

# **Inserting Africa into African/ist Studies of Africa: Un-reading History, Confronting Theories**

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## Introduction

I wish to begin this intervention with this statement- a statement of fact I might say. It is that this continent, the continent of Africa can be situated between two main categories- the known and the unknown. (*Ifriqiyyah baynal Majhul wal Maluum*). In other words, it is known to all that this is unknown to all- the true origin of the word Africa is unknown to all. According to Paul Tiyambe Zeleza “there are at least seven origins of the term Africa, all of foreign derivations” (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 2006). All of the theories and others not yet accounted for including the proposition that the word Africa is derived from the Arabic root *afraqa* have defied all validations; all postulations on this category have remained mere conjectures. Lack of consensus on the origin of the word Africa has thus raised a number of methodological questions for African scholars to ponder: Zeleza asks-“Is there a materiality behind the name Africa, or a reality that is distinctive from other realities encapsulated in the monikers of, say, Asia or Europe? Or is it all a discursive fantasy, an unstable and ambivalent sign that cannot provide a foundational basis for an identity, an invention prey to and prime for deconstruction as some postcolonialists are wont to do”. I side-step Zeleza’s line of thought in order to raise new questions in this regard. I ask; could the word Africa be a signifier for something mythical which, as an happenstance, found application in that part of the world now known as Africa or is it rather a product, like its medieval history, of imagination?

But I know you know this-that while the origin of the category Africa may as yet be unknown but definitely not unknowable, to be African is all about life and

living. It is real. In other words, what it means to be African is beyond controversies or arguments; it is beyond spatio-temporal contestations over and around the motif of Africa. There is something unique in being African which none but the African knows. Scholars in the field of commensality (food studies), would provide incontrovertible evidences in this direction. The essentially African, not necessarily Africa, may nest in the rich tapestry of Africa menu and cuisine.

Further, I know that this is known to all –we all know that this is Africa. This the land of magic. Africa is probably the only continent that belongs to all not only to Africans. The continent has an uncanny attraction for all races and for all nations. From its undulating landscapes, humanity, of all racial background, derive inspiration; from the bellies of the forest and the grim terrains of the desert, humans source direction. Muhammad b. Rashid al-Makhtoum, the Prime Minister of UAE refers to the continent as the locale of race. “With each new day in Africa” al-Makhoum posits, a gazelle wakes up knowing he must outrun the fastest lion or perish”. “At the same time”, he says further, “a lion stirs and stretches, knowing he must outrun the fastest gazelle or starve. It's no different for the human race. Whether you consider yourself a gazelle or a lion, you have to run faster than others to survive” (M. R. Maktoom, 2012). This is probably why Damian Marley says everyone is related to Africa; everyone comes from Africa; we are all distant relatives”. (D. Marley, 2010).

But this may not be known to all- Africa occupies the second position with reference to the available quantum of data of all the continents of the world. In other words, within 0.60 seconds, a search for the word Africa returned a finding of up to 3.100, 000, 000, while that on Australia which is the largest returned a finding totalling 3,460, 000, 000 within one minute. This occasioned for me an enquiry-why is Africa such an irresistible field of inquiry? Probably for four reasons. In other words, I propose four arguments- that is tentatively - for the unceasing representations of the continent of Africa. These are arguments based on love or affection, argument based on hatred, argument based on betrayal and argument based on tragedy.

Thus I proceed as follows- hardly is there a continent which is ‘loved’ like Africa. Then I heard a voice, the voice of Africa. The voice says: “I am the beloved continent not only to Africans but equally to non-Africans. Consequently, I have been subject of different portrayals. I have been subject of many representations. In the hands of my sons and daughters; in the hands of Africans. I have equally been subject of ‘other’ representations- representations of “love”- in the hands of non-Africans. The semiotics of the love Europe had and still has for me are there in arts and artefacts; in fiction and poetry, in paintings and drawings. Sometimes when

you love, in line Tayyeb Salih in *Season of Migration to the North* (T.Salih; 1969), you kill in order to show to love. Leo Tolstoy (1825-1918), the popular Russia writer once said that in order to destroy an enemy you must first show him love (L. Tolstoy, 1867, 98).

