

African Studies: A Re-assessment of Academic Tourism Since 1990

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Résumé: Le présent article examine le concept du tourisme académique pour expliquer le développement des études africaines en Afrique depuis 1960. Les paradigmes d'analyse des situations africaines ne sont pas d'essence locale. Ils constituent plutôt un produit de centres intellectuels d'Europe et d'Amérique cherchant à asseoir leur hégémonie sur d'autres sociétés. Par conséquent, ces paradigmes posent les problèmes en termes d'idéologies dominantes en Occident. Les idéologies se sont ainsi employées à maintenir le statu quo dans lequel l'Occident passe pour le maître, tandis que l'Afrique est réduite à jouer un rôle périphérique dans les relations intellectuelles. Cette tendance reproduit la dépendance intellectuelle et l'opportunisme de la part de certains chercheurs africains.

Introduction

It was a small band of dedicated men (for they were mostly men) excited by the implications of the emergence of new nations on global politics. Some were attracted by the thrill of cultivating an almost a virgin field, others sought to test their pet theories. There were also those whose interest in African studies developed because of their growing civil rights movement, or a chance to encounter with an African student, or curiosity triggered by school textbooks, films and anecdotes by that eccentric uncle or grandfather who had been to Africa as a missionary, colonial official, or soldier, with their stories of an exotic, primitive and faraway continent that needed salvation, modernization and development (Zezeza 1993:20).

That the process of production of knowledge is a political preoccupation related to the question of power relationships cannot be gainsaid. This is because the dominant approach or paradigm of social and historical inquiry is a reflection of the ideology of those at the centre of power. The centre of power constitutes the ruling elite, the forces sustaining those in power, or interest groups exerting influence on the polity. Also, the centre of power could be situated outside the state system in the institutions involved in power struggle, seeking to safeguard their social and economic interests. These may include; race, religious, ethnicity, gender, youth, entrepreneurial and industrial, peasant and workers' organizations.

Indeed, the centre of power determines the nature of knowledge to be generated and disseminated in the wider society. For instance, where the

bourgeoisie control the pivot of power, their worldview also underlies the general body of ideas they create and propagate. Conversely, the ideas of peasants, or workers are a reflection of their experiences, interests and aspirations.

Cognizant of these, this paper acknowledges the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity in the production of knowledge with the concept of power and its distribution in society. This is in view of the fact that all knowledge is functional, making it a false claim to assume neutrality in the process of knowledge production.

The concept, 'Academic Tourism' in the explanation of trends in African studies was first applied by Zeleza (1993). In his sequel, however, Zeleza did not define the concept explicitly. Instead, he left it for the reader to draw analogy from his discourse. This proved problematic given that the interpretation was left open-ended for the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. This complication notwithstanding, the concept was used to trace and explain the emergent schools of thought since the dawn of African studies to the early years of the 1990s.

Therefore, in this paper, the definition of the concept is inferred from the seminal work of Zeleza on the development of African historiography (*ibid*). Academic tourism from the point of view of this paper, connotes the historical explanation of the African experiences using theoretical and conceptual frameworks borrowed from the social science centres in Europe and America. Strictly, it is the romanticization of the total African historical experience. Moreover, it portends gloom and, therefore is pessimist about African scholarship in general, its capacity to invent paradigms of analysis to explain developments in the continent in African terms. This assumption invites the question as to whether there is any connection between academic tourism and the concept of power in the development of African studies.

Academic tourism romanticizes the African scenario lending credence to the notion of Afro-pessimism which only sees failures in the independent African state. Afro-pessimism has a tendency to ignore the historical roots of the African crisis, regarding it to be a recent phenomenon with non connection whatsoever with the African colonial experience. As a result, it depicts colonialism as a golden period of African history, ensuring economic growth, political stability and social cohesion — the tired claim that colonialism brought civilization to Africa. Thus, all discourses within this mould take 1960, once the great year of African independence as the point of departure of all discussions when the continent begins to slide in its perceived contemporary state of hopelessness. The argument is that this state of affairs spontaneously invites back Europeans and North Americans of 'good will' to save Africa from 'self-ruin'. Indeed, Mahmood Mamdani aptly captures this mood as follows:

...the air is rife with 'Afro-pessimism'. Even friends of Africa have despaired of a crisis, persistent and prolonged, taking on continental dimensions, so much so that words like 'intervention', 'conditionalities', 'limited sovereignty', and even recolonization have increasingly moved from a vocabulary that once sought to explain the genesis of 'the African crisis', to one that now prescribes solutions to it. Africa must be saved from itself, and the sooner the better, so runs the current refrain of specialists on Africa (Mamdani 1994:171).

