The Struggle For Recognition in the Philosophy of Axel Honneth, Applied to the Current South African Situation and Its Call for an "African Renaissance"

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Abstract The paper applies insights from Axel Honneth's recent book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, to the South African situation. Honneth argues that most movements for justice are motivated by individuals' and groups' felt need for recognition. In the larger debate over the relative importance of recognition compared with distribution, a debate framed by Taylor and Fraser, Honneth is presented as the best of both worlds. His tripartite schema of recognition on the levels of love, rights and solidarity, explains how concerns for equality and difference are two separate needs, even though both must be satisfied. Past and ongoing struggles in South Africa can be understood as struggles for recognition. The African Renaissance itself, to be successful, must address economic and recognition issues simultaneously.

In his recent book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth challenges what he calls utilitarian and reductivist accounts of social struggles.[1] According to his account, people often struggle because they have received social insult, disrespect, or denigration. While economic improvement may be part of an agenda of social change, it is not always the main motivating force behind the movement. In this way Honneth is challenging the readings of social struggle from the tradition of Hobbes and Machiavelli, as well as what he calls the materialist utilitarianism of Marx. He draws on writings of the early Hegel as well as the social psychology of Mead (and, ironically, the historical writings of Marx) to put forward his own convincing idea of the central role of intersubjective recognition as the driving force behind social movements.

I will argue that Honneth's account of the moral motivation of struggle for recognition (with its concomitant struggle for economic justice) is a more accurate account of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa than a Marxist or purely egoist economic interpretation would be. Indeed, Sartre and Fanon as well understood the importance of recognition in struggles against racism and colonialism. With that as a background, I will turn my attention to the new call for an "African Renaissance," discussing whether it is a call for vigorous economic activity capitalizing on regional political domination, or for another step in Africa's struggle for recognition.

At the same time, I will be advancing some cautionary concerns regarding the role of recognition. Apartheid excelled at giving a certain kind of recognition, that of racial and cultural distinctness. It was perhaps able to mask to itself the way in which it denied recognition in other important ways, by always congratulating itself on how well it was able to deliver this certain kind of distorted recognition. The fact that such dangers exist means that we will have to be vigilant in discerning which kinds of recognition are needed, and what will be entailed in delivery of that recognition. It is to this topic that the paper first turns.

Different emphases on recognition: Taylor and Honneth

Charles Taylor is widely known for his insistence that groups and individuals deserve recognition for their distinctness, and especially their cultural distinctness. While many champion his views, he has come under criticism from two directions. One set of critics wants to emphasize recognition of equality as more important, especially in a political sense, than recognition of distinctiveness. The other critics want to emphasize the need for utilitarian gains rather than the more nebulous psychological category of gaining recognition. Let us first focus on the first tension regarding distinctiveness and equality. As Blum notes, Taylor distinguishes his own interest in distinctiveness, from a democratic form of recognition "directed toward others in regard to their sameness with oneself – for example, as equal citizens of a shared polity, as equal human beings." This recognition of sameness is not the kind of recognition Taylor has in mind when he writes of "The Politics of Recognition." But Blum further notes that it is just that egalitarian sort of recognition that Honneth develops in his book, *The Struggle for Recognition*.[2]

Why do groups in their struggles care about one form of recognition rather than the other? According to Linda Nicholson, whether recognition of equality or difference seems of paramount importance to a community depends on its historical experience. Taking her examples from US history, Nicholson notes that many groups have actively avoided any recognition of difference. Historically, recognition of difference was coupled with discrimination, and the socially powerful in the USA considered themselves as without "ethnicity" while only others were considered different. Therefore in the first half of the twentieth century, ethnic groups in the USA wanted their differences to go unnoticed, particularly in the sphere of wage labor.[3]

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that feminists and African Americans decided that their difference should be recognized. Nicholson thinks the change is due to changing understandings of the meaning of oppression. In the early part of the century, oppression was understood in economic terms. It was not until later in the century that the idea that oppression could have cultural and psychological dimensions arose. There was also the added insight that oppression was social, and not merely political, "that it extended into such areas as sexual encounters, norms of behavior and styles of personal interaction and of self-presentation." This was the era that saw the creation of slogans like "Black is Beautiful." But according to Nicholson, the lesson being stressed at the time was not only "See me and recognize my distinctiveness" but also "See your activities of description and evaluation as

themselves problematic."[4] In other words, in this stress on recognition, there was also a focus on those who had been doing the recognizing, and belittling, of those who were seen as different. Nicholson explains that Taylor's discussion of recognizing difference "too prominently assumes a focus on the other to be recognized and too little assumes a focus on the practice of recognition itself."[5] She sees Taylor as listening to those who say "Recognize my worth," but not paying attention to those who understand the dynamics of recognition more thoroughly, and instead say "Let my presence make you aware of the limitations of what you have so far judged to be true and of worth."[6] For example, the person of color would say to the white person, or the woman would say to the man, "See how you presume that you know who I am. You have defined me without really knowing me, and the definition you create tells me more about you, your desires and your presumptions, than it does about me." So the more interesting, and more challenging, topic according to her, involves analyzing how we make judgments of worth.[7]

Rob Nixon, in his study contrasting the different approaches between American and South African anti-racist movements, notes that the concept of multiculturalism does not have the same popularity in South Africa as it does in the USA. This is due to the history of the subject. For apartheid was certainly an historical epoch in which difference was noticed, even heightened, and then discrimination was based on the differences. Nixon thinks that the postcolonial theorists that emphasize "the mutable, hybrid sites of identity" and those who participated in the South African struggle continue to pass each other "like ships in the night." There are two reasons for this lack of communication and understanding between these two groups. One is that intellectual talk of identity can seem inappropriate in the midst of a struggle against tyranny. But the other reason is because it, oddly enough, sounded too much like a new apartheid. As Nixon explains:

> Since the late 1950s, difference (as opposed to unity) has been perceived – for sound historical reasons – as a government term. This is so because the South African brand of racial supremacy has been couched as a form of sensitivity to the special needs and cultural particularities of diverse "peoples." An attentiveness to difference is thus perceived as "apartheid" business, a way of coating state racism with a democratic gloss.
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>   Americans are often baffled by the steely commitment of key organizations – the ANC, the United Democratic Front, the Mass Democratic Movement, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the South African Communist Party – to the term *nonracial* rather than multiracial or multiethnic, which are the obvious choices from an American standpoint. . . . The distinction in approach is symptomatic of a deeply felt need to counter the regime's sedulous accentuation, embellishment, and fabrication of different "nations" for the end of divide-and-rule.[8]

For these reasons, Nixon explains, the term "multi-" is a kiss-of-death prefix. The apartheid government played upon the idea that different African ethnic groups were different from each other, so different that they could not live together with a shared lifestyle. But apartheid could also conveniently overlook difference in favor of unity, as it did when it decided that all whites, regardless of different languages and cultures, could live together with each other, so that the White Nation was one, while there were various Bantu nations.[9] The apartheid government also used the Zulus, who were only too willing to assert their own cultural uniqueness in distinction to other Bantu-speaking groups, to reinforce the idea of difference. With this as an historical

background, it is no wonder that Taylor's present-day insistence on the politics of recognition is not well suited to South Africa.

But for all the shortcomings of Taylor, this does not mean that recognition of difference cannot be a goal, but only that it must be approached in a different way. I suggest in this paper that Honneth's approach is much better suited for South Africa than Taylor's. Honneth firmly grounds recognition first in the family and, second, in recognition of equality and equal legal rights. Only after equality is firmly realized, does one go the further step to recognize the uniqueness of individuals and groups. Since this third step is firmly based in the second, we can be assured that distinct traits, such as race and gender, will not be stigmatized and get in the way of appreciation of unique abilities. In our next sections we will explore Honneth's ideas at length.

Honneth on three needed kinds of recognition

Honneth explains that "human integrity owes its existence . . . to the patterns of approval and recognition." Insult or humiliation "injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively."[10] Honneth found, in the works of the early Hegel, the beginnings of a theory of recognition's centrality to social struggle. He notes that in the later works, notably *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel lost his earlier insight in pursuit of other topics. Honneth also sees the theme of recognition in the social psychology of George Herbert Mead.

According to Honneth's interpretation of Mead, we come to the point of knowing who we are, only by first seeing ourselves reflected in the expressions and reactions of other persons. This can begin from the stage of infancy, where the infant, at first not realizing that the mother is something apart from his or her self, eventually realizes that the mother is a separate agent who interacts with his or her self. One begins to realize that the things that oneself does affect the way that others react to oneself. By watching reactions, one learns about the social values of others. Later, through games, one learns the interaction patterns of others and finds one's own role. In our upbringing, we begin to internalize norms, which teach us what we can expect from others, and what we are obliged to do for others.

Mead insists that self-realization depends on others, because it involves recognizing one's unique abilities, and knowing that they are valuable because of the recognition one receives from others for them. This recognition must go beyond affection, to the stage of confirmation of one's chosen way of life. One must realize the positive contribution one makes to society; but it is the shared conception of the good life in the society at the time that determines the valuableness of what we do.[11]

But, what if we have desires, or personal goals, which are given no place by our society? Maybe our own community is too conformist, and is not accepting of who we want to be. Maybe we are women who want more success in the business world. Maybe we are Black and want freedoms denied to us under apartheid or apartheid-like systems, such as freedom to go where we want and live where we want. Maybe we are gay or lesbian and want to live in a society that recognizes our lifestyle as a valid

choice. Maybe we are artists who feel unappreciated in a society that only cares about money-making and sees our contributions as superfluous. According to Mead, we cannot just ignore society and continue on our own as if society does not matter. In order to realize the demands of the "I," Mead asserts, one must imagine a community in which one is entitled to have those kinds of desires satisfied. If they cannot be met by the "generalized other" present in our current societies today, then one must imagine a future community. We must secure acceptance from a "counterfactually posited community that grants them greater freedom, as compared to the established relations of recognition."[12] So this means that under apartheid, we must begin to imagine a community in which apartheid is gone, and open our struggling for the reality of that future community. In a patriarchal or heterosexist world, we must imagine a future community in which women, gays or lesbians will be given equal freedoms and respect. And, in a capitalist society that reduces all values to money, we need to imagine, and struggle for, a future community that recognizes some values as more important that mere monetary gain.

Mead sees this movement of struggle as historical. In his own terminology at the time, he called it the march of "civilization" towards greater liberation of individuality. "Primitive society," he thought, offered less scope for individuals, having rigidly defined and hierarchical roles. However, individuals need social liberation; so people have been struggling to expand the range of their intersubjectively guaranteed rights and personal autonomy.[13] We could note, however, that some of the biggest struggles for freedom of individuals have been happening in the so-called "civilized" countries, and the struggles are far from over.

Honneth also refers to Dewey's philosophy. Dewey claims that our emotions are connected to whether our intentions are thwarted or not. Thwartings due to unanticipated obstructions are technical disruptions, such as the car not starting, traffic jams, or sudden illness. But when disruptions are due to the violation of norms that have hitherto been taken as valid, this results in moral conflicts. For example, when workers have worked all month in good faith that they will be paid at the end of the month, and they are instead told that they must wait indefinitely for their wages, there is moral conflict, indignation and disappointment. Dewey asserts that moral emotional reactions are practical. If the moral norm is violated by oneself, the feeling will be one of guilt; if it is violated by the other, the feeling one will have is indignation. When others violate moral norms that allow one to count as who one wants to be, feelings of disappointment are natural and inevitable. Dewey says that humans "are incapable of reacting in emotionally neutral ways to social injuries." He further adds that only by gaining the possibility of active conduct can people dispel the emotional tension caused by humiliation.[14]

Honneth argues that social struggles are responses to perceptions that others in society are not recognizing oneself as one wants to be recognized. In what he calls a Durkheimian reading of Foucault, he asserts that "struggle is morally motivated in a very broad way, not only by questions of injustice, but by all forms of disrespect."[15] There are moral motives for revolt and resistance, which are based on a tacit understanding of what one deserves.[16] When one does not get the expected recognition, the result is denigration and insult. But there are different types of

denigration and insult, depending on which level of intersubjectively acquired relation-to-self they injure. Honneth divides these different sorts of recognition, with their corresponding insult, into three categories, based on Hegel and Plessner: love; rights; and solidarity.

