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Does Pan-Africanism Have a Future in Africa? In Search of the Ideational Basis of Afro-Pessimism

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In Lieu of an Abstract

As we come to the end of the twentieth century Africa remains a deeply contested intellectual and ideological terrain; a continent that is perhaps still as misrepresented and misunderstood as it was at the beginning of the century. Ever since Africa's tragic encounter with Europe in the modern times, each generation's social imagery of Africa, especially in the outside world, but sometimes within Africa as well, has been dominated by powerful metaphors and imaginary (sic) through which Africa is constructed and consumed, its histories and futures confiscated and condemned. To be sure the stereotypes that structure discourses about Africa mutate, but each mutation carries with it past discursive genes, and the prevailing social rhetoric always sets Africa up against the current conceptions of western modernity. In the days of slave trade, African 'paganism' and 'primitivity' condemned millions of Africans to slavery. Later African 'backwardness' and 'laziness' rationalised colonial conquest and exploitation. After independence 'development' became the conduit for neo-colonial interventions. Most recently, 'democratisation' has been added to the ideological repertoire, with the West presenting itself as Prospero to Africa's Caliban. Almost invariably, then, Africa is constructed or reconstructed as a representation of the West's negative image, a discourse that, simultaneously, valorises and affirms Western superiority and absolves it from its existential and epistemological violence against Africa. The arrogant mobilisation and deployment of this discursive power in recent years in Africanists scholarship has widened the rupture between Africans and Africanists (Zeleza, 1997: iii).

Introduction

Let me begin with a disclaimer. This article is not about the historiography of pan-Africanism. However, it is an attempt to animate the intellectual

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basis for understanding the emancipative quest of the African toiling people in the context of the multiple and hydra-headed crises afflicting Africa. At the very outset, pan-Africanism was an ideology that had a solid intellectual basis. That is why at its origin it was very elitist and idealistic as a social movement. Although in practice it is quite difficult to distinguish between the intellectual and political aspects of pan-Africanism. However, this distinction is analytically useful for the kind of enterprise we intend to undertake in this article. The intellectual aspect of pan-Africanism has become subsumed in its political aspect and in the process, care is not taken to sieve the various strands of pan-Africanism.

Today, however, pan- Africanism has come to occupy a statist platform appropriated by African Heads of state (Diagne and Ossebi, 1996: 3). In this way it has become a nebulous and perverted ideology which expresses and is an outcome of failure, a defeated ideology. Pan-Africanism that set out to express the hope and aspiration of Africans and African Diaspora became an ideology of despair and lamentation. In the Diaspora, the ideology was meant to dignify the black people and serve as a political and cultural link to Africa that they sentimentally wanted to be united with. To Myers, "identifying self in this way reflects the idea of holonomy, the being contained in each of the parts, which is so characteristic of nature" (1987: 77). Whereas for Africans (on the African soil), it served as a collective platform for self-definition and an onerous struggle against colonialism. Such a quest did not obviate the fact that there were cultural, social and class differences amongst Africans.

The African Impasse Problematised

My brief in this article is three-fold. First, I want to argue that there are heuristic claims we can make in trying to understand the pan-African idea and consciousness in relation to seeking its relevance in the definition of Africa's current crises and how to transcend them. In seeking this understanding, I want to contend that being a pan-Africanist entails more than a *shared racial identity*. Indeed, the affirmation rather than the denial of such identity is important to transcending its racial undercurrent. Indeed, racial/political identity (commitment and solidarity) is just one of the several qualifications for being a pan-Africanist. After all, racism is hyper-stereotype, a form of bio-psychologisation of people through the mediation of social object (Goldberg, 1987: 59) and power relations. In other words it characterises people on the basis of *specie* ontology and not *social* ontology.

Second, I will contend that there is need to re-tool us, in the Afrocentric sense, to be able to grapple with the multifaceted and hydra-headed crises confronting Africa. Afrocentricity is not and should not be seen as the flip side of Eurocentricity neither is it a nebulous attempt to make a claim of exceptionalism for the continent. Racial oppression finds its first meaning or