Academic tourism dramatizes the African scenario, using various theories and post-isms including postmodernism and postcolonialism (these concepts will be discussed shortly in this paper). The paradigms of analysis in this conception, ostensibly oscillate between Western bourgeois liberalism and marxism, supposedly with the view of explaining Africa's historical development from pre-colonial period to present. Indeed, academic tourism as a conceptual tool of analysis contains condescending elements regarding power relationship and the development of African scholarship.

In considering power relations, it implicitly advances the notion of superiority and patrimony of Western societies over African communities by relying on the power of discourse. More emphasis is laid on the 'otherness' of non-western cultures. The consensus, in this view, is that African societies and those outside the orbit of modern technological advancement are archaic and exhibit anachronistic tendencies which make them inferior. Thus, they represent the primitive stages of human development. Therefore, in explaining development, these societies are to be considered isolatedly of their western opposites, only becoming relevant in their social and historical analysis when Europeans and North Americans want to explain ethnic, cultural and technological distance from these so-called backward societies (Mudimbe 1988).

Furthermore, in scholarship, academic tourism perpetuates intellectual dependence which facilitates continued existence of replicated forms of institutions borrowed from the west in their undiluted form. In its analyses of the African situations, it helps to replicate systems of western institutions in Africa, reproducing intellectual dependence on the one hand while reinforcing itself on the other. This sets in motion a vicious circle in scholarship which renders African scholars as mere playthings in the game of Western scholarship. Moreover, as Thandika Mkandawire aptly notes:

Intellectual dependence also generates a negative self-image among scholars. Such an image may be demonstrated by forms of intellectual mimetism in which local scholarship is confined to 'empirical verification' of hypotheses thrown up by institutions in metropolitan countries without any attempt to evaluate their theoretical appropriateness and historical status (Mkandawire 1989:2).

Concomitantly, this mimetism is reinforced by a reward system which accords foreign appreciation of research findings greater weight than those by local scholars (*ibid*). This is a deliberately created phenomenon in which western scholarship is elevated above other intellectual endeavours outside its perception. Within this scholarly relations western writers declared certain topics, regions, 'tribes' or even approaches to be out of bounds for everyone else except themselves. The indigenous African scholars who cooperated with foreign researchers found themselves playing the role of assistants even in areas where the former possessed superior knowledge. This is because western institutions and scholars controlled the production and dissemination of knowledge. The situation is made no better when it comes to publishing research results. Publication of research findings is controlled by the west. This led two African social scientists to bemoan the situation thus:

A local African scholar is disadvantaged in competing for space in Western research dissemination media. Even when one gains publication space, the author must conform not only to editorial requirements but ideological and social ones as well. There are cases in which Western editors rewrite papers to remove 'unacceptable' portions of a report. In fact both research funding and the dissemination of results in the West are social and political matters (Sindiga and Zeleza 1985:5).

That Euro-American scholars exercise an inordinate influence in defining areas of social inquiry and the methodology is a matter of concern to the community of African scholars. In fact African scholars consider publication in Africanist journals as the 'rite of passage to the secret society of the academia'. This, it is argued, 'bestows the distinction of erudition and the privileges of promotion, name recognition and self-importance' (Johnson 1995:24). In fact, most universities in Africa place a higher premium on research results published in international (Africanist) publications than those in local journals. It is no wonder then, that these relations have led to intellectual opportunism in which the choice of research topics among African scholars quite often than not, have been tailored to meet the editorial requirements of Africanist journals. This development quickly brings into focus the struggle for control of production and dissemination of knowledge in the development of African studies.

The Battle for Control of Knowledge on Africa

The struggle for control of production and dissemination of knowledge on Africa dates back to the advent of colonialism. This also marks the beginning of academic tourism. Although still in its crude form, the social science introduced into Africa at the time, constituted part of the cultural apparatus of the colonial state. Claude Ake observes that:

The social science transplanted to Africa was a variant of the Western mainstream social science which was engendered essentially by capitalism and industrial revolution. The grafting of this social science into Africa arose initially from the need to understand the culture of the colonized. This need was first expressed in the sponsorship of historical and anthropological studies. For example, Lord Hailey's *An African Survey* recounts how in 1908 the colonial regime in Nigeria appointed an ethnologist to look into the applicability of indirect rule (which was instituted in Northern Nigeria) to Southern Nigeria (Ake 1986:1)

The received social science was characterized by the logic of imperialism which emphasized the differences between the colonized and the colonizer. This evolutionary scheme which it employed placed the colonized peoples at the bottom of the ladder and designated them backward while the imperialist nations were clustered at the peak of evolution being considered as civilized (*ibid*:2). Moreover, this discourse also favoured political quietism which took for granted the colonial order as representing the best of all possible worlds that the colonized could aspire to.