Love

Love is an emotional bond that depends upon affection. Here Honneth draws especially upon the example of mother and child, but all experiences of love and friendship belong in this category. Here, people recognize each other as needy beings. The child, for example, realizes through a struggle of wills with the parent that "he or she is dependent on the loving care of an independently existing person with claims of her own." If love is provided, one develops self-confidence, because one trusts the loved person to maintain affection, assuring that one's needs will lastingly be met, because one is certain of one's unique value to the other. If one is subjected to physical or psychological abuse, such as rape, one's self-confidence is undermined. Every attempt to gain control of a person's body is deeply humiliating, both because of pain, and the because of the feeling of being defenselessly at the mercy of another subject. Physical violation does lasting damage to one's basic self-confidence (learned through love). It results in loss of trust in oneself and the world; one can no longer be assured one can autonomously coordinate one's own body.[17]

Rights

With rights, we leave aside relationships of affection which are partial and apply to only our near friends and family, and instead adopt a stance of cognitive respect toward a larger group, if not all of humanity. One can have rights only if one is socially recognized as a member of the community. This was made all too clear by the examples of "stateless" persons such as the Jewish German refugees of the Second World War. Honneth notes that traditional forms of legal recognition are usually fused with social roles, which results in an unequal distribution of rights and burdens. For example, in a patriarchal society, men would have more rights while women would shoulder more burdens (perhaps both figuratively and literally). Hegel, in contrast, advocated a universalist conception of morality, which said that exceptions and privileges are no longer admissible. The legal system must be universalizable. The interests of all members of society must be covered. Hegel therefore severs rights from local ethical authorities. Rights have become detached from roles because they belong equally to all. For example, there should be no set of special rights and burdens for the aristocracy, and no separate set of rights and burdens for the peasants. Hegel also insists that rights are not supposed to be affective, but rather purely cognitive. Honneth then wants to know, however, how they can affect behavior.[18]

While we may have Kant and Hegel to thank for the idea of universal human rights regardless of social role, this ideal was not reached within their lifetime. As Lucius Outlaw explains, a universalist concept of political liberalism, meaning equal rights

. . . "without regard for the race, creed, color, sex, national origin," physical abilities, or sexual orientation of an individual – has come to have fairly widespread, though still not complete, acceptance in particular liberal democracies only during the past quarter-century and only then after intense and continuing struggles. To project this universalism back through the history of liberalism to the articulated intentions of its founding figures whereby *all persons* were thought to be equal politically and morally is to project understandings whose achievements are much closer to our own times. . . . Kant and Hegel especially, were *not* universalist in spreading the range of coverage of the philosophical anthropology that became definitive for liberalism. Both were racists as well as racialists and restricted their recognition of potentially and actually autonomous, rational individuals to individuals and civilizations of the white race(s) of Europe. . . . It has been the unwillingness of those defined as "other" to the model of "rational, autonomous, and white man" to accept the exploitative and disrespectful orderings of their lives as "according to nature" that continues to be the basis of the "rights revolution" in modern political communities. It is they who have brought on the continuing universalization of liberalism, not its original architects.[19]

We must be clear that, although Honneth finds his articulation of universal rights within Hegel's works, we should not attribute too much credit to Hegel himself. His works also contain, in other passages, clear notions that races are not equal in ability and worth. Outlaw's account testifies to the need for struggle to ever-expand the practical granting and upholding of rights. When one experiences exclusion or the denial of one's rights, one's social integrity is at stake, and one's self-respect is jeopardized. It suggests that we have struggling women, people of color, the disabled, gays and lesbians, as well as religious minorities, to thank for expanding our practice of upholding human rights, becoming practically more universal.

When our rights are upheld, this results in self-respect. One can respect oneself because one knows that one deserves the respect of everyone else. Honneth argues that human dignity is based on the recognizable capacity to assert (socially accepted) claims. When one is structurally excluded from certain rights, one feels that one's respect has been denigrated.[20]

Honneth notes that legal studies consider the notion of rights to have progressed throughout the recent centuries. They divide rights into civil rights (liberty) emphasized in the 18th century, political rights (participation) emphasized in the 19th century, and social rights (basic welfare) emphasized in the 20th century. Previously status-bound rights became universalized, when there were no longer convincing arguments to oppose them. Each new category of rights was the result of pressure from disadvantaged groups.[21] Obviously not all of these rights were fully won in the century that they were first articulated. For example, the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA was only then winning civil rights for Black Americans. Through social movements, like the civil rights movement, one can overcome feelings of social shame by protesting.[22]

Solidarity

The third category, solidarity, is one that provides social esteem for our individual or group special traits and abilities. In solidarity, one has a felt concern for what is unique in the other person (not just passive tolerance). While social esteem is about recognizing individual or group abilities, nevertheless there must be a shared idea of their value, because their worth is socially defined. For example, what is considered

honorable conduct is based on a culturally pre-given value order. Status groups are usually in relations of hierarchically graded esteem. However, in addition individuals outside of their estate can be esteemed for abilities society accepts as valuable.[23] Notions of honor have definitely changed over time. It used to be that honor was seen as a virtue particularly of the aristocratic classes. Leonard Harris has explained how Blacks in the USA have been systematically denied the chance to earn honor due to the racist concepts held by the majority of people in that society. In other words, it is difficult for Black men in America to gain honor when they are daily emasculated by a white society which has power over them in the workplace, in the prisons, and in the media. While Martin Luther King, Jr, can be honored, he is honored as the exception, not the rule, for Black men in America.[24] As Harris explains,

> No slave, eunuch, serf, or peasant was ever honored as slave, eunuch, serf, or peasant. When members of such groups attained honorable regard it necessarily had to be a function of behavior or attributes which made them exemplary as "above" their lowly station.[25]

Honneth argues that old notions of honor have changed from the earlier aristocratic connections: there is a universalization of honor into dignity; and a privatization of honor into integrity. Society used to think its values were objectively given. Now that there is more realization that values are not objective systems of reference (as in this example of honor), the way we give esteem must change. He refers to movements now known as the "Politics of Difference," where there is an attempt to end social patterns of denigration. But such movements do not in themselves provide esteem (which must be earned) but rather establish conditions under which esteem can be earned.[26] For example, removal of gender discrimination cannot assure any particular woman that she will now be esteemed for her competence, but only that she will be freed from those prejudging her as incompetent.