We also know this that the ‘love’ qua affection that some have for Africa is as deep as the hatred others have for the continent. This has been reflected in a panoply of negative representations of the continent- representations which sometime border on racialism or narcissism or even self-flagellation. In other words, there are non-Africans who hate and detest Africa with passion. Ironically too, there are Africans who abominate this continent with rapture (A. A. Oladosu, 2005; 211). Whereas the former consider Africa to be an open house of treasure that could be pillaged and plundered with reckless abandon the latter do not reckon with Malcom X who once said that “you cannot hate the fruit of a tree without hating the tree; you cannot hate Africa without hating yourself” (Malcolm X, 1965).

Again, this is known to us all- hardly is there a continent that has been betrayed both by its inhabitants and others who have benefitted from its huge resources, more than this continent. To some bearers of the African identities, those whose destiny has been meshed, by design, into this continent, those who have fallen into the cesspool of glum and scum, Africa is like the mother who must die in order for her son to survive. Thus the latter often relate to the continent in the manner of the Jackal and the Vulture. Situated atop the hierarchies of power in the continent, they usually render the continent’s natural resources asunder. Fed to the hilt- like the beg-bug - of the plum and luxury that this continent could afford, this group of Africans usually seek an escape from the continent. They indulge in the slippery assumption that to be outside Africa, away from the desert and the forest, is to cease being African. They often forget that, in line with Wole Soyinka, you can take an Isara man out of Isara, but hardly can you take Isara away from the Isaraman (W.Soyinka,1989) ; you can take an African out of Africa, but hardly could Africa be taken away from the African.

The last proposition from me in regard to the question –why is Africa a subject of unceasing scholarly and less-scholarly enquiries – is hinged on tragedy. Africa in the contemporary period enjoys unceasing patronage for its negative value. Whenever the news break here, it is to announce the occurrence of tragedy, of flooding, of violence. The most popular movie out of Africa is the one in which blood and tragedy enjoy prominence.

Out of the above postures in relation to the continent of Africa, the postures of ‘love’, of hatred, of betrayal and of tragedy, has emerged at least two streams of

consciousness, two different ways of imagining Africa by Africans and others. I shudder to refer to these postures as ideologies. These are Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism (J. Swift, 2011, 8-9). These streams are evident in different disciplines and specializations. The more critical your posture the more you see images of Afro-pessimism in African literature, sociology, anthropology, media studies and others. The more interdisciplinary one's readings, the more one comes across strident voices and images of Afro-optimism in historical studies and political science. The Afro-pessimist among us, among African scholars, is like a sanitary inspector. He sees a bleak future for the continent. To him Africa once described by Henry Stanley as the Dark Continent, will always be a place ridden with diseases and conflict; to him African is not an utopia but a dystopia. The Afro-pessimist constantly suffers from Afrophobia.

The Afro-optimist, on the other hand, is like an horticulturist. Each time he contemplates Africa, she sees potentials for greatness and development. He sees great potentials in the forest and in the desert parts of the continent- the huge geographical size, the mineral deposits, the agricultural resources, the demographics and the huge market. In addition, the Afro-optimist sees Africa as having the means to become the moral compass, the food basket, the technological hub and the leader for the rest of the world in the future. Thus, while Afro-pessimism encourages a resignation to fate, Afro-optimism sees utopias, hope and opportunities.

However, both Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism are not without their critics. There is a question of whether they do not actually represent romantist portrayal of grim realities of life across the continent (ibid). Contemplated more closely, I identify at least three different players from their ranks. I refer to them as African scholars, Africanist scholars and others. Let us begin with the last, the other player in the business of producing Africa.

The other since the early modern period in Africa is usually a business man. The business man whose ware is religion. He is in Africa to save souls, lost souls in the continent. The other in the early modern period was known as a slave merchant. He achieved renown during those eras for turning Africans to things and instruments: things he could use, instruments he could dominate. Again, this other could be corporate outfits. They are in Africa in order to expand their empire of fund and money. The other could be the metropole in search of new empire, to make money. The British Agent and Consul-General of Egypt from 1883-1907, Lord Cromer is quoted to have said that "the European would not reside in Egypt unless he could make money by doing so" (E. B. Cromer, 1908, p.432) In the

contemporary period, the Other inside Africa could be an African; the African human trafficker.