From the above enumeration, one is bound to discover that there were contradictory worldviews, pitting the colonized against the colonizer. There was, certainly, a conflict of interests with the colonized demanding independence while the colonizers rationalizing the efficiency of the capitalist order on the other hand. Eventually, what unfolded in the received social science discourse was its contradiction with the rising tide of nationalist political consciousness. Western scholarship realized it could not stem the inertia of nationalist consciousness and resolve, and other anti-imperialist struggles. It was compelled to adopt new strategies and began to identify with African nationalism. This was because:

... the process of political decolonization dismantled the age-old colonial structures, intellectual emancipation demanded that the production of knowledge must be conceived in African terms. And because of the nationalist onslaught, imperialist historiography went into hibernation shedding off its aged and hideous scales... Western scholars in the event, re-examined their discourses on Africa (Ochwada 1993:216).

But although the social and historical knowledge which western scholars produced on Africa appeared 'sympathetic' and 'friendly' to the continent, it remained largely, a powerful apology of imperialism. In essence, it was neither sympathetic nor friendly, but an account of global events of the late 1940s and early 1950s which redefined international relations between Africa and Euro-America.

The conjuncture of events at the close of the 1940s and early 1950s also brought about the East-West conflict which came to be known as the Cold War. This event moulded the international system into a bipolar structure heralding the rivalry between capitalism and socialism. However, outside the

Cold War orientation emerged the Third World, a product of the process of decolonization who sought freedom and *Uhuru* (independence) to control their lives and resources. The peoples of the world, including the Third World were inspired by the Atlantic Charter to demand greater freedom and self-government.

Thus, power struggle ensuing between the East and the West fashioned scholarship on Africa. Indeed, the impact of the Cold War on the process of production of knowledge is immense. After the Second World War the world was divided into two hostile camps led by the United States and the Soviet Union. These countries offered two opposed alternatives to development — capitalism and socialism, First World and Second World. The Third World was a third alternative to offer a different path for humanity (Ogot 1990:1).

This global arrangement in world politics defined relations of Africa with Euro-America. Academic discourses also took shape within the ideological crucible of the two camps. Moreover structurally, the achievement of independence in Africa was tied to the post-war developments, central to which was the emergence of Eastern Europe to socialism (Ochwada 1995:3). In fact it is inconceivable, perhaps, that without this new world order the emergence of Africa would have been anywhere as rapid, politically momentous, or strategically significant. The socialist countries which were emerging as a counter-hegemonic bloc after the war when African nationalism was entering its decisive phase, had a profound impact on the speed and direction of development of African nationalism (Hutchful 1991). It has been observed that:

... it was within the political, ideological, diplomatic and military spaces created by the Cold War that new states fashioned their strategies of survival and development, the accumulation of diplomatic influence abroad and political expansion at home. This situation endowed Africa with much greater diplomatic influence that might have otherwise not been the case. By allying with the socialist countries in the United Nations and other global forum, the newly independent African countries in particular helped to redraw the geopolitical map, turning the diplomatic tables on the former Western Colonial powers (Hutchful 1991:52).

In the new states of Africa, socialism came to provide a powerful alternative paradigm of autonomous non-capitalist development blueprint which significantly influenced countries of both the socialist and non-socialist ideology. Intellectuals and development planners world-wide were also influenced profoundly. Thus, intellectual and academic streams in scholarship in the continent were fashioned within the Cold War dispensation.

Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Julius Nyerere's Tanzania for instance, became academic Mecca of radical Marxist-Leninist theoreticians who

found the academic environment of these countries conducive for testing, redefining and refining their theoretical assumptions. However, after the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, Tanzania and particularly the university of Dar-es-Salaam, became significant in shaping scholarship in Africa within the general Marxist-Leninist theoreticians who found the academic environment of these countries conducive for testing, redefining and refining their theoretical assumptions. However, after the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, Tanzania and particularly the university of Dar es Salaam, became significant in shaping scholarship in Africa within the general Marxist problematic, thanks to the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967 for providing political space for experimentation of socialist ideas.