In modern societies, relations of esteem are in permanent struggle. The type of disrespect found in this third category is involved when one's social group is not appreciated for its form of life or manner of belief. Such disrespect robs members of the group of their chance to attribute social value to their own abilities. They need group solidarity in order to discover and acclaim good things about their own group. A group may choose to use symbolic force so as to raise the recognized value of abilities connected with that group. There is often concern over group pride or collective honor. Today the term "solidarity" is most often used to describe groups struggling against political oppression. Now subjects can esteem each other for abilities that were earlier thought to be without societal significance.[27]

Honneth on the role of recognition in the struggle against racism

Honneth credits Sartre with giving recognition a central role in social struggles. Yet, Sartre's early theory of intersubjectivity was inaccurate, because it always saw the gaze of the other as objectivizing. Sartre reduced all relationships to reciprocal reification. But later, in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew*, he explored the topic of social disrespect. He saw Jews' norms of social conduct as attempts to regain collective self-respect in a setting of denied recognition. He then saw the struggle for recognition as

caused by a relationship between social groups that is asymmetrical and, so, may be overcome. This became the theme in Sartre's negritude writings. Sartre asserted that colonialism distorts relationships of reciprocal recognition, so that the colonized are "pressed into a quasi-neurotic scheme of behavior." They feel self-contempt, and cannot be rid of those feelings except in cynicism, or heightened aggression. Referring to Fanon's analysis, Sartre explains that the colonized divide themselves in two, indulging in both ritual transgression and habitual over-accommodation.[28] Asymmetrical patterns of communication between European settlers and those native to Africa involves simultaneous denial and maintenance of relationships of mutual recognition. The settler has to recognize and disrespect the native; the native has to lay claims to and deny the human condition. Sartre's concept of "neurosis" is developed later in his work on Flaubert, where the term "neurotic" is intended to mean "pathological distortion of relations of interaction stemming from the reciprocal denial of relationships of recognition that are still effective below the surface."[29]

Despite Sartre's insights as to people's needs for recognition, Honneth thinks that Sartre was "still in the dark" regarding why humans are worthy of recognition, and he believes that this point clearly shows in Sartre's works on colonialism. Sartre at one point referred to denial of human rights, but at another point thought human rights were an "ideology of lies." On other occasions he said those colonized were denied social recognition because their ways of life and forms of self-realization were not tolerated. Honneth's point here is that Sartre had not separated out the three categories (love, rights, and solidarity) clearly.[30]

Fanon on recognition

Honneth mentions briefly that Fanon, in his work *Black Skins, White Masks*, drew on Hegel to explain the role that recognition plays among oppressed Blacks in colonialism.[31] While Honneth himself does not comment directly on Fanon's project, it is worthwhile for us to look at the section in Fanon's book entitled "The Negro and Recognition." Here, drawing on an essay by psychologist Alfred Adler who wrote of the nervous temperament or character, as well as Hegel's account in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he argues that Black people from Martinique in the Antilles are wholly dependent on others' estimations of themselves, and they spend an inordinate amount of time and effort in comparing themselves to whites, as well as comparing each other with themselves in reference to the measuring stick of whites. We must remember that the Caribbean islands were populated, during colonial times, with slaves brought from Africa, so that the contemporary descendants are black with various degrees of mixtures of white, due to intermarrying, which was a practice on the islands. We must not presume that racism was lessened on an island where racial intermarriage was the norm. Instead, subtle comparisons became the rule of the day, something Fanon himself was acutely aware of, having been the darkest-skinned child of lighter-skinned bourgeois parents. Fanon states:

> The Negro . . . is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The

> Other. The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one's own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility.[32]

Fanon is here re-emphasizing the importance of recognition, but he has a hostile interpretation of this mutual evaluation. Indeed he seems in some passages to draw upon the account of recognition found in Sartre's early works: subjects try to turn the other into an object that they can dominate or discard. If the Other has an interpretation of oneself that cuts down one's self-esteem, one can respond by ignoring that person, so that one is narcissistically surrounded only by those who admire one. So despite the large role that recognition plays, Fanon asserts that people are basically egoistic:

> I am Narcissus, and what I want to see in the eyes of others is a reflection that pleases me. Therefore, in any given group (environment) in Martinique, one finds the man on top, the court that surrounds him, the inbetweens (who are waiting for something better), and the losers. These last are slaughtered without mercy. One can imagine the temperature that prevails in that jungle. There is no way out of it. Me, nothing but me. The Martiniquans are greedy for security. They want to compel the acceptance of their fiction. They want to be recognized in their quest for manhood. They want to make an appearance. Each one of them is an isolated, sterile, salient atom. . . . Everything an Antillean does is done for The Other . . . because it is The Other who corroborates him in his search of self-validation.[33]

But according to Fanon, it would be wrong to say that Black persons who exhibit these characteristics are neurotic; it is not a personal psychological problem, because they are responding to an historical situation. "The Negro is seeking to protest against the inferiority that he feels historically. Since in all periods the Negro has been an inferior, he attempts to react with a superiority complex."[34] He therefore thinks that, when this problem with overdependence on recognition of the Other and its attendant superiority complex are explained to Blacks, they should also be told that "The environment, society, are responsible for your delusion," in hopes that, realizing the source, they will be motivated to challenge and change that society.[35]

