

**Studying and teaching ethnic African languages for Pan-African
consciousness, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance: A
Decolonising Task**

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Simphiwe SESANTI
Professor, Language Education Department
University of the Western Cape
Email: ssesanti@uwc.ac.za
ORCID: 0000-00034546-5218

Abstract

In order to conquer and subjugate Africans, at the 1884 Berlin Conference, European countries dismembered Africa by carving her up into pieces and sharing her among themselves. European colonialists also antagonised Africans by setting up one ethnic African community against the other, thus promoting ethnic consciousness to undermine Pan-African consciousness. European powers also imposed their own “ethnic” languages, making them not only “official”, but also “international”. Consequently, as the Kenyan philosopher, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, persuasively argues, through their ethnic languages, European colonialists planted their memory wherever they went, while simultaneously uprooting the memory of the colonised. Cognisant of efforts in some South African institutions of higher learning to promote African languages for the purpose of promoting literacy in African languages, this article argues that while this exercise is commendable, ethnic African languages should be deliberately taught to “re-member” Africa and rediscover Pan-African consciousness. By doing this, African scholarship would be aiding Africans’ perennial and elusive quest for Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.

Keywords: African Renaissance, Ethnic African Languages, Ethnic European Languages, European Colonialism, Pan-African Consciousness, Pan-Africanism

Introduction

In 1948, the Senegalese philosopher, Cheikh Anta Diop (1996, 35), noted what was appreciated by many, later, that a person “learns better in one’s language because there is incontrovertible agreement between the genius of a language and the mentality of its speakers”. Diop further noted that “learning in one’s own language evidently saves many years that would

otherwise have been wasted in knowledge acquisition [through a foreign language]”. Addressing a racist, prejudiced world that falsely claimed that Africans were incapable of performing or handling tasks that required the use of the brain, Diop (1996, 36) noted that “far from being incapable of logic, the African could even do without difficulty mathematical problems, and that what is actually blocking him is the mathematical symbolism taught in a foreign language of which he has no mastery”. Diop’s (ibid) point was that by being taught in European languages, Africans were “forced to make double efforts: to assimilate the meaning of words and then, through a second intellectual effort, [...] capture the reality expressed by words”. What has received little attention and appreciation, yet, is the significant role that African languages can play in promoting “Pan-African consciousness”, “Pan-Africanism” and the “African Renaissance”.

Pan-African consciousness refers to Africans’ recognition of ethnic groups in Africa, and those based in the diaspora, as one people (FYFE 1967, xii). Pan-African consciousness is indispensable for Pan-Africanism, a political ideology committed to liberating Africans everywhere from cultural dislocation and alienation, political disempowerment, economic exploitation and social degradation (ADEBAJO, 2020, 4). The African Renaissance refers to the regeneration and the rebirth of the African continent following years of slavery and colonialism (ADEBAJO 2020, 170 – 171). Key to Pan-African consciousness, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance are African languages. As Diop (1996, 35) notes, the development of African languages is the “prerequisite for a real African renaissance”. This means that African languages have a key role in African emancipatory politics. This discussion is of great relevance for, and in South Africa, where, since the early 1990s to-date, Africans from neighbouring African countries were killed by South African citizens who called their fellow Africans from “foreigners” taking their jobs (PRAH 2006, 23). South Africans’ hostility towards fellow Africans, wrongly referred to as “xenophobia”, a misnomer since no African is a foreigner in any part of the African continent, can be seriously challenged and undermined if and when Africans rediscover their sense of belonging to one African family (ibid). A careful study of African languages reveals that “all the ancient languages of Africa belong to a handful of ‘founding families’ which derived from remote Stone Age progress” (DAVIDSON 2004, 29). As African communities expanded and migrated to other parts of the continent, “the mother tongues divided in the course of centuries into a much larger number of ‘sub-families’; and these in turn ramified as time went by into the multitude of languages spoken today” (DAVIDSON 2004, 29 – 30).