After the *Arusha Declaration*, during the 1970s and early 1980s Dar es Salaam came to assume importance as a centre of theoretical debate on imperialism, class, underdevelopment and dependency. Numerous scholars from within and outside Tanzania were attracted to the 'Hill' (as the University was popularly known), at a time when 'radicalism' on the campus was on its ascent. It was during this period that scholars such as; Issa Shivji, Thomas Szentes, Justinian Rweyemamu, Henry Mapolu, Clive Thomas, John Saul Lionel Cliffe, Walter Rodney and countless others attempted to develop a socialist ideological orientation which characterized African studies at Dar (Ochwada 1993).¹ It was certainly, the epitome of marxist academic tourism.

But Dar was not the only intellectual centre from where marxist ideas radiated. Other intellectual and academic centres in Africa which became a major cooking pot of socialist ideas included; Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Nigeria which attracted a number of marxist academics including Bonaventure Swai and Arnold Tenu from Tanzania. Indeed, the discourses coming from ABU were equally vigorous and had considerable influence on intellectuals and scholarship in Nigeria.

This paper does not lose sight of the fact that the University of Zimbabwe also assumed importance in fashioning marxist scholarship. It attracted academics like, Shadrack Gutto and Micere Mugo, both Kenyans who could not be accommodated by the liberal bourgeois-leaning political dispensation in Kenya to test their ideas. Zimbabwe's independence had brought in power a socialist party which facilitated socialist experimentation.

However, while some institutions in certain countries of Africa pursued scholarship within precincts of the socialist walls, others opted to conduct

1 H. Ochwada has discussed elaborately the development of African historiography in East Africa delineating the various emerging schools of thought. Different periods and scholars produced divergent streams of thought, being a contribution in the development of Africa studies.

their discourses exclusively in Western liberal bourgeois problematics. At Makerere, University of Nairobi and University of Ibadan, for instance, reverberated liberal clichés in academic discourses. Despite the dominant Western liberal tradition, there were challenges from scholars who favoured marxism, as an alternative interpretative model of social, political and economic relations of Africa and the world. They chose to ally with international communists rather than the purveyors of capitalism and neo-colonialism, perceiving their mission as that of liberating African masses from the crutches of imperialism. According to Ngugi wa-Thiong'o, one of those African scholars with a strong socialist leaning in the yesteryears:

... the colonial phase of imperialism did produce an African elite with the mentality that was in harmony with the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist countries. And often it was this African elite, nurtured in the womb of imperialism, with the cultural eyeglasses from Europe, that came to power or who held the reins of power during the neo-colonial phase of imperialism. And it means that this class, because of the cultural-mental outlook it took from the imperialist ruling classes, does not see any contradiction between itself and the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist nations (Ngugi wa-Thiong'o 1985:18-19).

In fact in Kenya Ngugi wa-Thiong'o did not stop at mere rhetoric, but went ahead to actualize his ideals. From the beginning of the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, he exploited the University of Nairobi as his base of activism. Indeed, together with Micere Mugo and Maina wa-Kinyatti among others he used his fiction, public lectures and literary plays to mobilize the fringe left against the apparent conservative-leaning Kenyan state (Ochieng' 1994:6). Elsewhere in Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University became the hotbed of socialist discourses of the Nigerian left.

The foregoing citations are instructive, exemplifying the academic cold war that raged in African institutions of higher learning within the wider global political Cold War. The academic cold war among African scholars came to define the nature and course of discourse in African studies generally. The consequence of which was immense for the development of the African social science, identifying the contribution of African researchers and trajectory of analysis in African studies on the continent. For instance, at the close of 1960s nationalist perceptions of the African experience with its modernization trappings came under severe attack from scholars of marxist persuasion — the dependency school. Yet despite the illuminating analyses by Africans and their Africanist counterparts, their problematics remained imprisoned within the walls of paternalistic western scholarship. However, this is not to say they that did not influence the direction and development of African studies. In fact, it would be foolhardy to ignore the challenges and confrontations from African scholars, and the role they have played in deconstructing and constructing the dominant

western paradigms of social and historical analysis. Their analyses certainly shaped the western perception of Africa. Generally, avers Paul Tiyambe Zeleza:

There can be little doubt that studies of Africa have brought new contexts, methods, insights, and theories that have revolutionized many disciplines, so that the old Eurocentric approaches have lost their paradigmatic prestige and coherence (Zeleza 1994:181).