Fanon agrees with Hegel's statement, which he read in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that "Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him."[36] He gets this from the passages regarding the master–slave relationship. Hegel argues that the master and the slave must both struggle with each other, so that they can then mutually recognize each other. It is only when the slave encounters resistance from the other that he or she experiences desire, what Fanon calls "the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit."[37] He refers to Hegel's idea that only by risking one's life, by doing battle to fight for reciprocal recognition, does one show that one's worth is more than just survival. But he then expresses his deep disappointment that, in Martinique, independence was granted by the French, without the Martiniquans themselves having struggled for it. He thinks that this absence of struggle against the French means that the Martiniquans have not progressed to a certain level of consciousness about themselves. He admires instead the battles in which Black Americans are engaged in the United States. He thinks it is better to have the experience of fighting for one's recognition. The Martiniquan situation is reactional; and such reaction always brings resentment. Better, he states, to be actional, or pro-

active as we might say. There is no choice but to fight.[38] As he explains in his conclusion,

> If the white man challenges my humanity, I will impose my whole weight as a man on his life and show him that I am not that "sho' good eatin" that he persists in imagining. I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: That of demanding human behavior from the Other.[39]

In this way, we create ourselves through our struggles.

If Fanon is right, and struggle is necessary for growth, then South Africa will be at a more fortunate starting-point for the African Renaissance, in that it has just gone through a long, protracted struggle, with the result being that both groups have recognized each other. But recognition is not static; it is not won once and for all. As Honneth noted, struggles can be set off when an implicit economic consensus is violated, for people feel that they have been denied social recognition and worth.[40] Insofar as many people's economic expectations have not yet been met by the new government, we should not be surprised if occasions for struggle continue. Honneth, however, disagrees with certain aspects of Hegel's account of struggle. Honneth says that risking death is not the best way to solve the misunderstanding between warring partners such as master and slave. Rather, it is the social experience of realizing that one's interaction partner is vulnerable to moral injury that brings consciousness to relations of recognition.[41]

In contrast to egoism, utilitarianism, reductionism

Honneth begins by noting that early communities or states such as the *polis* were not just economic practicalities, but instead were based on shared notions of virtues. However, with the coming of the European Renaissance, new commercial methods meant that economic activity had outgrown the framework of traditional morals. That is why Machiavelli presumed a permanent state of hostile competition, with actors motivated only by self-preservation. Hobbes followed suit by imagining that individuals were self-propelled automata in a war of all against all. However, the young Hegel resisted this tendency of social philosophy to reduce all political activity to power concerns alone. He was against the idea that all "natural" actions were isolated and solitary, and rejected Hobbes's views to side with Aristotle's notion of humans as "political animals." Instead of Hobbes's view of public life as a restriction of spheres of liberty, one may instead see it as an opportunity of fulfilment. After all, humans move within a framework of ethical bonds; therefore, mores and customs can create a basis for extended freedom. Aristotle thought that society's ethical relations guarantee complementary agreement and mutuality of opposed subjects.[42] Honneth argues that pre-contractual relations of mutual recognition underlie even relations such as social competition, for in competition people agree to restrict their own spheres of liberty. Therefore Hegel must reinterpret the so-called "state of nature" as a unilateral seizure of goods. Instead, it is seen as a struggle for recognition.[43]

However, present ethical mores and current practices of mutual recognition are bound to be disturbed and challenged through struggle. In struggle, there is an interruption of already established processes of mutual recognition as new conflicts

come into play. So, the ethical norms that make up society's preconceived notions of what can be expected morally, are always changing over time, sometimes slowly, sometimes suddenly.[44]

Honneth also accuses Marx of economic reductionism. He thinks that Marx's problem began due to his reading Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, rather than the *Realphilosophie*, and so unfortunately Marx focused on Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage, a study that Honneth considers to be flawed. Marx reduced all demands for recognition to self-realization through labor. His concept of labor was so normatively charged that he imagined that the craftsperson is so in touch with the consumer, that they receive intersubjective recognition and self-worth in this way. But under capitalism, this is taken away from them. Marx thought that recovery of autonomous labor would in itself re-establish the conditions under which subjects mutually affirm each other. But there is a problem here: this account reduces all possible relations of recognition to one based on satisfaction of material needs. Marx appropriated a utilitarian model of social conflict, in which classes fought over economic interests. But by doing so, he ignored moral claims based on disappointed identity claims.[45]

While his writings on economics are materialist, Honneth notes that Marx does show sensitivity to issues of recognition in his historical writings. It is there that he feels the need to incorporate class-specific everyday culture into his accounts of struggle. Honneth notes that

> If it is the case that culturally inherited lifestyles are what shape the way in which social circumstances and privations are experienced, then the question of which objectives the various groups in a political confrontation are pursuing can no longer be decided on the basis of a pure weighing of interests. . . . In these social struggles, groups or classes confront each other in an attempt to defend and establish the values that guarantee their identities.[46]

One key example from Marx is his account of the civil war in France, which Honneth says can be called expressivist. In other words, more than concern for economic prosperity, those struggling against the then powers-that-be in France (or later the Prussians) were interested in asserting their class and national identity.

Honneth charges that the stress on the role of recognition in social struggles is not present in academic sociology circles. There, all is turned into "interest," without being linked to the "everyday web of moral feelings." Sociologists must notice and study the transition between individual experiences of disrespect, and group understanding that those so-called individual experiences belong to them as a group, which then struggles for respect. This means that the struggle is both personal and impersonal at the same time. But the movement hinges on the availability of shared semantics to express the feeling of group disrespect. One good thing about collective struggles is that they can tear the individual from a crippling situation of passively endured humiliation, and find a new form of expression where they can express their moral or social worth. In this way they can anticipate a future community that will recognize them.[47]

