeploy" has become the standard term for any appointment, irrespective of whether it is military or civilian in nature.
104. At the time of writing, this phenomenon is playing itself out in an acrimonious debate within the ANC about whether the head of the Special Investigations Unit, the "Scorpions," informed against his fellow ANC comrades while in exile. This is happening against the background of his unit's investigation into alleged corruption in South Africa's huge arms acquisition program in which the deputy-president is alleged to have been involved.
105. Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle*, 257, 258.
106. Any person who has lived abroad will agree that it is sometimes more difficult to adjust back home than in a foreign country. The person who has lived abroad has been forced to change and adjust to the culture within which he finds himself. Upon return, the process starts all over again because both the original country and the person have changed. Those who stay behind have not always undergone significant changes in approach to life and the world and may find the returnee threatening.
107. Maier, *Into the House*, 8.
108. I believe the current form of globalization is just another mutation of the types of world hegemony by world powers, economic and political, that manifested itself in the past.
109. Mamdani *Intelligentsia*, 125-34.
110. Biko, *I Write*, 29.
111. Delivered on behalf of the ANC on May 8, 1996, on the occasion of the adoption of South Africa's new constitution.
112. At the time of Mandela's political maturation, this belief was manifested in nationalism, but he soon realized that it should be a nationalism that transcended his own tribe.
113. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 4, 5, 11, 19-21, 21, 91, 171, 172, 204, 474, 215, 10, 604. One wonders where the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, and many other conflict situations around the world, would be if this advice had been followed.
114. When Mandela and seven others stood accused and were convicted of conspiracy and sentenced to life-imprisonment.
115. Andrew Nash, "Mandela's Democracy," in *Thabo Mbeki's World: The Politics and Ideology of the South African President*, ed. Sean Jacobs & Richard Calland (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; London: Zed Books, 2002), 243-55.
116. He alleges that Mandela took his recollections of his childhood experience verbatim from Anton Lembede, the philosopher of Africanism and first elected president of the African National Congress's Youth League.
117. One of the founding fathers of the African National Congress.
118. Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (Johannesburg: Collins, 1963), quoted by Nash in "Mandela's Democracy."
119. Whereas they avoided these public mass meetings with black leaders in the past, even white people are now beginning to make use of them!
120. Memorandum of Understanding on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), (NEPAD/HSGIC/03-2—3/APRM/MOU, March 9, 2003), par. 6. <http://www.touchtech.biz/nepad/files/documents/111/pdf>, retrieved November 9, 2003.
121. *Ibid.*, par. 260.
122. He did not mingle as easily with his subjects as Mandela, his command of his mother tongue, Xhosa, had become rusted after so many years in exile, and he got himself embroiled in the controversy about HIV/AIDS.
123. Sparks, *Miracle*, 257, 273.
124. South Africa provides most of Zimbabwe's electricity.
125. At the time of writing, Zimbabwe does not have a "government in waiting" that can take over from Mugabe when he leaves. Mugabe never cultivated a successor, the

ruling party itself is divided and does not have a clear way forward, and the opposition party (the Movement for Democratic Change) does not have the capacity to take over government. In addition, drastic measures from South Africa would exacerbate the situation and not alleviate the problems. Many analysts also warn that there is a real possibility of civil war if the problem of leader change is not managed with circumspection. Neither does South Africa, the only regional power, have the capacity to babysit Zimbabwe after Mugabe goes, like the United States is doing in Iraq.

126. Makhale-Mahlangu, "Reflections."
127. William Ury, "Wandering Out to the Gods: Lessons in Dispute Resolution from the San," *Track Two*, publication of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, Cape Town, July 1999, 22-29, originally published in *Negotiation Journal* (October 1995). [http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/two/8\\_1/P22\\_wandering\\_out.html](http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/two/8_1/P22_wandering_out.html), November 8, 2003.
128. Alcinda Honwana, "The Collective Body, Challenging Western Concepts of Trauma and Healing," *Track Two*, July 1999, [http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/two/8\\_1/p30\\_collective\\_body.html](http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/two/8_1/p30_collective_body.html), August 21, 2003.
129. Noel Bruyns, "Let Africans Honor Ancestors with Blood Libations in Mass, Says Bishop," *Christianity Today*, April 10, 2000. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/115/46.o.html>, retrieved November 2, 2003.
130. "Ubuntu at Work — Business Can Empower a Rich Vein of Talent While Keeping Shareholders Happy," *Sunday Times Business Times* (South Africa), October 12, 2003, 3.
131. Nash, "*Mandela's Democracy*," 254.
132. Biko, *I Write*, 47.