A discourse on the reclamation of Africans' identity as one people (Pan-African consciousness) is of great relevance, especially in the light of the establishment, in 2020, of the Centre for African Language Teaching (CALT), at the University of Western the Cape (UWC), with isiXhosa as its special focus. The UWC's CALT is only one aspect of a greater project of South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to set up Centres for African Languages Training throughout the country for all official African languages (NOMLOMO 2021). Already, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) has its Centre for African Languages Teaching (CALT), whose focus is SeSotho and isiZulu languages. Among the UWC-CALT's stated aims and objectives, is to "focus on practice or innovative methodologies of teaching isiXhosa home language and first additional language [...] that will impact on the teaching and learning of reading and writing in primary schools" (NOMLOMO 2019). Of even more significance is the fact that the UWC-CALT does not only seek to "strengthen the quality of teaching and learning of isiXhosa literacy in Teacher Foundation", but also to "inform the language and literacy curriculum, policy implementation and practice in early schooling" (ibid). This quest is informed by a number of realisations, namely, (a) an absence of centres of excellence to support the teaching and learning of African languages in Teacher Education programmes, except for UJ-CALT for isiZulu and SeSotho; (b) very limited research that focuses on the teaching and learning of literacy in African languages; (c) the dependence of the teaching of literacy in African languages since this exercise draws mainly on English methodologies (ibid). Though this is not stated explicitly, there is an implicit recognition that African languages are positioned in miserable, backward and underdeveloped conditions, compared to some European languages, due to the colonial legacy in Africa.

The implicit recognition of these facts by the UWC-CALT is also manifested as an implicitly stated quest for decolonisation and re-Africanisation, in other words, the African Renaissance. This article argues that the UWC-CALT, the focus of this article, along with other CALTs that may emerge later, must have an explicit philosophical agenda if their projects are to accomplish their stated missions. That is because European education in general, and European languages in particular, have been used as philosophical tools in Africa to support the objectives of colonialism. Taking into cognisance that the 1884 Berlin Conference, which decided on partitioning Africa for among European powers "was effected through the sword and the bullet", wa Thiong'o (1986, 9) goes on to note that "the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard", further pointing out that the "physical violence of the

battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom”. What this means is that while the “bullet was the means of the physical subjugation [...] Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (WA THIONG’O 1986, 9). If, as stated above, it is true that institutions of learning, in the context of colonialism, have served as launching pads to destroy African languages, it is appropriate, in the context of decolonisation, that institutions of learning should serve as centres of restoring dignity to African languages. The emphasis on the philosophical with reference to ethnic African languages has a special significance also because while on the one hand, in addition to European colonialists’ promoting their ethnic languages in the African continent in order to consolidate their power and hold over Africa, on the other hand they also promoted ethnic African languages, not to empower them, but to sow divisions and hostility among Africans to weaken them so that Europeans could have an easy political ride (RODNEY 2018, 306). However, it is not just European colonialists who are guilty of misusing Africans in this manner, but post-colonial African “leaders” who have promoted ethnicity among Africans to gain political power that comes with economic and social upward mobility (MAATHAI 2008, 23).

I begin this exercise by demonstrating how Europe elevated its languages from an “ethnic” to an “international status”, thus universalising Europe’s cultural memory. I then present a philosophical debate provoked by wa Thiong’o who, in the footsteps of Diop, called for the reclamation of the status of equality of African languages to the rest of the world’s languages. In line with wa Thiong’o’s argument, which points out that reclamation of the dignity of African languages must not just be for the sake of literacy, I demonstrate that since the advent of colonialism, African literature in isiXhosa – this article’s focus – has served to advance anti-European colonialism, Pan-African consciousness, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. I then conclude, in line with wa Thiong’o’s (2009, 69) argument, by pointing out that just as European ethnic languages were used in dismembering Africa, ethnic African languages must be used to remember Africa.

Universalisation of European cultural memory through European languages

There is “nothing inherently global and universal” about European languages (WA THIONG’O 2016, 74). Rather, European languages grew “on the graveyard of other people’s languages”, where African languages were the vanquished, and European languages the victors (WA THIONG’O 1993, 35). In colonial Kenya, school children were forced to learn English as a medium of instruction (WA THIONG’O 1986, 11). In

this arrangement, African children experienced at least two forms of humiliation. The first was that if a child was caught speaking an African language, s/he was punished either through corporal punishment or compelled to pay a fine (ibid). The second was that if an African child failed the English language, even if s/he passed all other subjects, s/he was failed and forced to repeat the whole year (WA THIONG'O 1986, 12). While, on the one hand, an African child was punished for speaking an African language, on the other hand, "any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded" with prizes and applause (ibid). In this way, English became "the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all other branches of

learning", and thus the ticket to progress and success (ibid). Effectively, what this meant was that "English was made to look as if it was the language spoken by God" (WA THIONG'O 1993, 33). In the colonial journey characterised by, among other things, the suppression of African languages and elevation of European languages, this imposition of European languages also achieved another great victory in the service of the colonial project – it served to displace African memory and replace it with European memory (WA THIONG'O 2016, 69). This can be fully appreciated when a person is sensitive to the fact that all languages are not only means of communication among people, but also serve as carriers of peoples' histories and cultures, and collective memory banks of peoples' cultures (WA THIONG'O 1993, 30). The displacement of African memory and its replacement with European memory was carried out in at least two ways, that is, physically and mentally (WA THIONG'O 2016, 69).