Now when I reference the other as an African, it is to complicate our notion of identities even among African intelligentsia. Thus there is another other among African scholars. He is there in the north of the continent. He is the Arab-African. The African who loathes and detest the other African. Ihsan Abdul Quddus, in his novel titled *Holes in the Black Garment* (Thuqub min al-thawb al-Abyad) (Oladosu, 220) does a beautiful portrayal, or rather a caricature of his persona for our contemplation. It is the portrayal of an African who sees blackness as a metaphor for tragedy. In the racial hierarchy within which he exists, the Arab-African other constructs himself as the second in superiority only to the white man. And the white man knows that!

Yet there is another Other. The Black-African other. He is there in the so-called sub-Sahara Africa. He is here, right here in this hall. He is the other African scholar. He is the counterfoil, the anti-thesis of the Arab-African racist other. He loathes the Arab with passion. He detest the sight of the desert like humans' aversion for death. A reading of Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* and Ayi kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (Oladosu, ibid) render Joseph Conrad's negative representation of the non-West in *Heart of Darkness* (J. Conrad, 1899) an invalid. The worst representation of the African has been that of the African of the African. In other words, be it the Arab- or Black-African other, these are elements within the African landscape which celebrate alterity and adulate the metaphysics of difference in their quest for what Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, while invoking V. Y Mudimbe describes as 'cultural ontology of blackness'(Zeleza, 15) and in my view Arabness.

Ironically, there is a third hierarchy of otherness that we should not neglect to engage in this otherwise widening geography of ways of imagining Africa. Here I call attention to the black-African self that negates the black-African other; the so-called victim that became a perpetrator; the oppressed that became the oppressed. Such a reading becomes axiomatic in the black-on-black violence that recently rocked South Africa where foreign identities in the country were hacked down and heinously killed (CODESRIA 2016).

Despite the pertinence of the above reading of the trajectories in the ways of imagining Africa, this presentation must side-step the category of the other in order to engage the self; it must yield space to the known not the unknown. Thus of particular interest to me are the first two categories I identify in the field of African studies, namely that of the African scholar (W. Soyinka, 1977) and the Africanist

scholar. It is the ways by which their representations, constructions and theorizations have impacted Africa that are of greater concern to me. There can be no argument that by the African or the Africanist, reference here is ordinarily to a scholar, an intellectual. The intellectual is and should ordinarily be a deracialized subject. He could be a faithful and faithless personality. No matter what he believe or disbelieve, the intellectual has one idol that s/he worships-objectivity. He has only one place of worship- the library. She has only one group of followers-books.

Let me explore this a bit further. The late Palestinian cultural critic and global scholar, Edward Said (1993), while Julien Benda intellectuals “are “a tiny band of super-gifted but morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscience of mankind...Intellectuals do not do the same thing year in year out. Rather, “they are always on the move; on the make” (ibid 4); they are those whose “kingdom is not of this world” (ibid 5). They risk being “burned at the stake, ostracized or crucified. They are symbolic personages marked by their unyielding distance from practical concerns...always in permanent opposition to the status quo; very small group of wo/men “whose stentorian voices and indelicate imprecations are hurled at mankind from on high” (ibid).

If indeed all the above constitute the fundamental gravitas of the intellectual, then the whole field of African studies should ordinarily be free of all postures which could call to question the above hallowed and revered characterization of the man of intellect. But what we have for contemplation, like the one I painted above, like the cartographer, of the African other, is an eclectic field in which the production of Africa in electronic and print media, in books, pamphlets and magazines, in novels and anthologies have been circumscribed, to a large extent, by the trajectories in what I am referring to as African in contradistinction to Africanist scholars. It is to this eclecticism and slippages that my title, African in African/ist studies of Africa seek to call attention to.