touch stone in politics or power relations – as the oppression of historically oppressed people on account of control over political power. Afrocentricity is or should be seen as the recognition of a humanist approach to an investigation of Africa from a sensitive, measured and sober intellectual and political point of view; the issue of social location, context and specific material and cultural differences in material and social production. And this methodological approach is much more than a vocation as it requires commitment and even sacrifice. Afrocentricity does not seek to transcend value-judgement in analysis for the major thrust of the accusation of critics of Eurocentricism is centred on their claim that the latter is a conscious attempt to impose one cultural standpoint as the universal basis for reflecting and understanding the rest of the world. All else is either meaningless or unimportant. Afrocentricity seeks a more sober and humanist disposition to analysis and commentary about Africa. The point here is how has the African reality been interpreted? The first guinea pig of the Afrocentric approach will necessarily be anthropology that, ontologically, is racially constructed and racially pursued as a discipline. It begins with the unilinear definition of culture and values and what standards of living are civilised or uncivilised. There is also Political Science that came to define what makes for a stable polity, what constitutes democracy and so on. The crucial questions for us are; what are the multiple explanations offered about Africa? In what ways do they reflect the objective conditions of the African people and the struggles they are waging to transform this? Here, our attempt is to challenge the Africanists and those discourses that seek to absolutise knowledge–they alone make universalistic and monopolistic claims to scientific knowledge!

Third, I intend to link the claim of pan-Africanism and the Afrocentric perspective to the question of Afro-pessimism. The crucial question here is, how come that Africa that started off with so much hope several millennia past, has now become the pathetic victim of donors and charity organisations. Is the *new humanitarium* in Africa not a new way of continuing the pillage and plunder of Africa? Is Africa really poor in the way the poverty discourse is framed? How come that Africa whose most able-bodied citizens were forcibly taken away in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as slaves, today has able-bodied and skilled manpower that *desperately* wants to emigrate to Europe and America, but this time against the wish of the patrons of those countries? In the process many of those Africans become victims of immigration laws and are consequently subjected to the most bestial and inhuman treatment. Why is it that it is only famine, war, debt, poverty, corruption, AIDS, witchcraft and authoritarianism that are associated with Africa? Indeed, the philosophical thrust of Afro-pessimism is rooted in those latter set of questions. Afro-pessimism is a new ideology that

has a composite population. Its adherents include many of the Africanists, the donor and charity community, international money-lenders, some neo-liberal and post modernist African scholars and above all, some New Left converts to what I elect to call *revisionist liberalism* (A la Anthony Giddens et al). These converts view the crisis in Eastern Europe as marking the *nunc dimitis* of the ideology debate and hence of the triumphalism of western liberalism.

What went wrong and who benefits by this? What are the issues that an Afrocentric perspective must address? What is or had been the character of the intellectual contestation in Africa and what are the gains or significance of the past and how do we bring them to bear in the understanding of our current realities? What, for instance, is the place of the current advocacy for African Renaissance and African Union, in the attempt to grapple with the emancipation of the toiling people of Africa? What are the issues on the front burner of the toiling people of Africa? An article such as this is certainly incapable of answering all those questions. My belief is, however, that it is more useful to pose the right questions than to pose the wrong and diversionary ones. I will, all the same, tentatively answer those questions in a broad and totalising sense.

The crucial point for us is if Africa were that bad, poor and hopeless as it is being portrayed, most of the MNCs and moneylenders could have left it a long time ago. The point is Africa is poor because it is rich and Africa is portrayed as a poor continent so that Africans will continue to be hapless and hopeless about Africa. Put differently, *Afro-pessimism is an invented ideology.* The way Africa is currently portrayed is part of an orchestrated hegemonic ideology nurtured or inspired by the western world and reproduced by local African leaders. Afro-pessimism is therefore not a fair or correct political reflection of the mood of the people of Africa. Pushed to its logical conclusion, coming from the West, Afro-pessimism is a racist ideology that is a mere continuation of the "dark continent" thesis and the view that "nothing good can ever come out of Africa". For the African leaders and ruling classes, it is a portrayal of their callousness, irresponsibility, and their political failure. But in this failure is to be found the institutional and structural bases for Africa's destruction. And this is for two reasons: the west mentored those African leaders and they created the external environment that nurtured their sustenance. Even when the African people found ways to challenge their leaders and transform their political institutions, the West have always found ways of subverting them. It is in this sense that we need to understand the failure of democracy's "Third wave" or the democratisation process in Africa or what has been euphemistically referred to as "political conditionality" for African leaders. This is what makes western solutions suspect. For instance, some of the humanitarian agents in Rwanda will

lose their jobs as soon as there is no longer crisis in that country. Kofi Annan has come out to admit that the genocide in Rwanda could have been averted if the United Nations acted early enough and promptly. Bill Clinton has come out to tender a similar apology. But the crucial question is, was an early warning signal not sent out or not? Did the signals matter? What were those states and forces that asked that the signals be ignored? What is the people's understanding of the Hutu and Tutsi problem?