In the physical sense, Africans who were captured and taken to the Western world as slaves, were branded with hot iron on their bodies so as to establish ownership of their bodies by the slave owners (ibid). But, as wa Thiong'o (ibid), points out, the "biggest branding was that of the intellect through language". This "branding", in the context of languages, was accomplished through the suppression and degradation of the languages of the colonised. It is, therefore, no accident of history that African countries "came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe: English-speaking, French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African countries" (WA THIONG'O 1986, 5). In the 17th century West Indies, where Africans were forcibly relocated, "African tribes were carefully split up to lessen conspiracy, and they were therefore compelled to master the European languages" (JAMES 1989, 407).

In many political, legal and even ordinary discourses held by people the world over, few are cognisant that the phrases they use such as “Draconian laws”, “Rubicon speech” and “pyrrhic victory”, carry Europe’s historic and cultural memories. The phrase “draconian laws”, traced to Dracon, a 7th BC Athenian legislator, “refers to very harsh or severe” application of laws (THOMPSON 1995, 409). Under the Draconian code, “almost any kind of offence was liable to the death penalty, so that even those convicted of idleness were executed, and those who stole fruit or vegetables suffered the same punishment as those who committed sacrileges or murder” (PLUTARCH 1960, 59). It is for this reason that “Demades became famous for his remark that Draco’s code was written not in ink but in blood” (ibid). When Draco himself was asked why he had “decreed the death penalty for the great majority of offences, [he] replied that he considered the minor ones deserved it, and so for the major ones no heavier punishment was left” (ibid). Traced to Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, who defeated the Romans in 279 BC, but not without him, in return, suffering heavy losses, “pyrrhic victory”, refers to victory which comes at a high cost on the part of the victor (THOMPSON 1995, 1117). With reference to Pyrrhus and his “victory”, Pyrrhus was “the bravest of all the princes of his time, only what he got by great actions he lost again by vain hopes, and by new desires of what he had not, kept nothing of what he had” (PLUTARCH 2015, 379). The term “Rubicon” refers to “a boundary which once crossed signifies irrevocable commitment; a point of no return” (THOMPSON 1995, 1204). In a historical context, it is “a stream forming the boundary of Julius Caesar’s province and crossed by him in 49 BC as a start of a war with Pompey” (ibid).

Not only has Europe universalised her historic and cultural memories in the fashion outlined above, but it has also displaced others’ historical and cultural memories, and replaced them with hers. In his book, [Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah], Nkrumah (1971, 4) notes that the Akans believe that a person is made up of “three souls”, namely the “blood soul (or *mogya*), transmitted by the female and considered synonymous with the clan, the *ntoro*, which is transmitted by the male and the *okra*, or platonic soul”. Why is Nkrumah explaining an Akan concept through a Greek (Platonic) concept and not on Akan African terms? Nkrumah’s approach is one example of how European memory, through a European language, English, has displaced African memory. In order to appreciate the foregoing observation, we make a reference to Kwasi

Wiredu (2003, 289), a Ghanaian African philosopher, who reiterates Nkrumah's observation regarding the Akans' philosophy on human beings being constituted by "three souls" (Nkrumah's words) or "three elements" (Wiredu's words). While Wiredu (*ibid*), like Nkrumah, associates one element with the female/mother, another element with the male/father, unlike Nkrumah, Wiredu, does not associate the third element with Plato, but with the "divine substance", that is, with "God". Wiredu's illustration and distinction are important because associating one element that constitutes human beings to the "divine being" or to "God", gives space to the philosophical stamp of the Akans as opposed to the "platonian soul" reference which elevates the Greeks.

In 1977, after a period of writing and publishing creative writing in English, wa Thiong'o (1986, 27), decided to cease the practice of writing his creative work in English, and began writing in his mother-tongue, Gikuyu.

Reclaiming the dignity of African languages

As if writing in an African language, and in his mother tongue, in particular, was "abnormal", and writing in English, "normal", wherever wa Thiong'o (1986, 27 – 28) went, "particularly in Europe", people asked why he had made the switch, and "abandoned" them. In 1986, after nine years of having "continued writing explanatory prose in English", wa Thiong'o (1986, xiv) took a step further, by – with the publication of his book, [Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language In African Literature] – bidding "farewell to English as a vehicle for any of [his] writings". wa Thiong'o (1986, 5) saw as ironic that some African writers, "[e]ven at their most radical and pro-African position in their sentiments and articulations of problems they still took it as axiomatic that the renaissance of African cultures lay in the languages of Europe". Rhetorically, wa Thiong'o (1986, 26) asked, "What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?"