Honneth contrasts struggles over interests and struggles over recognition. The models of struggle that start from collective interest want control over opportunities to reproduce their culture and way of life. In contrast, struggles for recognition start from

feelings of having been unjustly treated. They struggle for personal integrity. These two models of conflict should not try to replace each other. The point is that the second can complement the first. While it is good to caution against economic reductionism, it is also good to remember that economics is not irrelevant to social struggles. For example, social esteem is indirectly related with patterns of income distribution. Those groups who are underpaid or underemployed understandably feel that their special skills and attributes are not being appreciated by the larger community. For example, farm workers who are paid below the minimum wage, work in hazardous conditions (because of pesticides) and work long hours, undoubtedly feel that their contribution to feeding the rest of the society is undervalued. Likewise women who work in the underpaid child-care sector are likely to feel that their contributions to raising the next generation are undervalued, resulting in low social esteem. Honneth refers to E. P. Thompson's study of the English lower classes, as one of the many examples where struggles begin when an implicit economic consensus is violated. Then people feel that they have been denied social recognition and worth.[48] A study of workers' movements for improvement of working conditions in South Africa could also be shown to be based on the feeling of violation or disappointment when expectations of recognition for a job well done are not forthcoming. It would, therefore, according to Honneth, be a distortion of the situation to say that workers only, or mostly, care about their material conditions alone. On the other hand, it would be an equally severe mistake to think that economic impoverishment is irrelevant, for underpayment or underemployment is one way to tell members of a group that they are not valued.

Recognition and economics

Honneth's notion of the importance of recognition should not just replace concerns for economic redistribution. Martin Matustik, in his work on the role of recognition of difference in challenging a new hegemonic "world order," notes that critics like Nancy Fraser and Iris Young show that "focusing on cultural recognition at the expense of bypassing the economic issues of redistribution represents a retreat to uncritical theory."[49] Both approaches should be taken seriously, and the links between them are extensive. When Fanon states, for example, that he must demand to be treated like a human being, part of that treatment will be demonstrated by paying fair wages, by opening up business opportunities to those who had been excluded, by increasing educational opportunities. If these concrete manifestations of recognition are not forthcoming, then we are right to be skeptical of claims that we have been recognized fully already.

According to Blum, in certain circumstances, the recognition for which groups are looking is not of their cultural uniqueness, but rather of their shared experiences. For example, regarding African-Americans, it would not be enough to recognize a cultural distinctness found in the African-American community. First and foremost it is important to recognize their historical experience, as Blum explains: "Part of what is to be recognized is the group's historical experience of subordination, resistance, and accommodation to it." So not all forms of recognition are recognition for cultural distinctness. As Blum explains, there are some groups "who, having been denied full human equality, are demanding to be granted it. . . . In these cases, the demand is that their distinguishing characteristic – race, gender, sexual orientation – not be taken as a badge of inferiority or deficiency."[50]

Fraser criticizes Charles Taylor as an example of someone who has shifted the emphasis away from economic injustice to cultural injustice. She worries that implicit in Taylor's move is the idea

that we no longer have to worry about economic injustice, or that economic injustice is not as important as cultural injustice. She is also concerned that Taylor may think that focusing on cultural injustice itself will give us the answers to the problems of economic injustice. She also considers Honneth to be a thinker who errs on the side of emphasizing recognition as playing too great a role. As she explains, "He argues that recognition is the fundamental concept of justice and can encompass redistribution."[51] While she is against attempts to reduce redistribution to a facet of recognition, she does acknowledge that Honneth's book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, is "the most thorough and sophisticated attempt at such a reduction."[52] However it is important to realize that the disagreement between Honneth and Fraser is narrow. While Fraser considers redistribution and recognition to be analytical distinctions, she admits that "In practice, the two are intertwined."[53] This is particularly the case, she explains, with "bivalent" collectivities such as race and gender, where both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition play a role. According to Fraser these two types of penalty are "primary and co-original" while for Honneth misrecognition is primary.[54] It is exceedingly difficult to discern, when two events are in constant conjunction, which is the cause of the other, or which is more primary than the other; Honneth has at length argued, as it was explained earlier, that recognition is central to human thriving. On this point, I want to emphasize the fact that both of them think that redistribution and recognition are alike important and should not be neglected. Fraser's ideas can complement Honneth's concerns at the point of looking for solutions to racism that encompass both redistributional and recognitional justice.

The fact that in practice the two issues are intertwined is also reiterated by Blum, who illustrates: "Blacks deserve to be treated as equals; to do so involves economic, political, social, representational, and cultural spheres."[55] However, Blum is concerned that there is a third category ignored in Fraser's dyad, which is the political or civil – a concern that he says that Honneth deals with adequately in his book.[56]

James Ingram is concerned that recognition without economic change will be experienced as bogus. He agrees that sometimes a group suffers misrecognition and demands a cultural or symbolic remedy, some symbolic "marker" which stands for the public's new recognition. However, he is concerned that such markers might be seen as "tokens" when some weightier outcome is sought. Groups might be wanting both restored self-esteem, a subtle good that only accounts like Honneth's can notice, and also some instrumental or procedural changes.[57] Symbolic recognition is not enough. As Nixon explains, many white South Africans thought that "once the old personnel have changed their minds, little else need change, least of all the institutions of power."[58] Granting political rights in South Africa without attempting to correct deep and long-standing discriminatory practices in the economy will lead to continued economic apartheid. As Nixon points out:

> Historically, South Africa was singled out as a uniquely offensive society not because of its discriminations, state brutality, injustices, or unequal opportunities, but because it enshrined racism in law. It has thus been all too easy in the early 90s to misconstrue the attenuation of legalized racism as the end of apartheid. If that perception prevails, once the laws have gone, South Africa will slide from the news and join the ranks of the myriad more or less anonymously unjust societies. Without economic redress and swift institutional transformations which require international support and investment, privilege and dereliction will remain distributed almost entirely along racial lines. If we permit that to happen, the future will hold out little more than flag-independence from apartheid, which will continue to govern the society from the past.[59]

Since economic justice, directly intertwined with issues of recognition, continues to be an important issue in South Africa, as well as in Honneth's work, we turn to the topic of the African Renaissance.

The African Renaissance: cultural recognition, or economic improvement?