In other words, two types of genre or body of knowledge, or is it ignorance are in existence on Africa. The first is Africanist studies of Africa; the second is African studies of African. The Africanist of my proposition is the non-African whose expertise is on Africa and one who is located out there in the centre, in the metropolis, outside Africa, far away from the continent; the quintessential African studies of Africa, on the other hand, is situated here in Africa, in the desert and forest of the continent. Thus the African in the studies in my title refers to the intellectual who is born in Africa, lives in Africa and experiences the weal and the woe of the continent. It is to that brand of studies that are produced by those scholars who are either ‘filiated or affiliated’ to the continent and would pooh-pooh

the idea of being referenced as Africanist. In other words, my schematization seeks to open gaps in the assumption that all those who study Africa be they Africans or not could all be referred to as Africanists. It is meant to question the gathering into the same group of such writers and intellectuals as Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), J. F. Ade Ajayi (1929-2014), Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu (1924-1996), Albert Adu Boahen (1932–2006), Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973), Gwendolen M. Carter (1906-1991), Patrick Chabal (1951-2014), John Henrik Clarke (1915-1998), Basil Davidson (1914-2010), Kenneth Dike (1917-1983), Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986), Stephen Ellis (1953-2015), John Fage (1921–2002) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). In my framing, these are Africans not Africanists; these are and were intellectuals whose works speak to Africa and those whose scholarship were circumscribed by urgent issues of concern to the continent.

Again, by seeking to divide epistemological engagement with Africa into two using the African versus the Africanist construct I wish to call attention to a trend which has of recent become popular in scholarly circles around the world. In other words, whereas the Africanist scholars has an Association known as African studies Association (ASA) based in the United States, another association named African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) was recently launched with headquarters in Accra, Ghana. The launching of ASAA in 2013, in addition to “promoting ‘Africa’s own specific contributions to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa and the Diaspora (ASAA 2013)”, in my view, recognizes the subtle dynamics in the existing knowledge systems on the continent. It appears the founders of ASAA have realized that, no matter how truthful the scholarship of the Africanist on Africa might be, such would still not make him, except by willful decision against orientation, an African.

But it is not only on matters bordering on geography or proximity to the continent that we encounter differences in the approaches of the Africanist and the African to studies on the Africa. Years of scholarship in the field has been instructive of the fact that the epistemological tools often deployed by either of the two groups are usually laced with the imprimatur of contemporary geo-politics. In other words, while the African would ordinarily hinge his production of Africa on firsthand experience as an African, and on a critical lens that inserts African-centred ways of knowing and references into the scholarly endeavour, the Africanist would depend either on a bibliography that is full of negative portrayals and representations of the continent or at best seek recourse, as was the case in the medieval period, to imagination. Let me explore the latter more closely.

Cultural practitioners are well aware that all representations based on imagination are all about transaction in power-politics. The person who imagines the other desires to know the other; to know the other is to define it, to give it a name. To give the Other a name, however, is not an end in itself. It is rather a means towards a greater end. In the primordial times, the Almighty invited His angels to His presence after He has taught Prophet Adam the names of all entities in nature. He therefore asked the angels to name the entities. They immediately owned up to their ignorance. Prophet Adam eventually seized the moment by providing the names of all the entities in nature. By doing so, he became the representative of the Almighty; he seized the power to dominate nature.

Thus to define the other, to name it is to possess it, to control it, to dominate it. Imagination equally invests the subject with the warrant to dance around the present and therefore to attempt to construct the future. The non-African other, who sets out to represent and construct Africa while deploying his imagination seizes the initiative to question the other; he appropriates the space for and of inquiry. He asks -‘Who are they? Who could they be? How could they be overcome?’

The second thing imagination does to the presumably inferior particularly when it is deployed as a tool by the supposedly powerful is to deprive the former of the opportunity to self-define. Here the imagined is deemed to be incapable of asking the question: Who am I? He cannot ask the other question: how long have I lived? Why am I like this? What can I do to improve on my condition”. According to Karl Marx, the non-West cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.

But what feeds imagination about Africa? How do the Africanist, Africanist cartographers, Africanist historians, the Africanist writers, the Africanist social scientists derive data for their trade and continuous production of the continent of Africa? At least three suggestions may here be proposed in response. The first is that imagination and by extension representations are natural endowments in humans which recognize neither the barriers of race nor religion. In fact it has been posited that human beings have four endowments – self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom. It imbues us with the power to choose, to respond to the phenomena, to strive to change our reality. Ironically, however to be imbued with imagination is not the same thing as having the zeal and zest to deploy imagination as an instrument of change. Imagination is like the sharp knife, it rusts out of disuse.