Not only did wa Thiong'o (1986, 26 – 27) bid farewell to the English language, but also advanced a re-definition of "African literature". In this re-definition, the "only" literature that could qualify as "African" was literature "written in African languages" (WA THIONG'O 1986, 27). Literature written in European languages, even if written by Africans, was "not African literature" but "Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages" (WA THIONG'O 1986, 26 – 27). It must be stated, though, that in re-defining African literature this way, wa Thiong'o was following in the footsteps of Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop and South Africa's Mazisi Kunene. In 1948, before wa Thiong'o wrote his [Decolonising the Mind], Diop (1996, 34) made the following observations:

Without in any way underestimating the contributions by those African writers who use foreign languages, does one have the right to consider their writings as forming the basis of an African culture? Even a superficial scrutiny leads us to answer in the negative. We do, indeed, believe that every literary work necessarily belongs to the language in which it is written: works written by Africans in foreign languages thus belong first and foremost to those foreign literatures and cannot justifiably be considered as monuments of an African literature.

In 1982, four years before wa Thiong'o's book, Kunene (1982, ix) dismissed the "claim [...] that writing in the former colonial languages widens the writer's audience", pointing out that such a claim "ignores the factor of quality for quantity". Kunene (ibid) held the view that a writer

should avoid the temporary attractions of cheap popularity and make a contribution to the community that gave birth to his genius. This way he/she is able to grasp its deepest traditions. Such literature can be translated (both literally and philosophically) into various languages and cultures of the world.

Kunene (2017, xxi) wrote his literature in isiZulu, first, and, later, translated it into English. wa Thiong'o's re-definition of African literature was not received kindly by Chinua Achebe, an African writer from Nigeria who wrote in English and regarded his writings as "African literature". According to Achebe (2011, 104 – 105), an examination of Nigeria's history suggests that "Nowhere in all this can we see the slightest evidence of the simple scenario painted by Ngugi of European imperialism forcing its language down the throats of unwilling natives". In backing up his argument, Achebe points out that in Calabar, by 1876, "some of the chiefs were not satisfied with the amount of English their children were taught in missionary schools and were hiring private tutors at a very high fee". In Achebe (2011, 105)'s view, the "only reason that these [European] alien languages are still knocking about is that they serve an actual need". In line with this argument, Achebe (2011, 100) notes that English is "not marginal to Nigerian affairs" but "quite central". The centrality English in Nigeria is informed by a recognition that "Nigeria [...] transacts a considerable portion of its daily business in the English language" (ibid). The second observation made by Achebe (ibid) is that "[a]s long as Nigeria wishes to exist as a nation, it has no choice in the foreseeable future but to hold its more than two hundred component nationalities together through an alien language, English". In order to appreciate Achebe's point, even if a person may object to his argument, two further observations by him need to be

taken into consideration. The first relates to ethnic hostilities in Nigeria in the 1960s, which resulted in “a series of horrendous massacres of Igbo people in Hausa-speaking northern Nigeria”, following the first military coup in the country in 1966 (ACHEBE 2011, 101 – 102). Achebe’s (2011, 100) second observation relates to the ethnic hostilities in Nigeria, which are so intense that fellow Nigerians “oppose most vehemently the token respect” given to three major languages in Nigeria when newscasters say good night in those languages “after reading a half-hour bulletin in English”. This foregoing observation by Achebe proves correct, wa Thiong’o’ (1993, 40)’s point that the “colonial dominance of English and French in African lives has made African languages so suspicious of one another that there is hardly any inter-African communication”. Centering European languages in this way after Africans regained their independence is not a uniquely Nigerian phenomenon. Having noted that no African in our recent history “fought imperialism more doggedly or presided over a more progressive regime than Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana did”, Achebe (2011, 105) citing Smock and Enchill, notes that despite this historical reality, Ghana chose English, a “language alien to Ghana” as the “best vehicle for achieving national communication and social and political unification”, a demonstration of a “considerable concern over the possible divisive impact of a mother tongue policy”. Ghanaians made a choice for English as a medium of instruction in education in the face of significant levels of ethnic mixing, a consequence of internal migrations (Achebe 2011, 105). If the policy of teaching mother tongues had been enforced in Ghana, Achebe (2011, 106) notes, the simple consequence would have been that the “schools concerned would have to hire more than five teachers for every class”. In addition to the cases of Ghana and Nigeria, who embraced their former colonial masters’ language, Achebe (2011, 106) draws attention to the “strange fact that the Marxist states in Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia, have been the most forthright in adopting the languages of their former colonial rulers – Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and most lately Burkina Faso, whose minister of culture once said with a retrospective shudder that the sixty ethnic groups in that country could mean sixty different nationalities”. These choices suggest, then, in Achebe’s (2011, 106) view, that “the culprit in Africa’s language problem was not imperialism [...] but the linguistic pluralism of modern African states”.