The deconstruction and reconstruction of paradigms of analysis in African studies are, to say the least, a result of the challenges and confrontations of African scholars with their Africanist counterparts. This paper admits that the full import of these challenges and confrontations in African studies cannot be treated adequately in this limited space. However, to appreciate their significance the development of African historiography, one will be required to study the following works: *ROAPE*, No.17, (1980); *ROAPE*, No.20 (1981); Kitching, (1980); Zeleza, (1983); *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 19, No.1, (1985) and Campbell, (1986). These works have undertaken detailed evaluation of conceptual frameworks employed in African social studies. But the main question remains — whither African studies in the process of production of social and historical knowledge in this era of intellectual uncertainty and paradigmatic disorder? Perhaps the first step is to identify the African predicament and institute a divorce in this unhappy intellectual marriage between the west and Africa. However, this will not be achieved by mere lamentation as has come so far, but a concerted effort to breakaway from this grotesque grip by the West of Africa in the intellectual realm.

The Struggle Continues...

In 1987 William R. Ochieng² asserted that there was a vicious propaganda being spread about Africans, claiming that they were better off economically and socially under colonialism. What was the motive behind this vicious propaganda? It was, wrote Ochieng²:

As some frank American scholar recently told me in Nairobi, the propaganda is aimed at winning for colonialism the vast population of Africa's post-independence generation who had no colonial experience. They are being told that European tutelage was much better than independent African rule. The idea is to smuggle back into Africa European control through the back door... In preparation for this, the

2 William R. Ochieng is a Kenyan historian who has published extensively on intellectual relationships between the West and Africa. According to him Western scholars are not keen on changing the status quo in the intellectual relations.

imperialists are already advancing 'good', or 'humanitarian' reasons for their involvement in Africa (Ochieng' 1987:44).

Indeed, since the late 1980s, there has been an apparent resurgence of conservatism and imperialism in Europe and North America. Many European and American scholars and 'friends' of Africa have since turned their back to Africa. Their writings justify recolonization of the continent to save it from the alleged failures of independence. What they see in Africa are only but painful images of poverty, corruption, drought, incessant civil wars and streams of refugees from war torn areas in search of livelihood elsewhere. In this view, Afro-pessimism is at its highest level of actualization, dramatizing the African crisis and predicament, drumming up bewilderment and a sense of hopelessness among the African masses. With the end of the Cold War, Africa's influence internationally has waned, reducing African leaders and scholars to concentrating on discourses of their marginalization in the global economic order and the process of power distribution (Ogot 1995). In this breath, two currents are delineated in contemporary scholarship of Africa. These are post-colonialism and post-modernism, being concepts borrowed from the West and are increasingly becoming fashionable in African studies.

This paper notes that post-colonialism advocates new modes and forms of the old colonial practices. In Africa, the chief priest of this idea is Ali A. Mazrui who has recycled his views on the so-called decaying parts of Africa and the need for benign colonization in at least three influential publications, two of which are published in the West while the other one in Kenya. These recycled views appear in *International Herald Tribune*, of 4, August 1994; *Sunday Nation* of February 5, 1995 and *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* volume XXIII/1 1995. Mazrui observes the African situation and recommends for recolonization of the continent in a very absurd manner as follows:

Contemporary Africa is in the throes of decay and decomposition. Even the degree of dependent modernization achieved under colonial rule is being reversed. Successive collapse of the state in one African country after another during the 1990s suggests a once unthinkable solution: recolonization. To an increasing number of Africans, this is the bitter message that has emerged from the horrifying events in Rwanda. While Africans have been quite successful in uniting to achieve national freedom, we have utterly failed to unite for economic development and political stability. War, famine and ruin are the postcolonial legacy for too many Africans. As a result, external recolonization under the banner of humanitarianism is entirely conceivable (Mazrui 1995:22).