In other words, imagination is like the seed of the oak tree. Planted on the barren land, the tree remains a mirage, far from reality. Nurtured, however, on a fertile



landscape, nature celebrates the birth of wonder. This reading is very germane to the way by which humans deploy their imaginative capacities to impact the world. It is highly critical to the way Africanist scholars go about their representation of the continent since the medieval to the early modern period. Unlike African scholars who were steeped in an austere landscape, intellectuals who lived on lands which were, in line with Frantz Fanon, hungry for water, for bread and for light (F. Fanon, 2004, 4), Africanist scholars, on the other hand, have since the medieval period enjoyed greater luxuries of life. They have always belonged to the privileged class – a class which had access to the necessities of life. It is a class which, after having succeeded in answering the summons of the stomach became invested with the chiliastic power to begin to deploy their imaginative powers into the task of changing reality, and indeed the world.

Thus seated in the plum and luxury of the metropolis, far away from Africa, the Africanist of the early modern period began to imagine the possibilities of preserving the comfort of the centre in relation to the periphery. Invariably Africa, which had previously been subject of different representations by Western cartographers and explorers during the medieval period emerged into his consciousness. Two different types of representations of the continent eventually resulted from his imagination. The first is an Africa that needed to be ‘produced’ for the consummation of the metropolis, of Europe, of Britain, for the citizens of her majesty. The second, is the other Africa which had to be produced for the soon to be colonized continents of Africa and Asia.

Three texts are very relevant to this reading. Henry Stanley’s *In the Dark Continent* (1890) and Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859) which were written for the consumption of Europeans, while the third *Déscription de l’Egypte* (S. Moreh, 2001, 68) was written in order to convince the soon-to-be dominated of their primordial inferiority. The first two texts figure the White man as a subject which is second only to the divine in nature; the second corpus was produced with the sole purpose of dominating the minds of Africans, in this instance, Egyptians, and to convince them of their status as the third, if not the fourth, in the hierarchy of existence. The first product of imagination in which Africa figured as the centerpiece of the imperialist vision was written in order to enlist the support of the ‘King/Queen’ and the proletariat in the metropolis for the task of ‘civilizing’ the backward nations of Africa and Asia. The continent was equally represented as ‘a bride to be courted’ and ‘a forest where monkeys live.’ (V.Y. Mundibe, 1988)

All of the above are there in the open; they constitute part of what we know about the history of this continent in the early modern period. We know that citizens of her majesty were, in line with Plato, ‘taught lies’ (Plato, 1977) about Africa, ‘in

order to instill (fake) patriotism' (ibid) in them. They were taught of an Africa that was primeval and in utter state of 'inertia'; an Africa on its knees pleading that Europe should take it over; it was only Europe that could save Africa from itself.

In other words, the image of Africa in Africanist studies of the early modern period was a means towards an imperial end. The construction of Africans as primeval, brutish and backward provided justification for the violent exploitation of its resources and the enslavement of its inhabitants. Africa in the Africanist schema of that era was one in utter need of civilization; it was the Christian mission that could save Africa from itself. All of these constitute the body of knowledge at our reach.

But that which is and could probably be unknown and be novel is to invite attention to how Africa has been inserted into the works of Africans who worked and sacrificed for the continent at a time anti-colonial fervor had not moved from cooperation to confrontation in many parts of the continent. It is to this I now turn my attention.