Achebe's observations and objections deserve attention and responses. The first point relates to the chiefs' over-eagerness to have their children studying in English. The fact of the matter is that the over-eagerness on the part of the chiefs for English was not out of love for the language, but a result of the effects of colonialism. To facilitate their rule in Africa, the British co-opted some African chiefs where the "mastery of the English language was the measure of one's readiness for election into the band of the elect" (WA THIONG'O 1993, 32). The chiefs' embrace of English, therefore, was as a result of coercion and co-option. The second point relates to Ghana's government under Nkrumah using English as a language of instruction and communication. It is true that Nkrumah (1973, 102) acknowledged that "[o]ne of the most obvious difficulties which face Africa south of the Sahara is the multiplicity of languages and dialects", a reality which forced members of Ghana's Assembly to "conduct this parliamentary business in a language which is not his own". Creating tensions in Nkrumah (1973, 102 – 103) as this did, Nkrumah conceded "welcom[ing] English as not only providing a common medium of exchange between ourselves, but also for opening the door to us to all the heritage of the world". But Nkrumah was not content to leave the matter hanging, and thereby allowing Ghana and the entire African continent to be captives and dependants on European languages. Nkrumah (1973, 103) argued that

At the same time, however, it is essential that we do consider seriously the problems of the language in Africa. At present, such is the influence of Europe in our affairs, that far more students in our University are studying Latin and Greek than are studying in the languages of Africa. An essential of independence is that emphasis must be laid on studying the living languages of Africa, for, out of such a study will come simpler methods by which those in one part of Africa may learn the languages of those in all other parts.

The third point relates to Achebe's observation about Nigerians' preference for hearing greetings in English, a European language, than from fellow Nigerian/African languages, and acceptance of English as a common language for Nigerians without contemplating the possibility of an African language, KiSwahili, for instance, as a *lingua franca*. Reference is made to KiSwahili because it is an African language that is spoken as a common language in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa (WA THIONG'O 1993, 41). An African *lingua franca* can be established without suffocating other African ethnic languages. In Kenya, for instance, Maathai (2008, 42), a Kikuyu speaker, recalls that in her early schooling her mother tongue was the language of instruction while learning KiSwahili and English as well.

At this point, it needs to be observed that while *studying and teaching African languages for the purposes of literacy* (paraphrasing wa Thiong'o who was making reference to writing in African languages) is "a necessary first step in the correct direction", such "will not itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our people's anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control" (WA THIONG'O 1986, 29). In this context, an examination of African literature in some African languages, reveals a great literary tradition inspired by anti-European colonialism, Pan-African consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and the African Renaissance. Even though our focus in this article is isiXhosa, we did make a reference to Kunene's approach in isiZulu. It is useful, for future research, in the context of anti-colonialism, the advancement of Pan-African consciousness, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, to mention that even though Sol Plaatje, a teacher and journalist, who edited *Koranta ea Bechoana* and *Tsala ea Bechuana*, wrote in English and isiXhosa, he passionately promoted writing in his native language, SeTswana (MATJILA AND HAIRE 2012, xvii, 22, 49). While writing in isiXhosa and SeTswana was a reflection of Pan-African consciousness, his commitment to anti-colonialism, Pan-Africanism, and the African Renaissance was reflected in his "rousing call to the Batswana to educate their children by inculcating love for Setswana language and culture", his "forthrightness on the abject cruelty of whites who [did] not consider blacks to be human beings", treating them, instead, as animals, and his "constantly encouraging Africans to unite" against oppressive European laws (MATJILA AND HAIRE 2012, xvii, 56). IsiXhosa has this political legacy, too.