Many people have speculated on what the "African Renaissance" really is. Is it a policy? Or, as Ian Liebenberg wonders, is it a mobilizing tool or a vital lie?[60] There has been a debate among writers in many South African newspapers about whether the African Renaissance is about symbolic recognition, or whether it will have concrete economic results. Robert Kirby thinks that choosing the term "African Renaissance" suggests that Africa needs a flowering of the arts, while in his opinion what is needed instead is reconstruction in a practical sense.[61] Ebrahim Harvey thinks that only the intellectuals care about issues of identity and other rarefied topics.[62] On the other hand, Xolela Mangcu thinks that there is a need for more Black intellectuals to rise to the challenge of thinking out the future course for the African Renaissance, and not just to stick to the more pedestrian issues such as building houses.[63]

It seems that Thabo Mbeki himself, populizer of the term, is trying to wed these two themes of recognition and practical economics together. One reporter, Howard Barrell, notes that in President Mbeki's speech at the United Nations University in Tokyo in April 1999, he made the following claims about the African Renaissance:

> What he wants is to draw pride from the achievements of African societies before they were plundered by the colonial powers from the 1600s onwards; he wants to advance an appreciation of African abilities and genius among fellow Africans and beyond; he wants to promote the spread of basically liberal democratic systems of government in African states; he wants to see to "the establishment of modern multi-sector economies," open and attractive to investors; and he wants to improve education, health and other social provision among Africans. . . . Mbeki seems to be saying, quite sensibly, that the artistic and cultural renaissance he hopes for depends substantially on creating security and prosperity. It is the kind of perspective with which a progressive 15th-century Florentine silk merchant might have had little argument.[64]

The close connection between recognition and economy was brought out in Mbeki's Tokyo speech, as another reporter, Ferial Haffajee, notes:

> Mbeki has ambitions to make South Africa an economic and intellectual center like Timbuktu. From the 14th to 16th centuries, that West African city was like a Wall Street, a vital node in the trade routes which criss-crossed Africa. It was also a world-leading Islamic center of learning.[65]

Here, Mbeki seems to be connecting the worldwide recognition of the greatness of the past of Africa, illustrated by the medieval city of Timbuktu, and suggesting that if the world is now ready to recognize Africa's great past, people will be ready to admit that Africa can have a great future as well.

Some people are more skeptical. Anthony Egan notes that some think that all this talk about the Renaissance is just diverting people's attention from the fact that the proposed change is not happening, and not due to the uncooperativeness of global players, but due to the insincerity of Mbeki and other South African politicians:

> This concept seems at its best to be a commitment to revitalizing Africa as a continent – economically, politically, culturally – and bringing it into a more central position in the global village. Inevitably this means both building greater self-esteem among all Africans (black and white) and restoring the values of liberty, community and democracy. This one can only praise and support. But some might argue that such a project could simply be a "front": a comfortable and comforting discourse to plaster over socioeconomic cracks; a way of bolstering the interests of a "patriotic bourgeoisie," a new ruling elite whose only difference from the former is that they are black.[66]

Fears of the new "African elite" seem widespread. Another commentator, Ebrahim Harvey, focusing on the dashed economic hopes of many South Africans, said:

> The negotiated settlement, which culminated in the 1994 elections, left many questions of our struggle unresolved. The capitalist economy, responsible for the exploitation of the African masses, was left untouched. The marriage between non-racial democracy and the capitalist system, which puts profits before people, was bound to pose fundamental problems for our transformation, simply because apartheid was underpinned by capitalism and did not stand on its own as a system of racial oppression. Apartheid and capitalism worked hand in glove. All the changes to the laws of the country could not wipe away the legacy of deep-rooted racism and ethnicity in our country, which is why today it is still so prevalent.[67]

Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko argue that the "African Renaissance" is indeed an under-defined ideal, "more promise than policy" at this early stage. They are concerned to find out just what Thabo Mbeki intends his African Renaissance to accomplish. Among commentators and those devoted to the African Renaissance, Vale and Maseko note two trends or interpretations which are dominant. The first they call the globalist interpretation, the second the Africanist interpretation. For our purposes, we could note that the first focuses on economics to the neglect of issues of recognition, while the second sees both economic justice and issues of recognition as intertwined and important.[68]

The first globalist interpretation would see the African Renaissance as proclaiming that Africa is an expanding market, and "South African capital is destined to play a special role through the development of trade, strategic partnerships and the like. In exchange for acting as the agent of globalization, the continent will offer South Africa a preferential option on its traditionally promised largess of oil, minerals and mining."[69] Understandably, the rest of the continent is nervous about South Africa's taking on this role, as noted by Moletsi Mbeki, the President's brother.[70] While proponents of economic globalization imagine that the market itself will erode authoritarian governments with its freedoms, others have shown that the influence of the market widens the gap between rich and poor.

The second, Africanist interpretation is poststructural, in that it attempts to "unlock a series of complex social constructions around African identity." It advocates tapping African culture, literature and folklore, turning these resources into viable policy to help the continent. It rejects the globalist consumerist approach to Renaissance. It charges that the market cannot recognize human worth and diversity of cultural values, and is in fact creating an international system of global apartheid. Neo-liberal economics offers no hope, because it would leave the African majority in the margins. Vale and Maseko also caution that South Africa dare not "lead" this African Renaissance, because any residual power the country has (economic and military) would only skew the prospects for equitable development in the African continent.[71]

Vale and Maseko's criticisms of globalist consumerism resonate with Nancy Fraser's criticisms of the liberal welfare state, which she sees as aligned with mainstream multiculturalism. While the liberal state engages in surface reallocations of existing goods to existing groups – for example, through affirmative action and other programs – the same programs exacerbate misrecognition, creating a "stigma" for a group now seen as getting special favors, and create a backlash of resentment.[72] A socialist approach, she suggests, would be transformative rather than adaptive to the status quo, since it would question, challenge, and change socio-economic conditions that create maldistribution in the first place. She explains: "Transformative remedies

reduce social inequality without, however, creating stigmatized classes of vulnerable people perceived as beneficiaries of social largess. They tend to promote reciprocity and solidarity in the relations of recognition."[73]