Today, Rwanda and Burundi have been turned into laboratories for the experimentation of all sorts of absurd and racist projects; from the most sublime to the most ridiculous. Much as we can say this for those institutions, agencies and political leaders we can also say the same for so called humanitarian agencies and Africanists whose survival depends on the existence of the *African tragedy*. No other person than Goran Hyden best captures this. In his Presidential Address to the African Studies Association in 1995, in Orlando, Florida he states thus:

> ...Africanists need to be united. The marginalisation of the continent (Africa) does also impinge upon the Africanist scholarship and makes it increasingly threatened.... After all, the bulk of research on Africa is still being produced on this side of the Atlantic. Certainly, it is our writing that reaches furthest and in that sense helps determine intellectual trends (Hyden, 1996: 4).

Pan Africanism: 'From Do You Remember the Days of Slavery' To 'Do Not Forget Your History'.

The starting point of most discourses on pan-Africanism is its origin in slave trade and how the African Diaspora used it as a political weapon to construct a rallying platform for identity and affinity with Africa. In this way some writers have seen it as a sentimental ideology that only has meaning for ex-slaves. Two points need to be made here. First, Africa was Diaspora's patrimony and the issue of the recognition that slavery and slave trade were wrong and objectionable actually started in Africa and not in the Diaspora. Second, and this is the more important point and at the risk of repetition, pan-Africanism actually started as an intellectual movement. It required ingenuity and rigorous study to disprove that the Europeans were not superior to Africans. It required rigorous investigation of the past to disprove the thesis that Africa had no past before the coming of the White people. Many of the issues and things we take for granted today were never taken for granted in the past and they were not only fought on the political level but on the intellectual level too; the capacity and quality of the African intervention in the interpretation of the current realities in Africa is weak and this is a big challenge to the new African Renaissance movement? Do Africans have an opportunity to interpret their own realities by themselves?

What are the political and structural handicaps to such interpretation and transformation of the African realities? These are the fundamental issues that require to be interrogated because the anti-Semitic strand of so-called neo-liberalism and Rational Choice theory cannot be taken for granted in the name of universalism and globalism.

DuBois has argued that "Africans in the Diaspora tend to look to Africa as one united continent, one unit, mainly because they cannot trace their particular roots" (Bankie, 1995: 1). This raises a fundamental issue about the attitude of the African Diaspora and Africans on the African continent in the definition of who is an African. What is more important – is it the colour of the skin, world outlook or geographical location? What is the status of the creolised Arabs of North Africa and the Asians and coloureds of East and Southern Africa? (Mamdani,1998: 5). It is impossible to make an essentialist and puritanist claim about Africa based on the specie-logic or the pure Black race argument. This is because it remains to be seen whether, for instance, the creolised people were also not the victims of the history and ideology of racism, against which pan-Africanism was a response. Indeed, the recaptives who were in the forefront of the anti-Semitic ideology did not wage their struggles purely on account of being Black. They interfaced race, ideology and (even) class. This is why it was easy for some of them to have allies in the British Left and in Eastern Europe. Indeed, there was no one worldview about what pan-Africanism meant, there were various strands of it. This accommodative and flexible approach should underline our attitude to the notion of Afrocentricity.

Two points need to be stated about the intellectual and political attempts to promote the differences amongst Africans (pathetically, both North Africa and South Africa fell for it.). Some elites from both regions are making a claim of exceptionalism from the rest of (Equatorial) Africa. It should be stated, and with emphasis too, that the claim of exceptionalism by these two regions is meant to escape the epithets and characterisations that accompany the study of equatorial or 'Bantu' Africa. Hence the World Bank Report often talks of Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) and so on, in their studies or social and economic indexation of the region. As Mamdani so eloquently argues, while the White population of South Africa ranks 24th and next to Spain in wealth or per capita income, the Black and Coloured population rank 123rd and next to Congo in poverty (1998: 2). The latter population constitutes over 70% of the total population of South Africa. It is also useful to begin to factor in the poor whites of South Africa into the study of poverty in that country. The question to ask is, what is the ideological motive of the case for exceptionalism? Is it because Arab Africans do not want to relate or be compared with the rest of Africa, in terms of those social and economic indicators? But are these countries really exceptional in the terms in which