The African scholar of the early-modern era is a largely uncelebrated figure particularly outside Arab-Africa. These are subjects that emerged at that moment when Africa was departing its mediocrity for modernity. These are Arab-Africans who had first-hand experience of what it meant to be a colonized subject, what it meant to be free but only as a second class citizen on one's motherland. Here reference is not to Ibn Batuta (1304-1368) whose travelogues circumscribed both the Asian and Africa's historical landscape nor I am tempted to invoke the memory of Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the African ornament, who even preceded Augustus Comte in the field of sociology and historiography. Here I am content to cite, for its ultimate relevance, Abdulrahman al-Jabarty (1753-1825), the Egyptian chronicler, historian, social critic and probably the earliest scholar to be concerned with Africa and indeed Western imperialism. I recall the sacrifice of African writers like Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932), the Shakespeare of the Arab world, who was exiled for speaking truth to power; I retrieve from silences of history Muawiyyah Muhammad Nur of Sudan (1929-1945) who strove to traverse the imaginary barriers between the forest and the desert at a time borders were being erected by the British colonists across Africa (A. A. Oladosu, 2001).

The Africa in the works of these writers and thinkers like that of their successors who struggled for independence of the continent from colonial stranglehold, including Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Leopold Senghar Senghour of Senegal, Alhaj Sekou Ahmad Toure of Gambia, Ben Bella of Tunisia, Muhammad Miftah al-Fayturi of Sudan, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana represent the quintessential Africa of our imagination.. Al-Jabarty's works for example which featured *Târîkh Muddat*

al-Faransis bi Misr, *Mazhar al-Taqdis bi Zawali Drawlat al-faransis* and *Ajaib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wal- Athar* were not only textured with fundamental issues of concern to Africa and the African societies of the early modern period, it could equally be suggested that it is probably the first work by an African to insert Africa into history, to reconstruct the history of Africa while colonialism was putting up its infrastructure in the continent. *Tarikh Mudat* (Moreh, 10) probably has the first word in that field which later came to be known as postcolonialism. Before its publication, Napoleon Bonaparte had justified his invasion of Egypt as a rescue mission of Africa not in furtherance of the French's imperial ambition. Al-Jabarty's works did other thing for African studies- it blazed the trail in the oft-neglected field of Occidentalism, a field of study which awaits its moment of fame among African scholars. His works contains first-hand narratives of the encounter between Europe and Africa; it provides critical insights into the African view of the non-African other in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As it is usually the case with intellectuals who speak truth to power, Al-Jabarti eventually paid a price for his vocation as an intellectual. One of his sons was murdered and placed on a horse in the city of Cairo. He was said to have consequently suffered blindness due to unceasing grief over the incident. He later died in 1825.

An objective assessment of the contributions of these early African writers would show that the works of these mid-19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist fighters in northern parts of Africa actually provided antecedent to anti-colonialist fervours in other parts of Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their works served as precursor to the subsequent interrogation of theories of race in which blackness is constructed as an inferior to whiteness. In other words, by the end of the nineteenth century, the 'monumentalist' (F. Nietzsche, 1974, 144) theories about Africa -theories of primordial primevality of the continent - began to be critically contested by Africans and indeed some Africanist scholars alike who strove to reframe and reconstruct the history of the continent in relation to other civilisations around the world. The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century further witnessed the establishment of centres of African studies both in Africa and other parts of the world with disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, anthropology, and archaeology. The studies encouraged better understanding of the history of Africa and put to rest the heavily biased image of Africa's past.

Several nationalists and the new elite, who had been educated in Western school system, employed the reconstructed African history to challenge colonialism and began the process of state building. Between the 1950s and 1980s when majority

of African nations got their independence, the nationalists who became leaders of their people embarked on nation-building with the development of critical infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, roads, electricity, and water resources. They also facilitated the integration of their countries into the global economic and political systems which over the last three decades has become more strengthened as a result of democratisation, revolution in telecommunication, transportation and neo-liberal policies which facilitated large scale international trade from the United States, Europe and China. In addition, there has been a growing mass of technocrats and professionals who not only work in their countries, but also taking advantage of international migration policies to render their expertise in various parts of the world. However, despite making this huge transition in the last century, it is striking to note that some of the negative narratives and stereotypes of Africa in the past have continued to resurface while new ones have emerged. This is largely due to several developmental challenges facing Africans and the bias images and reports on the continent on the news media.

In other words, from within this new trajectories in the studies of Africa by African and Africanist scholars has emerged new challenges that are critical to the whole task of reconstructing Africa. The first relates to all of us in the field of African studies. Exactly why are we in this business?

