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A LECTURE PRESENTED BY ANTHONY ALEAKWE ODIOR, GENERAL COORDINATOR,  
CORRECT CONNECT AFRICA FOUNDATION (CCAF); ON THE OCCASION OF THE GRADUATION  
OF THE STUDENTS OF DON BOSCO INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY IBADAN, CLASS OF 2021.  
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Title: The Relationship between Cultural Renaissance and Integral Progress in Africa

Thank you. I wish to register a profound sentiment of gratitude to the dean of studies, Rev Fr. Dr Anthony Emeka Okonkwo SBD and the entire members of staff of this noble and illustrious institution for granting me this rare and singular opportunity to deliver the graduation lecture to the graduating class of 2021; an important day in the academic span of this distinguished institution.

**My lecture is titled: *The Relationship between Cultural Renaissance and Integral Progress in Africa.***

The Latin etymology of culture is *colere*. It means to cultivate, to carefully wait for.<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, a Welsh academic and socialist writer corroborates the Latin signification, when he opined that the term culture began as a noun of process connected to cultivation. Furthermore, culture as a concept developed in time to incorporate the human person and its activities. It establishes that to be cultivated implies to be cultured, educated, civil.<sup>2</sup> The Bambara people of Mali defines culture with two concepts: *Donignan* and *Laada*. *Donignan* translates as Knowledge, Education, while *Laada* translates as traditions and customs. Hence, fusing the two concepts, we observe that culture is the knowledge that emanates from education drawn from the lifestyle, the traditions of a given people; of a specific space and time.

The concept, "renaissance" as a political and cultural vision dates back to Pharaonic Egypt. In the Egyptian language, this notion translates as "Uhem Mesut," which means: "the renewal (uhem) of births (Mesut)." in fact, there was a period in ancient Egypt's political history referred to as Uhem Mesut, a period that marked the beginning of the accession to the throne of the Pharaoh Ramses XI,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marco AIME, *Culture*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri (Ed.), 2017, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chris BAKER, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, London, Sage Publications, 2004, 44.

in the year 1107-1078 BC. In recent time, from the 14th to the 17th century, the term was used to classify the period of European cultural, artistic, political, and economic rebirth, promoting the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature and art.

When we speak of integral progress, we intend a complete growth that emanates from the shared historical and cultural consciousness, rooted in the socio-political and cultural milieu of a particular people, in this case, the African people. A growth that is consequential to the solutions proffered to the immediate contemporary experiences, and the exigencies of the African people.

Africa's progress for a very long time now has been linked to one thing, that is, unity. The call for Africa's unity has been on the lips and pens of many of Africa's intellectual ancestors and scholars since the end of the European occupation and the creation of Nation States. A strategic division orchestrated to strip the continent of its human and natural resources; colonize the minds of its people, thereby alienating them, that is, making them strangers to themselves and their environment.

Africa is in troubled waters. We can compare Africa to a ship with a faulty compass. She sails, thinking she is in the right direction, but the compass is taking her to an unknown route, a direction she has not envisaged for herself. Hence the need to retrace her steps, to reroute, using the compass meant purposely for her journey. Rerouting is what will lead to the rebirth of the African culture and then authentic integral progress.

As earlier mentioned, Africa's progress hinges on its unity. I wish to stand on the shoulders of two African Intellectual giants, Cheikh Anta Diop and Kwame Nkrumah, to reiterate their views on actualizing a cultural rebirth. Diop speaks of Historical and Cultural unity, while Nkrumah centres on Conscientism and the unification of Africa, warning against the dangers of imperialism in trying to break up Africa into small weak states. A United Africa remains the standing frame for a progressive Africa.

#### Historical and Cultural Unity

According to Diop, Africans share a common history and culture. He argues that in prehistory, there was a powerful South-North movement of the African peoples, starting from the Great Lakes region, that is, the African region that comprises the following: Rwanda, Burundi and Congo DRC, reaching the banks of the Nile basin, that is, countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Egypt, Tanzania, Uganda, Eritrea and Kenya. They remained there for millennia. They founded the Nilotic Sudanese civilization and the Egyptian civilization. These early black civilizations were also the first in the world. A few centuries later, around the first century, they founded the first continental

civilizations of the West and South: Ghana, Nok, Ifè, Zimbabwe, etc. The disintegration of these empires ended in the 19th century after the European occupation. The peak of the dissolution was the birth of small kingdoms jealous and protective of their independence.

As it pertains to Cultural Unity, Diop argues that Africa's cultural unity centres around historical facts not a mere fiction. According to him, the main elements of cultural unity are as follows:

- A linguistic matrix using a comparative historical approach
- A dominant worldview: cosmogony, anthropology, aesthetics, etc.
- A common religious background
- Political organization and
- A shared historical consciousness.