they are defined as exceptional? The first point to note here is that all countries in Africa where uniformly victims of colonial rule, except Ethiopia that was never colonized throughout its history. All the colonised countries witnessed oppression based on racism, political domination and economic exploitation. During colonial rule, no colonial power distinguished between the Arabs and the black countries. Afterall, *the first principle and law of colonialism and colonial rule was racial segregation.* Indeed, when the Algerians were fighting their war of independence against French colonialism they saw unity in the cause of all African peoples and hence solicited assistance from other African countries in the spirit of pan Africanism without sensitivity of being black or Arab. It was in that same spirit that Frantz Fanon, a major ideologue of the Algerian National liberation struggle and the FLN, supported the Algerians. In South Africa, the colonial powers decided to remain as settlers and used race as an ideology of privilege against the blacks. Even in this latter regard, South Africa is not an exception because Zimbabwe also compares favourably to it, in terms of the experience of settler-colonialism and racial domination in the society. And the major liberation movements mobilised support against apartheid within the framework of pan-Africanism, no matter how it was defined. Then, the Frontline states were the most strategic allies in this campaign At that time nobody made allusion to boundary which the "Limpopo thesis" has created in the claim of exceptionalism being made for South Africa. Apartheid was the generic state of colonialism in Africa, its manifestation in South Africa exemplifies the legacy of late colonialism. To criminalise apartheid is to make a civilised, universal and humanist claim. In other words, South Africans were fighting the exceptionalism imposed on them by a racist white minority regime: by saying we are not different, we want to behave like and/or to be linked to the rest of humanity and more particularly our liberated African brethrens.

The point is that the claim of exceptionalism is based on the fact that those minority white-dominated enclaves in Africa do not want to be associated with the ideology of Afro-pessimism or its fall-outs. Hence Afro-pessimism can only be the product of black and 'Bantu' Africa! The claim is rooted in the misleading principle that anything done or inspired by Africans can not work (a la Africa Works). It should be stated and with emphasis too that, *if there is any country in Africa that qualifies to make a claim to exceptionalism it is Ethiopia, a country without colonial experience and whose rich history and culture predates Christianity.* Yet, when Africans talk about that culture and civilisation and especially of the Egyptian civilisation which was related to Nubia and which was a black civilisation, Africanists and Western scholarship dismiss them as rumour-mongers and myth-makers (Cf. Lefkowitz and Rogers (eds), 1996). Some Africanists have

engaged in and substituted impressionistic, armchair theorising, crude empiricism and name-calling for scholarship in their attempt to deny the study of Cheikh Anta Diop. Yet, none of them has provided persuasive counter evidence to invalidate Diop's claims. Diop relied on sociological, historical, and archaeological works for his study. He relied on radio-carbon dating, the use of the more scientific and generally acknowledged and much more sophisticated method of inquiry such as ultra violet rays, and oral tradition. What was considered as heresy by the eurocentrists was the provocative argument made by Diop to the effect that Egyptian civilisation to which many Greek philosophers and writers alluded in their writings, was actually a black civilisation and that the Arab occupation of that land is a very recent event. The controversy here is that the Greeks of antiquity that were the direct patrimony of western civilisation, were said to have borrowed and learnt a lot from the Pharaohs of Egypt in such fields as philosophy and mathematics. Writing in 450 BC, Herodotus stated that even the names given to the ancient Gods of Greece came from Egypt. And the history of that famous kingdom dates back to 3400 BC as it came to be institutionalised under the Pharaohs of the "Double crown" (Davidson, 1994: 20). On the Egyptian controversy, it will be useful to quote Diop *in extenso:*

> I related the fact that the Egyptians were Blacks because beyond the manner in which they portrayed themselves in their monuments, beyond what we made of their ethnic group, beyond what we would have wish them to be, if they are removed from their sarcophagus, if the skin of the mummies is scientifically scoured, the epidermis will be pigmented just like that of all other Blacks of Africa.
>   What is presently found in the Sahara only goes to confirm what preceded. The Stone Age activity discovered in the Sahara, and all the other cultural elements found in this region up to 7000 years BC, strictly point to a black world. *It is impossible to date the presence of Indo-European man in the Sahara beyond 1500 years.* I add that presently *there is infallible scientific process* (ultra-violet rays, for instance) for determining the amount of melanin in pigmentation. Now, the difference between a White and Black from this point of view comes from the fact that the organism of the white secretes enzymes which reabsorb the melanin while the black organism does not secrete these enzymes. The same goes for that of the ancient Egyptian. This is the reason why, from prehistory to the Ptolemaic period, the Egyptian mummy has invariably remained black. In other words, during all of Egypt's known history, the skin of all Egyptians of all social classes (from the Pharaoh to the Fellah) has remained that of authentic blacks. The same goes for their bone structure (Diop, 1996: 140–141). (emphasis added)