Mazrui's remarks are an exemplification of academic tourism of an African scholar. It is obvious he is not serving African interests but those of the West. His views corroborate those appearing in *Foreign Affairs* (January/February, 1995) which bemoan Africa's destitution, a topic perceived in Eurocentric perception to be long overdue for in-depth political

discourse. What a coincidence? According to William Pfaff, the writer of an article entitled: 'A New Colonialism — Europe must Go Back into Africa', it is considered opportune time 'for honest and dispassionate discussion of this (destitution) immense human tragedy, for which the Western Countries bear a grave if partial responsibility and which will worsen if not addressed'. After making such contemptuous remarks about Africa he recommends 'a disinterested neocolonialism', saying that 'Africans acknowledge the immensity of their crisis and the need to consider hitherto unaccepted remedies'. How similar is Pfaff's proposal with Ali A. Mazrui's benign recolonization? Indeed, it would seem as if the two worked in cahoot to produce a programme of Africa's crisis before making their absurd recommendations about Africa.

But when did Ali A. Mazrui's academic tourism commence? It did not start yesterday. It is possible it began in the 1960s when he used to write for an apparently Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) funded journal, *Transition*. In fact, Henry Indangasi captures his activities so graphically in the following words:

It was Ali Mazrui, then teaching political science at Makerere University, who gave *Transition* its eclectic and controversial character. A strong supporter of liberal democracy, an opponent of any forms of socialism, African or scientific, a scholar who eschewed scientific methodology for a discussion of symbolic structures in politics, and a writer who would occasionally resort to intellectual and linguistic gymnastics, Mazrui emerged as a thinker who embodied the ideology of *Transition*. In *Transition* No.26, Mazrui wrote an article entitled 'Nkrumah: The Leninist Czar'. This article examined the contradiction in the man, Kwame Nkrumah.... The article went to press just before Nkrumah was overthrown in a *coup d'état* and most people read it after the event... in Africa, the article gave both Mazrui and *Transition* a bad name (Indangasi 1993:6).

What are the implications of post-coloniality for African studies? First, it assumes that human development proceeds from simple to complex forms — a kind of evolutionist approach. Thus, all humanity follow a unilinear course, moving from primitivity to 'modernity'. The 'primitive' people represent the so-called prehistory of Western societies who are an embodiment of the ultimate evolutionary adaptation of human civilizations. In this regard, the achievements of capitalism or liberal bourgeois thought signifies the end of history and there can be no superior humankind's evolutionary process than this. Therefore, the most logical step is to understand the history of Euro-American development and try to follow in its footsteps in order to attain relative technological advancement.

Second, since capitalism is presented as the end point of humanity's ideological evolution, signifying the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are paraded as possessing the

key to the liberation of Africa from the shackles of backwardness (Zeleza 1986; Fukuyama 1989). And we arrive at the threshold of 1960, the year of Africa's independence, as the starting point of all discourses on Africa's crisis, when Europe:

... withdrew hoping her energies had not been wasted, that Africa would steadily continue progressing along the path Europe had carefully charted out for her, until she too became civilized. But those hopes were soon dashed. The 'natives' soon went back to their old 'primitive' ways (Zeleza 1986:187-188).

Thus, Western commentators pronounced Africa's independence as a failed project. Consequently, the World Bank and the IMF assumed the role of spokesmen for the Third World poor and insisted on international aid for those countries. This explains how the World Bank and IMF have interfered in African political economy, introducing the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). The concept of second liberation is seemingly erected on this perception. This paper hopes this is not the kind of recolonization which the post-colonialists are advocating. Indeed, postcolonialism itself consists of repackaged theories of despair on Africa—Afro-pessimism, championing interventionist policies in African affairs. Interventionist policies only make Africa more dependent on the West.

The other school of thought that is becoming faddish in African studies is post-modernism. Postmodernism sees itself as exposing the workings of power in history by showing how rhetorical forms are turned to political ends. It calls for more diffuse approach to power emphasizing the link between power, control over knowledge and discourse. Consequently, it requires one to move away from the dubious authority of received tradition and consult sources not typically well presented in surviving documentation, the most important as well as the most fragile, the human memory (Henige 1995; Parpart 1995), for postmodernist, they will:

... seek to initiate lines of investigation to produce counter-memories that will weaken what they regard as a 'hegemonic' stranglehold on sources. This will, it is argued, lead to alternative pathways to the past that will expose previously unsuspected worlds. In the cant of postmodernism, these counter-memories have been 'suppressed' by unnamed but sinister hegemonic forces, presumably 'the Establishment' (Henige 1995:312).