IsiXhosa Literature: Traditions of anti-European colonialism, Pan-African consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and the African Renaissance

Amongst the most celebrated prolific writers in isiXhosa, "who wrote for publication only in Xhosa", is Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi, who is remembered for having "employed a very rich Xhosa" (OPLAND 2009, 15, 25). Considering that Mqhayi was also a poet, a newspaper editor, a teacher and a historian, as well, he could have easily chosen to write in English, but, instead, took a conscious decision against that trajectory (OPLAND 2009, 12, 23). While on the one hand, Mqhayi was proud of his language, he was no ethnic chauvinist, but an African driven by a Pan-African consciousness. Even as Mqhayi (2017, 222, 224, 226, 228, 230) wrote in isiXhosa, thus addressing an isiXhosa-speaking community, he often greeted them as Africans: (Bhotani ma Afrika! – Greetings, Africans!). Not only did Mqhayi (2017, 277) acknowledge African oneness, but actively called for African unity in the face of encroaching European colonialism:

This year let us clasp hands,
and guard against all that drives us apart,
You Tswana and Ndebele,
clasp hands, fellows!
You Swazi and Sotho,
Clasp hands, fellows!
You Zulu and Ngwane,
clasp hands, fellows!

In celebrating the philosophical ties that link amaXhosa to all Africans, Mqhayi (1974, 12 – 13) wrote that it was not only amaXhosa who prohibited the selling and the buying of land, but that this practice was a pan-African cultural tradition. The logic for prohibiting sale of land was that since land was meant to benefit everyone, it could not be reduced to private property that would benefit only a few (ibid). In a letter to a newspaper editor, accompanying his poetry contribution paying homage to Charlotte Manye Maxeke, a Pan-Africanist leader in South Africa, Mqhayi (2009, 524) celebrated the fact that when Manye Maxeke returned from the United States of America, where she studied, she did so “with education as her prize [...] and shared it with all Africans”. In the actual poem itself, exhibiting his Pan-African consciousness, Mqhayi (ibid) noted that Manye Maxeke, the “full breasted woman of Africa suckled all the black children”.

Mqhayi’s writings – poetry, novels, letters to newspapers – reveal a fierce hostility to European colonialism in whatever manifestation it took. Mqhayi (2017, 287) made the point that Africans should not be “apprehensive and entertain the belief that we’re being destroyed by hostile nations. It’s our responsibility to make every effort on our own behalf, and not surrender to death”. Mqhayi (2017, 271) was sensitive and objected to the tendency by European Christian missionaries sent by the London Missionary Society and other European Missionary Societies, “who crossed one ocean after another, propagating not just Christ, but digging up all the trash from their home countries, which they taught to other races and nations”. In 1928 Mqhayi (2017, 287 – 288) observed that

Christ has not been preached to us as a nation. What has been preached so far are the traditions, customs and beliefs of the English – and not a word about Christ. Because these customs were different, we seized them, since they were brought by people who repeatedly asserted they were bringing Christ – but that was the death of us [...] Let us find Christ for ourselves. He is not inaccessible to us, because he is the One our forefathers were already invoking long ago when the whites arrived – the very same.

Mqhayi's foregoing observations reveal a number of things. The first is that in embracing Christianity, some Africans of his time saw in Christ's teachings the same message that existed in African philosophy. The second is that in embracing Christ's teachings, Africans like Mqhayi were not embracing what was alien, but what was familiar to them, an echo of their African spirituality. Thirdly, it is remarkable that this point, made by Mqhayi in 1928, was to be made later by the celebrated revolutionary philosopher-activist, Frantz Fanon, who, when Mqhayi made the point, was only three years old. Saying this is not the same as saying that no one before Mqhayi made such observations. As if copying from Mqhayi's writings, Fanon (2001, 32), in his book, [The Wretched of the Earth], first published in French, in 1961, wrote the following, which echoed Mqhayi's articulation above:

The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor.

In fact, in 1927, Mqhayi (2017, 279) had called for an African Renaissance in African spirituality:

This year may we have our God,
whom we had in olden days;
let's worship him in our fashion,
with respect, love and reverence.

Mqhayi (1981, iii) in an introduction to his book, [Ityala Lamawele], first published in 1914 (OPLAND 2009, 18) notes that his book was meant as an act of resistance against a wave that sought to wipe out the entire nation. Reference to the wave was to European colonialists' encroachment in the territory of amaXhosa. His novel was an effort to demonstrate that amaXhosa chiefs, contrary to claims by European colonialists, did not, without consultation, take arbitrary decisions that bound the entire nation (ibid). The book was meant to serve as a lesson to the youth about the tragic consequences that befall a nation when it loses laws that make it a dignified people (ibid). The lessons of history revealed that the destruction of amaXhosa customs by European Christian missionaries, which they denounced as heathenism, resulted in drunkenness, disregard for ethical behaviour and a disastrous loss of respect (MQHAYI 1981, 61). So, [Ityala Lamawele], was not only an act of resistance on Mqhayi's part, but also an act of rallying support in a concerted act of confronting European

colonialism (MQHAYI 1981, iii). Mqhayi's writings earned him recognition as an activist who was "passionately committed to the restoration of black rights, to countering the discrimination suffered by black people" (OPLAND 2009, 27). Mqhayi's "concern for and interest in the people of the nation", his involvement in his people's political, educational and social affairs, "found expression in his poetry and in his historical or biographical writing" (OPLAND 2009, 23). In one of his passionate poems, calling for "Africa's return", a very clear articulation in favour of the African Renaissance project, Mqhayi (2017, 213) writes:

Let her return without delay,
we her possessors say so;
let prisoners be freed;
let prostitutes reform;
restore our language,
our ways and customs:
our health and our strength,
and all our wealth.

This commitment, which distinguished Mqhayi as an anti-colonial and pro-African Renaissance activist, carried a heavy penalty, one which Mqhayi was not only willing to pay, but actually paid. While a student at Lovedale, in the Eastern Cape, Mqhayi "withdrew from school and, in defiance of his missionary teachers, [...] entered an initiation lodge. He had come to the realisation that his future lay in service to his people, and he felt he could not fulfil that ambition if he were not one of them." (OPLAND 2009, 4). At the Lovedale Institution, a "prestigious [...] premier educational establishment for black students, founded by agents of the Glasgow Missionary Society in 1841", teachers exhibited a "strenuous opposition" to African boys intending to go through the circumcision rite practised by amaXhosa (OPLAND 2017, xv – xvi). Later, after accepting a teaching post at Lovedale, because of his "strong held convictions" and his teachings which were "clearly at odds with the institution and its outlook", Mqhayi resigned (OPLAND 2009, 5, 23)

While AC Jordan, a university graduate, in 1940, "could have written in English as well as in Xhosa, he wrote his first novel, [iNqumbo ye miNyanya], in his native tongue, addressing himself to an African readership" (NTANTALA 1992, 109). A deep sense of patriotism on the part of Jordan comes out as we learn that he was "galled [...] that the authorities in African languages were whites, sons of missionaries, who had grown up speaking the languages and had developed an academic interest in them" (NTANTALA 1992, 108). Jordan appreciated that if he allowed whites to be experts in African languages, they, not Africans,

would be authorities on African history and culture. This he refused to accept. In a colonial space where European colonialists did everything they could to denigrate and vilify the African image and personality by distorting African history and culture, through his novel, Jordan treated “African culture in a dignified and wholesome way, showing its qualities and beauty [...] very much aware of the new forces at work among the people, depicting the new man who is beginning to look critically at the new ways and trying to forge for himself a course that will perhaps serve his interests better”.

A further examination of early isiXhosa literature reveals that its writers were sensitive to the indivisibility of amaXhosa from the rest of the African nation. For instance, not only does Soga (1989, v, 1), state, categorically, that the Black nation, including the people of Ethiopia and Ancient Egypt, are originally one people, but also, specifically, states that amaXhosa ethnic group is an offshoot of the northern African people. This fact comes out when one examines the performance of libation, a ritual performed for honouring the Ancestor Spirits throughout the African world, both in the continent and in the diaspora (NEHUSI 2016, xxviii, 2, 185). This cultural oneness among Africans is also found not only in the act of libation, but in the very wording used when this cultural practice is performed (NEHUSI 2016, 55 – 56). In this regard, Nehusi (2016, 56) observes that “[i]t may be of significance that in the languages of both Kemet and contemporary Afrika there are specific words for libation, yet there is also the formulation ‘pour water’ that is often employed to render this meaning”. It was after reading this passage in Nehusi’s book, in December 2017, that after many years of researching about the etymology and meaning of the isiXhosa word “camagu”, used when performing libation, it dawned on me that the word, literally meant “pour water”. The word “camagu” (pour water) is derived from the word “amacam”, meaning “water”. When I shared this finding on Umhlobo Wenene, a radio station broadcasting in isiXhosa, in 2018, none of those who called in knew the meaning of “camagu”, a word used in all rituals invoking Ancestor Spirits among amaXhosa. While the realisation of the etymology of the word was of great significance, of more significance is the Pan-African linguistic explanation which points to the cultural oneness of African people, a building block for Pan-Africanism. Along this line of reasoning, Nehusi (ibid) points out that “[i]t does appear probable that this very form of words was taken to different parts of the continent by Afrikans migrating out of the Nile Valley. Alternatively, this formula may have been extant in a linguistic environment that was common to both Kemet [Ancient Egypt] and may even lie in a combination of these two possibilities.” It is against this background that one argues that studying and teaching ethnic African languages can be used effectively to re-establish the cultural links that bind Africans, simultaneously leading to the re-discovery of common African

philosophical orientations, and, ultimately to the accomplishment of the objectives of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. I clarify more in my concluding remarks below.