What are Mbeki's intentions with his African Renaissance? Some critics note that Mbeki himself has cautioned against globalization. As Haffajee notes:

> Again this week, Mbeki castigated the corruptible and the corrupt – those who come from "overseas with bags of money." And on a continent cowed by structural adjustment programs, Mbeki also aimed a broadside at the global economy with the view that Africa must find its own solutions. "We [Africa] must be in the forefront in challenging the notion of 'the market' as the modern god, a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates everything human must bow in a spirit of powerlessness."[74]

Here Mbeki states that an Africa that is recognized in its own right will also have the right or ability to forge ahead on its own path of economic renewal, without bowing to the powers-that-be in the world, who would make Africa conform to their ways – statements that fall into what Vale and Maseko call the Africanist approach. However, the two analysts are concerned that while Mbeki asserts that he wants to fight Afropessimism, he has nevertheless shown that he is committed to globalization and neo-liberal macroeconomics, such as in his overseeing of the creation of GEAR.[75]

Nevertheless, Vale and Maseko argue that "African Renaissance," due to its being in its early stages and still underdetermined as a theory, still has the possibility of being a concept filled in by what the people want it to be. Rather than its being a directive from above, this movement of African Renaissance may be shaped into something beneficial if people act quickly. Certainly, we can agree that the Africanist version of the Renaissance will give equal and important weight to issues of recognition as well as those of just economic distribution.

I conclude by asserting that Honneth's analysis on the importance of recognition, with his emphasis on the recognition of equal rights creating a firm foundation for appreciation of difference, can help to chart a course for the African Renaissance. Honneth has shown that concern for recognition is not something separate from concerns for economic justice. An African Renaissance that will be able to benefit the entire continent must address issues of equal rights, challenging both global as well as local discrimination. Insofar as the current economic order is a mask for continuing global apartheid, the struggle for recognition, and against discrimination, must continue. The African Renaissance cannot be allowed to become defined in such a way that it supports this global problem; instead, it must become part of the solution.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the Goethe Institute of Johannesburg, South Africa, at a seminar on "The African and European Origins of the Renaissance and their Contribution to Human Development." The seminar took place on 29–31 October 1999, and my paper was included in the seminar report.
2. Lawrence Blum, "Recognition, Value, and Equality: a Critique of Charles Taylor's and Nancy Fraser's Accounts of Multiculturalism," *Constellations* 5(1) (1998): 51–67, esp. 52. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle*

for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

3. Linda Nicholson, "To Be or Not to Be: Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition," *Constellations* 3(1) (1996): 1–16, 3–4.
4. ibid., p. 6.
5. ibid., p. 7.
6. ibid., p. 10.
7. ibid., p. 15.
8. Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 206. 9 ibid., p. 207.
10. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition,* p. 131.
11. ibid., pp. 87–9.
12. ibid., p. 83.
13. ibid., p. 84.
14. ibid., pp. 137–8.
15. Axel Honneth, "Critical Theory in Germany Today: an Interview with Axel Honneth," *Radical Philosophy* 65 (Autumn 1993): 33–41 (37).
16. Joel Anderson, "Translator's Introduction," in Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. x–xxii, esp. p. xix.
17. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 132.
18. ibid., pp. 109–10.
19. Lucius Outlaw, book review of *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, in *Constellations* 3(1) (April 1996): 128.
20. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 119–20, 133.
21. ibid., pp. 115–17.
22. ibid., p. 121.
23. ibid., pp. 123, 129.
24. Leonard Harris, "Honor: Empowerment and Emasculation," in Larry May and Robert A. Strinkwerda (eds) *Rethinking Masculinity* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), pp. 191–208; 2nd ed (1996), pp. 275–88.
25. Leonard Harris, "Honor, Eunuchs, and the Postcolonial Subject," in Emmanuel Eze (ed.), *Postcolonial African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 252–9 (258).
26. Anderson, "Translator's Introduction," p. xviii.
27. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 127–8, 134.
28. Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: MacGibbon, 1963), pp. 7–26, esp. p. 16ff.
29. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 156–8.
30. ibid., p. 158.
31. ibid., p. 160.
32. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 211.
33. ibid., p. 212.
34. ibid., p. 213.
35. ibid., p. 216.
36. ibid.
37. ibid., p. 218.
38. ibid., pp. 219–24.
39. ibid., p. 229.
40. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 127, 165–7.
41. ibid., pp. 46–8.
42. ibid., pp. 7–15.
43. ibid., p. 42.
44. ibid., p. 20.
45. ibid., pp. 145–9. 46   ibid., p. 150.

47 ibid., pp. 161–4.
48 ibid., pp. 127, 165–7.
49 Martin J. Beck Matustik, *Specters of Liberation: Great Refusals in the New World Order* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 122.
50 Blum, "Recognition, Value, and Equality," p. 61.
51 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 34, n. 13.
52 ibid.
53 ibid., p. 15.
54 ibid., p. 19.
55 Blum, "Recognition, Value, and Equality," p. 64.
56 ibid., p. 65.
57 James Ingram, "Comment on Lawrence Blum," *Constellations* 5(1) (1998): 69–73.
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59 ibid., p. 211.
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61 Robert Kirby, "Renaissance Isn't the Right Word," *Mail and Guardian*, 15 May 1998.
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65 Ferial Haffajee, "Renaissance Incorporated," *Mail and Guardian*, 2 October 1998.
66 Anthony Egan, "Fear and Philosophizing in South Africa," *Mail and Guardian*, 12 March 1999.
67 Harvey, "Dispel the Myth of a Black African Identity."
68 Peter Vale and Sipho Maseko, "South Africa and the African Renaissance," *International Affairs* 74(2) (April 1998): 271–87.
69 ibid., p. 279.
70 ibid.
71 ibid., pp. 281–3.
72 Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, pp. 25–7.
73 ibid., p. 26.
74 Haffajee, "Renaissance Incorporated."
75 Vale and Maseko, "South Africa and the African Renaissance," p. 285.