At least two motives nest behind and beneath the African/ist's production of Africa in the contemporary period. The first is what I refer to as subjective/imperial/pecuniary and the second, the objective, the altruistic, the anti-imperial. When the African/ist treats the category of Africa subjectively, the continent becomes an intellectual sparring partner. Here, he is involved with, for example, African history or African politics for situational, institutional and personal reasons. The situational reason consists of his identity as a historian on Africa and one who resides and indeed must reside, not in Africa but in the West. To be resident in the West is to assume authority over the non-West; to write the non-West into or out of existence. Thus, this Africanist's involvement with Africa becomes an extension and a continuation of the unfinished business of imperialism.

The African/ist historian might also be involved with *Africa* for institutional reason. This references the whole necessity for the West to be on top of the hierarchy of knowledge production. It also explains the establishment of many agencies and centers in the academia outside Africa whose sole concerns is Africa not its immediate environment. Designated atimes as area studies, these centers derive its glory in 'producing' Africa. The way it relates to and treats Africa also

makes what may be referred to as distanciation in historical exercise a possibility. Here, distanciation references a situation where Africanists entrenched as they are in Western academia, are able to distance themselves from Africa and the values which the continent's true history embody while posturing to do otherwise.

Now when Africanists engage with Africa for personal reasons, the continent becomes a means towards an end, the end being the achievement of material comfort. The more they write about Africa, the more popular they become, especially in the inner caucuses of the state in Europe; the more he writes about Africa the more he is acclaimed for the 'profundities' of his knowledge; the more he writes the more he is seen as the specialist on Africa. His perspective on African affairs becomes more valid than that of the African; it is his version of history that is treated as the 'truth'. This occurs despite the fact that the Africanist could have been involved in writing African history less for the purpose of knowledge but more for the purpose of bread.

But whenever the Africanist or the African/ist engage Africa objectively, he does that in the first person. Though he has no links, biologically that is, with Africa, he nonetheless writes about Africa in the 'first person'. He gives preference to objectivity and yields space to the true calling of the intellectual. He engages with Africa in fulfillment of the oath of truthfulness and honesty which intellectual practice demands of its practitioners. Thus, a careful reading of the works of some Africanists and African scholars on the historiography of domination and resistance in the continent bears this out. In other words, there are uncanny similarities in the works of, for example, Sean O'Fahey's 'Growth and Development of the Keira Sultanate' and that of Muddaththir Umar's 'Imperialism and Nationalism' (1986); there appears to be historical concurrence in G. Warburg's 'Religious Policy in the Northern Sudan' and H. A. Ibrahim's 'Imperialism and Neo-Mahdism' in *A Study of British Policy towards Neo-Mahdism* (1980). A reading of M. O. Al-Bashir's *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan* returns us to the work of Winfred Cantwill Smith. As far as these Africans are concerned, African studies is both a weapon and a profession: a weapon with which the history of Africa written by the 'perpetrator' could be un-written in order to be re-written; it is equally a profession by which the African could properly reposition and reconstruct the future of the continent.

In order to continue the on-going efforts towards reconstructing the continent's future, adequate attention needs be paid to critical challenges confronting scholarship in the continent. We have to find creative and sustainable ways through which the creative and imaginative powers of young African youths and

intellectuals could be unleashed for the progress of the continent; we have to find sustainable ways by which academic practice can be made more productive, more fulfilling and more engaging. Presently this is not the case. It is not the case because large parts of the continent do not enjoy good governance; lack of good governance has led to poverty; poverty has led to ignorance which in turn has led to transaction in violence. This largely accounts for low-level knowledge production in the continent, on the continent and for the continent.

Now since knowledge production on the continent inside the continent is low in comparison to the Africanist setting, it becomes axiomatic that available data and scholarly materials on the continent would not be available here but far away from Africa. The Kluge Library of Congress in the United States probably has more data and materials on Africa than all the libraries of universities in the continent. What kind of libraries and laboratories are there in our academy? Are they automated or digitized ones or analogue ones?