It is also instructive to take a cursory look at the works of Martin Bernal (1985, 1987) who has received the most virulent attack from Lefkowitz et al. Bernal tries to reconstruct the history and origins of the Greek in the context of two contradictory models, the Aryan and the Ancient. The West

wants to discard the *Ancient model* because it is an account of the "colonialists". The *Aryan model* talks more of the written word and a nuanced method of data collection and analysis – in a word, the scientific approach. Hear Bernal:

> Proponents of the Aryan Model have not however based their claim for superiority on quantity of information. For them what matters is not the amount of information. It is true that Egyptologists can read Egyptian better than most of the Greeks who went to Egypt. They cannot of course read it as Greeks, modern historians cannot experience Ancient Egypt Society or question Ancient Egyptians. Surviving written records from the Levant are negligible in comparison to those we know to have existed 2,000 years ago. It is true that archaeology has enabled us to know more about the material culture of Egypt and Greece–though not Phoenicia–than any one in the past 1,500 years. This, however, does not put us beyond the ancients themselves who lived at the end of a period of extraordinary cultural continuity of 3,000 years (1985: 71).

Proponents of the Aryan model describe this account as incorrect and false. Their argument is that facts and information gathered from that era need to be subjected to a "scientific" test. "For them, just as the railways, steamships and telegraphs transcended all previous means of transport and communication, their scientific and skeptical historical approach or "method" has put them on a categorically higher plane than all their predecessors, especially the "credulous" Greeks" (Ibid). The quarrel over written and oral sources of information/data is one means by which western scholars have tried to deny African knowledge and indigenous ways of knowledge production. However, Abdullahi Smith has so persuasively shown how oral sources of history are so important to both written history and the prehistoric world. He also demonstrated that oral history has its own method, rules and mode of self-verification. Eurocentric scholarship has no patience about studying or discovering this.

The major claim between the Aryan and Ancient models lies in the issue of proof – documentary versus oral. Even some anti-Semitic proponents of written accounts that fall outside the framework of the Ancient model (period) do not want to rely on alternative evidence particularly Semitic evidence. This is why in spite of current evidence about Egyptian and black influence on the life of Greek towns and cities, and above all, epistemology, very little of this is accepted by many western scholars. At best, some of them advise that we should forget about the past and think about the future. But we are talking about a *millinerian past* in which Africans were described as inglorious and sub-human. It is not easy to forget such a past – it needs to be interrogated, reconstructed and re-interpreted. Herodotus is associated with the school of thought which challenges this gross denial, for that reason he was described as a liar by some Greek philosophers including

Plutarch in the Second century A.D. (Bernal, 1987: 100). The point is that anti-Semitists do not want anything that will associate Greeks with a culture of borrowing from others, particularly from Egyptians and the Phoenicians–specific form of borrowing which in their view makes the Greek culturally inferior to those people. This new thinking is a product of a late history that was constructed about Africa particularly from 500 A.D. That history is highly embedded in the politics of colonialism which in turn was instrumental in the underdevelopment of Africa. This is the major source of the Aryan account, beginning from about 500 A.D. The history of the Ancient Model which lasted from about 500 B.C to 500 A.D is better reflected or captured in Egyptian and Phoenician sources. There is little in western sources to rely on for that era. Many western scholars however dismiss the Aryan model because it contradicts many of their claims suggestive of racism.