Concluding Remarks

In order for Pan-Africanism to accomplish its objectives, there is a need for ordinary African people to recognise their “cultural oneness” (DIOP 1987a, xii) or the “common denominator in African culture” (DIOP 1989, 2). There are at least two pathways necessary to this Pan-African consciousness. The first is exposure to, and appreciation of African scholarship that has established that Africans originally come from one geographical location from which they spread across the continent, thus forming different ethnic identities (DIOP 1987a, 216; 220; MUTWA 1998, 557 - 558). This resulted in some Africans thinking that they were different entities, a situation that was exploited both by European colonialists and opportunistic African politicians. The key to the rediscovery of Pan-African consciousness is the study and teaching of ethnic African languages because, as wa Thiong’o (2009, 69) points out, “language is the re-remembering practice”. Such an exercise will establish, as Diop (1987b, 7) did, that among African languages, there is “a common linguistic background”, meaning that “African languages constitute one linguistic family, as homogeneous as that of the Indo-European languages.” A quick search will reveal that isiXhosa, isiZulu and KiSwahili word for “mbuzi” (goat in English) is the same in many African languages, though pronounced slightly differently. In Shona. For instance, it is “mbudzi”. A promotion of this awareness, through a study of ethnic African languages, is bound to bring about not only a similarity in words’ pronunciation but also a similarity, if not sameness, of African philosophical orientations that are receiving little appreciation presently. An example of this is that in present-day South Africa, amaXhosa, to a very large extent use the word “ibhokhwe” for a “goat”. The word “ibhokhwe”, is a Dutch adaptation of “goat” (MUTWA 1996, 64). This is tragic because while the word “ibhokhwe” carries no cultural significance in isiXhosa, among the Nguni, a larger group to which amaXhosa belong, the word “imbuzi”, meaning “the one which asks”, is derived from the word “umbuzo”, meaning “a/the question”. Not using the word “imbuzi” denies the speakers of isiXhosa an appreciation of the philosophical, the historical and cultural significance of the word “imbuzi”. The Nguni people did not keep goats “so much as a source of meat, but as a means of communicating with the gods and the ancestral spirits, and asking questions of these invisible or barely visible beings” (ibid). An absence of this appreciation is also not only an absence of the philosophical meaning of the word, but also an absence of an appreciation of historical connections between amaXhosa, on the one hand, and many other African ethnic groups, on the other.

There are a number of words in African languages which reveal deep common philosophical orientations among African people which Africans are not aware of because of lack of understanding of one another's language. In the Walaf language of Senegal, for instance, a person calls his father's little brother "Bay-bu-ndav" meaning "little father", in the same way that a person calls her/his mother's "little sister" "Yay-dju-ndav" meaning "little mother" (DIOP 1989, 39). In the Gikuyu language of Kenya, "little father" is translated as "baba monyinyi" (KENYATTA 1965, 15). In isiXhosa, "little father" is known as "utat' omncinci". When translated into English, failure to pay attention to these cultural dynamics, can easily lead to distortions and diminished meanings. A typical mistranslation, and, thus, misinterpretation of relationships among Africans is that of Jeff Opland in Mqhayi's book, [Abantu Besizwe]. Opland (in MQHAYI 2009, 94) refers to Ngqika as the "nephew" of Ndlambe, and the latter as the "uncle" of the former. Yet, rightly so, in the original text, the writer, Mqhayi (2009, 95) refers to Ndlambe, the brother of Ngqika's father, Mlawu, as "[u]yise", meaning "his father", and Ngqika, as the "son" (nyana), rightfully so. In African culture/s a man's brother is a father to his brother's children, in the same way that a woman is a mother to her sister's children. It does not end there. In African cultures, a brother is regarded as a "male mother" to his sister's children, in the same way a woman is regarded as a "female father" to her brother's children. African scholars such as Wamala (2006, 438), Rukuni (2007, 32) and Oyèwùmí (2016, 21) allude to these relationships in Ganda, Shona and Yorùbá societies, respectively

African history has demonstrated that ordinary African people, with exceptions, of course, experience no contradiction between, on the one hand, speaking their own mother-tongues, and, on the other hand, "belonging to a larger national or continental geography", that is, "to Africa as a whole" (WA THIONG'O 1986, 23).

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