History and Culture are the two parts of the same coin. The historical factor is the cultural cement that unifies the distinct elements of a people to make them into a whole, by the particular slant of the feeling of historical continuity lived by the totality of the collective.

The historical consciousness through the feeling of cohesion it creates constitutes the safest and the most solid shield of cultural security of a people. Hence, the reason why cultural communities seek only to know and to live their history well, and to transmit its memory to their descendants. **So, when confronted with cultural aggression of all sorts, the essential cultural weapon with which they can arm themselves is the feeling of historical continuity. The erasing, the destruction of the historical consciousness has been since time began part of the technique of colonization, enslavement, and debasement of peoples.**

### *Conscientism*

To actualize a cultural renaissance that leads to integral progress, Kwame Nkrumah, in his *Conscientism* tells us that we must undergo a Social Revolution backed by an intellectual revolution. It is a revolution where our thinking and philosophy should redeem our society. **Our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people.** It is from those conditions that the intellectual content of our philosophy must be created. The emancipation of

the African continent is the emancipation of man. It requires two aims: first, the restitution of the egalitarianism of human society, and second, the logistic mobilization of all our resources towards attaining restitution.<sup>3</sup>

### *Africa Must Unite*

Nkrumah points out some challenges of attaining African Unity. First is the **African resistance to the unification theory**. In his words “So many African nations cling to their newly won sovereignty. They consider it more valuable than the interest of all of Africa and seek to create alliances with nations that attempt to balkanize our continent in the interest of neo-colonialism.”<sup>4</sup> Secondly, **the lack of economic unification**. As a continent we must create an African Common Market (ACM) and industrialize the continent. We have a tremendous economic potential: geography, good climate, natural resources, and demographics. For example, he says, Africa has the “most important hydro-electric potential in the world.”<sup>5</sup> This potential cannot benefit the peoples of the continent if continental economic unification is lacking.

Today, African states do not reflect these principles and ideologies. Our societies rather imitate the socio-political and cultural framework of colonial nations and the West in general. The African cultural identity is gradually sliding into extinction. We cannot speak of a cultural renaissance that leads to progress if we keep courting and re-proposing ideologies that are not a product of internally generated reflections. That is, reflections that are not driven or inspired by our socio-political and cultural conditions.

We at Correct Connect Africa Foundation (CCAF) have resolved to pursue Africa’s Cultural Renaissance via education. We promote an educational philosophy known as Sankofa. Sankofa is an Akan (Ghana)word that translates to going back to take what was left behind. We have left behind our rich cultural heritage, unimaginably enormous. Its reappropriation is a requirement to move forward, to progress.

Yearly we organise and promote different initiatives: a journal called Sankofa Youth Journal (SYJ), Sankofa Political Studies (SPS), Diop Legacy Day (DLD), and the just-concluded May 1 Africa Memorial Day (AMD).

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<sup>3</sup> Cf, Kwameh Nkrumah, *Conscientism, Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization*, Chicago, NYU Press, 1964, 78.

<sup>4</sup> Kwameh Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, New York, F.A. Praeger, 187.

<sup>5</sup> Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, 178.

Our Sankofa Political Studies is an attempt to create and instil an African consciousness in the minds of Africans, especially young Africans.

I would like to call our attention to the pastoral and intellectual works of this Salesian Institution.

- First, I note with delight the population of young and vibrant African students in this institute. They are the Diops and the Nkrumahs, the Thomas Sankara's and the Patrice Lumubas, the Felas and the Sophie Oluwoles of our time. They need to be challenged, encouraged and accompanied to be critical, responsible and free in their philosophising.
- Philosophy, as they say, is not done in a vacuum. It happens within time and space, embracing the context and culture of the people it seeks to serve. It is therefore important that the content of your thinking and research be birthed from within, so that the right answers, compatible and capable of advancing African progress is actualised. If we don't do it, no one else will do it for us!
- This is a Catholic and religious institute with the charismatic pedagogy of Saint John Bosco. From this institute, many go on and become priests, brothers and catechists. Don Bosco as an Italian educator, was versed in the culture of his people and responding to the signs of the time, employed that knowledge in educating the young. **As imbedded in Art. 21 of the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.** The signs of the time in Africa today compels us to engage the young with a similar approach and pedagogy.
- Africa has contributed much to humanity and still has so much to contribute. But if we only regurgitate what other cultures have produced, we would deny ourselves, our people and the world at large the unique contribution that is ours to showcase.

To conclude, I wish to draw our attention to an interrogation Diop threw at us all, particularly to students and professors. It goes thus, "As students on the boat of reflection, do our reflections seek to find and offer solutions to the problems in our surrounding, or do they repropose or romance ideas and solutions to problems of far distant realities that have little or nothing to do with our socio-political and cultural milieu?"

So, Sankofa! Be bold! Take your place by contributing to the cultural renaissance and integral progress of Africa, our motherland. Congratulations.