Rhetorically, therefore, postmodernism has the capacity to persuade and influence historical thought as it suggests that social history should be viewed from below, emphasizing the need to uncover what it perceives as previously silenced voices in the process of historical explanation. It explores the relationship between power, language and knowledge and situates this understanding within its specific locale. In short, its mission is to control knowledge and meaning as the key to understanding and exercising power relations in society in general (Parpart *Op.Cit.*:16).

First, this explains why in the postmodernist conception, all historical thought processes are a production of the dominant ideology of the contemporary times. These are interpreted in terms of power relations. Hence, the scholarly pursuit of truth in the postmodernist postulation lies in the ability of one to demystify grand theories of the past, whether liberal bourgeois thought or marxist explanations. That is why in its discourses there is an inherent:

... irresistible compulsion to be autobiographical and self-referencing, fondness for repeating utterances, particularly confraternity words; an inveterate penchant for bottling old wine in new bottles; and the view that sources can never be authoritative, but can at least be interesting for the idiosyncratic reactions they might stimulate (Henige *Op.cit*).

Second, postmodernists maintain that the truth cannot be known because written texts and other sources on which postmodernism is predicated are interpreted as being 'invented' by the contemporary generation in what is perceived as 'deconstruction'. What follows, therefore, should be 'construction' which is 'decontradiction'. In this sense, the meaning of history is what a particular researcher subjectively provides in his/her own sensibility and disposition. The bottomline in that what we perceive to be an historical event is nothing but a historical source to be deciphered or interpreted by the researcher who comes after us. What it calls for is for the researcher to be inventive, imaginative and creative in a similar manner a critic will confront the work of poetry or prose. Therefore, in this view, postmodernism does not dichotomize fact and fiction, thereby equating history with say, philosophy, literature or even anthropology. Moreover, there is no consensus on issues of social and historical concern nor a single cause of an event.

Because of its eclecticism, postmodernism is gaining currency among the young scholars. And because of its disregard of the past and its acceptance of discontinuity in history, its influence on younger scholars is particularly intoxicating. It is, perhaps, because of its onslaught on history that history may be losing its glitter and hence appeal to upcoming scholars.

Indeed, the most prominent postmodernists to write on Africa are David William Cohen, Elisha Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo and Valentine Y. Mudimbe. For example, Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo in an introduction to their work cited below justify their approach thus:

...We attempt a perspective both removed and intimate: removed so that one can gain control of the sociology and intellectual history of the ethnographic literature itself; Yet intimate so that one can come to terms with the ways in which people — in ordinary, commonplace activities — have produced society and culture not only through social practice but also through the formation of histories and anthropologies (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989:3).

The above writers appear to deny any knowable social or cultural history of the Luo, but opting to invent it instead. This they do by 'connecting disjointed yet revealing fragments of social life'. In their view, they bring together very different sorts of voices which they assert is essential in recognizing the richness and complexity of creating and of explaining culture. The voices are the so-called silenced ones by the privileged discourses.

Another researcher, Valentine Y. Mudimbe has been articulate in popularizing postmodernism. His thesis is that Africa was invented by Europe as a result of colonialism. Europe transformed the African way of life to the extent that those ideas and interpretations of Africa, and generally African culture held by African intellectuals are a result of interaction with Euro-American social sciences (Mudimbe 1988). Consequently, this had led Africans to project themselves in both the Western and African heritages with the former being preponderant. Following this argument, the concepts of race, racism and racialism are but mere myths which Europe has created to justify subjugation but which do not make sense in explaining historical processes. Accordingly, the world is moving towards a cultural heterogeneity or universalism. The idea of universalism is what is most appealing to the new generation of African scholars (Appiah 1993).³

But postmodernism has its critics in Africa who, assert, its problematique does not transcend the liberal Western bourgeois thought of capitalism. And for this reason its propositions remain unclear and confusing. (Amin 1993; Aseka 1995). It is argued that postmodernism does not contribute any fresh insights into paradigm development with the exception of the exercise in the deconstruction of discourse which served some useful purpose. This is because it exposed the metaphysical nature of both post-Enlightenment bourgeois discourse and of its extension in the prevailing schools of socialist thought (Amin 1993:2). Otherwise, according to Samir Amin, it should be dismissed as:

...an intellectual non-starter, in the sense that beyond its hype, it offers no conceptual instruments capable of transcending the capitalist framework; neither does it demonstrate any capacity to inspire an innovative design for social change. In short, the post-modernist critique is less radical than the critique whose seminal ideas were put forward in Marx's work (Amin 1993:2).