An equally important challenge we have to confront in order to creatively begin to produce new knowledge on this continent relates methodology which is in itself a product of normativity. In other words, there appears to be this seemingly compulsive patronage and deployment of research tools, theories and methodologies that are foreign to the study of the continuities and change in the Africa. Three centuries after their postulations, we still invoke classical theories in economics provided by John Locke's (1632–1704), we still celebrate Adam Smith, David Ricardo , Jean-Baptiste Say's (1767–1832) theories of law of equality of market demand and supply; the theory that glorifies the division of labor, the theory that led to the promulgation of the law of diminishing returns, and the assumption that the best economy is that with the ability to self-adjust in a laissez-faire system devoid of government intervention. Today in the twenty first century, we have not allowed Karl Marx (1818-1883), the German economic, social, and political philosopher to rest with his theory of dialecticism; our reading of history is still held hostage to the trajectory postulated by these European theoreticians that the history of all societies usually proceeds linearly by the triad of forces or dialectics called thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. We do all of these without paying attention, one, to the fact that no methodology is fool-proof; two, that no theoretical framework can perform wonders all by itself and three, that all methodologies rise or fall by the degree of competence brought to bear on it by the researcher.

Put differently, we have not taught our students that theories are in themselves invalid in the absence of conscious choices and actions on the part of the researcher. We often forget that the knife, no matter how sharp it is, cannot by

itself cut any object; that the master cannot share the tool of domination with the servant no matter how humane he postures.

The indiscriminate deployment of western theories into our practice as intellectuals is not simply the problem. Perhaps the greater problem is our lack of attention to the socio-cultural and political biases that inform these theories. Thus when we deploy these theories into our works, it is based on the assumption that we can keep pace with the fast pace of Western life that informed the development of those theories and methodologies. Let me remind this gathering of this fact in history. When the colonialists came to Africa, they took exception to women who they saw going about their daily life some half-naked, others completely in nudity. During that time in Europe, it was customary for women to wear long skirts and flowing gowns, covering themselves from head to toe except at formal evening receptions or dinner parties). Today the West now regard nudity as a metaphor for modernity, for advancement, as a sign of open-mindedness and a high-level of development. This means in less than half a century, Western mentality had shifted abruptly from one to the other, from bias in favour of covering up to bias against it. Such arbitrariness and slippages foreground Western epistemological production. It is one that completely negate what we know of African value system.

What other implications branch out of the above for African studies of Africa? This includes the fact that we do not pay close attention to the underbellies of Western theoretical paradigms – paradigms that glory in self-centricity; self-centricity that borders on narcissism or what Pierre Clastres refers to as “civilizational arrogance”. (Epistemological Bias 108); self-centricity which usually eventuate in the negation of the values of the non-West or the annihilation of the uniqueness and specificity of the Other and the propagation of a linear sense of history which begins and ends with the West.

Going forward with the task of reconstructing our future would therefore mean asking the unasked, saying the unsaid, thinking out of the box. In practice, it would mean asking political science when shall we begin to retheorize notions of the state using traditions from Africa as tools? It would mean asking the unasked: Could there be an alternative to Western democracy, an alternative that would derive from Africa’s tradition? If it is true that it is Western democracy that has produced separation of children from their mothers at the borders of life; it is western democratic practice that has produced the humongous incidence of corruption in which a former minister could steal trillions of Naira while the rest of the nation is steeped in the abyss of underdevelopment, then the exploration of newer systems of governance has become a categorical imperative. Until African political

scientists answer those questions, Africa would continue to be an appendage of its former rulers.

In addition to the above, the task of reconstructing the continent of Africa would gain new traction when knowledge production becomes completely Africa-centered and largely Africa-funded. Governments in the continent need to increase allocation to education such that we can begin to depend less on foreign grants. Only recently, a university in Zambia received a sum of \$340,000 grant from UNESCO to run degree in witchcraft as part of the university's project work in intangible cultural heritage. Most of the ground-breaking studies on Africa have been funded by donors and grant awarding institutions in the developed world especially Europe and the US. While this has helped many scholars researching on Africa to advance their career and knowledge, it usually comes with the responsibility to produce knowledge that is situated within the epistemological systems/methodologies developed in the West. You and I know that he who wears borrowed garments suffers two tragedies-its either the garment is too short or too long; Africa cannot afford that anymore; not anymore.

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