Marx's critique of capitalism, at least, offered an innovative design for change in society embedded in dialectical and historical materialism. Even if

3 K. A. Appiah discusses the idea of cultural universalism in relation to African studies. The world is becoming a global village whereby ideas are flowing freely across the continents.

the socialism he proposed was not achieved, the systematic liberatory aspirations of society are discernible in his schema, the historical materialism. On the other hand, postmodernism seems to emphasize western tendencies towards dualist thinking, whereby the nature and primacy of a term depends on the definition of its opposite — the ‘otherness’. That is why the postmodernist methodology favours the western culture in the event, marginalizing Africa (Parpart 1995). Since postmodernism is theoretically bankrupt, it is arguable, it may soon be rendered redundant in African studies (Aseka 1995).

Notwithstanding the fragmentation of national or regional narrative and the evident decomposition of dominant Western metascripts, racism and imperialism have remained a twin compelling factor in African studies. The West has striven to retain its grip on Africa by popularizing its social science. Indeed, it has been correctly observed by two historians that:

Its ultimate objective was to impede alternative approaches by African states for social and economic transformation... intellectual development is an important component of this transformation and that is why the trajectory of growth in African scholarship had as it were to be nipped in the bud. Obsolete theories ... and other metatheoretical constructs have as a consequence found their way in African historiography without Africans themselves braving the challenge to question their validity (Shiroya and Aseka 1990:7).

But African scholars have in the recent years challenged the assumptions of western scholars, and even attempted a counter-penetration of the hitherto considered sacrosanct turf of Western scholarship and its Africanist-dominated educational institutions. The most notable is the crop of Africans who moved to American universities and research institutions to pursue academic careers. These scholars have challenged condescending body of knowledge generated by Africanists over the years. In fact, while working with African — American scholars, African scholars have effectively been able to introduce perspectives which have emphasized African identities and aspirations.

Consequently, there has been a great demand in institutions in America to have African studies taught by people of African descent. However, Africanists have not reacted warmly to this development. Curtin, for instance, laments the situation thus:

Students... often demand that courses be taught by African — Americans or when not many African-American candidates are available, by Africans, with whom students want to feel a common heritage. When these demands are put side by side with laudable efforts by colleges and universities to increase the number of black faculty members, the result is often the ghettoisation of African history (Curtin 1995:51).

Curtin's reaction characterized the battle for control of knowledge in African studies, with Africanists trying to use all means possible to retain the niche they secured in nascent years of African studies in the late 1940s and 1950s. Moreover the demand for African scholars in America has changed with the waning interest in Africa by the north.

Academic tourism has also witnessed the introduction of feminist studies in the study of Africa's political economy. The Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approach purport to explain the backwardness of the so-called Third World Societies. These approaches are, particularly favoured by the World Bank and IMF. They too, do not transcend the capitalist unilinear evolutionist approach to historical explanation. These approaches only but justify the efficacy of postcolonialism and postmodernism as the most viable frameworks for analysis. Compare the nationalist approach and the radical feminists perspectives and the same story of academic tourism is recounted.

Conclusion

At the moment it may not appear quite clear which approach is viable for the explanation of the historical processes in the continent. However, it is imperative that African scholars assess the political and economic immediacy that has necessitated scholarship to African studies. This will include questioning both liberal and marxist assumptions in the fields of culture, politics, the meaning of nationalism, ethnicity and the polarization of global centres of power including gender (Zezeza 1994). By exposing and discussing issues pertaining to these, Africans will be able to chart out a direction for themselves.

Moreover, given that at the moment post-modernism and postcolonialism are in currency and tend to influence political and social relations of individuals and the production of knowledge in general, conversations among African scholars ought to be encouraged to demystify these Western epistemologies and standpoints. This will enable African scholars to contribute significantly to the empowerment of African identities and become less reliant on western models for human progress. This could, certainly, be done by sharing discourses that are open-ended, regardless of the presence of dominant western ideologies, reflecting in the process, on African needs, and realities.

Perhaps, African scholars should begin by assessing achievements of individual societies in politics, technology and economics before European intrusion. This will enable African scholars to discover where Africa went wrong, correct the mistakes with the view of stemming academic tourism and gradually becoming master of their own destiny. How about revisiting Cheikh Anta Diop's thesis on the African origin of civilization and proceeding from where he left? First and foremost Africans need to restore

their dignity and self-esteem. The current experimentation with paradigms invented in the West simply erodes African dignity and renders them more dependent on the West.

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