Diop's work is caught in this controversy and contradiction. Africanists *ahistorically* used the current underdeveloped status of Africa to deny Africa's past and teleologically deny its future; and as such dismissed Diop's investigations and path-breaking study as a delusion, propagandist and a tissue of lies. The claim that Africa has no written history before the coming of the white people covers up a lot. It was indeed proven that Africa had written history that was first fossilised and later destroyed with Bantu civilisation. In any case, having written evidence is not a proof of correctness or authentic knowledge, as there are many views on any issue so there are many written materials. It is not all written records that are factual and correct. Furthermore, there is a wide gulf between evidence and proof. The point here is that the dismissal of oral tradition and the obsession with *written records* do not say much in the discussion of centuries of human history and civilisation. At any rate there is evidence of the existence of the Kemetic library at Amarna in 1300 BC and the Royal library in Alexandria in 3 BC (Bethel, 1993: 7). What materials did they contain and how many western scholars bothered to acknowledge the evidence as authentic? Many Africans scholars have not taken up the challenge to uncover African history. The few who have attempted this have been victims of Africanist intimidation. The basic reason is that the west never wants Africa to make allusion to any glorious past. Hence they denied the existence of such a past. Second, *while the west link their civilisation to Greece, there is ample evidence to suggest that Greek civilisation borrowed from Africa, in particular, Egyptian civilisation which at the time in question was occupied by blacks and not Arabs.* Western scholars find it difficult to accept what is contained even in the Bible about Africa. They tried to deny the existence of a black African civilisation so that they can defend their claim of racial superiority. Yet they cannot find any historical claim for that other than by examining Africa's cur-

rent history *camera obscura* and by beginning that examination of African history from where they came in contact with Africa and what happened in their interaction with Africa, as perceived from their own selfish point of view or enlightened self-interest. They did not study Africa from the point of view of where Africa truly was or what Africans knew of themselves. To illustrate my point, a few examples will suffice. For instance, there lived King Taharqa of Nubia (710–664 BC) who fought and defeated the Assyrians in defence of Israel. This King ruled in Nubia at the age of 16 years and his reign lasted for 25 years over an empire that spanned south of the Mediterranean sea through the Sudan covering over 1,500 miles. This King is mentioned in the Old Testament at Isaiah 37:9 and 2 Kings 19:9. Will the Africanists also claim that the Bible is wrong?

How come that there are black Jews? What is the origin of the *Falashas*? What is the history of Queen Sheba and what was her relationship with the Biblical Solomon?

In all books on post-Newtonian science that exist, virtually all those mentioned as scientists that made discoveries are Europeans. Nowhere is Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) or Jan Ernest Matzeliger (1852–1889) mentioned. German philosophy is widely acknowledged to be a major influence on modern western philosophy. Yet when works are written on German philosophy nothing is said about the Ghanaian philosopher, Williams Amo, who was a Professor in a German University and whose views were well respected by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant.

These are the kind of issues that make an Afrocentric discourse all the more important and necessary. All this makes a reconstruction of Africa's historiography an inevitability.

The crucial point is to accept that the Arabs and South Africans and such other people of Asian origin are Africans; while noting that a claim to "oneness is not sameness" (Mamdani, 1998: 9). There is another significant sense in which it will be wrong to make a case of exceptionalism for the Arabs of North Africa and the South Africans. The Arabs have interacted and indeed have been on the continent of Africa for several centuries.

Accounts by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqqadimah which was an attempt at a social theory of understanding of how societies exist;* Abi Yaqub composed a chronicle or *Tarikh* in 871 AD and his report covered such countries as Kanem-Bornu in present day Nigeria. These were all intellectual attempts to engage North and West Africa. There is also Al-Bakri who wrote on Ghana in 1067 AD. By the seventeenth-century there existed the detailed chronicles of Timbuktu written by Mahmud Kati in his *Tarikh al Fattash* and Abd al-Rahman al-Sadi through his *Tarikh al-Sudan* (Davidson, 1994: 31). The latter scholars wrote in Arabic which had become the main medium of study at the Sankore University in Timbuktu. This university is

600 years older than the University of Oxford and *Ulamahs* from the East came to teach in that university. Some of them also came from the Azhar University in Egypt, a university that is 800 years older than University of Oxford. Again, Africanists may dismiss Davidson as a rumour-monger. Yet, he remains one of the very few Europeans who have taken the study of Africa seriously and diligently and with the commitment it requires, debarred of racial prejudice.. The same Africanist scholars easily forget that civilisations rise and fall. Hence it is possible to talk of the Greek civilisation, Roman civilisation and the Ottoman empire which are now all part of history. It is also possible to talk of the rise and fall of an African civilisation. What is important is proof. And for Africa such a proof is partly oral, written and fossilised in the earth. History can neither be studied nor appreciated by using the stereotype and binary of 'traditional versus modern'. There is a methodological and epistemological concern that arises from all this, namely the need to study Africa as an integrated whole and from a trans-disciplinary approach. This has implications for the politics of African unity and pan-Africanism. How is it that Europe that was so fragmented and divided consistently for over 600 years and fought a 30 years war which culminated in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1638, is now integrated under the European Union (EU)?

The question of what pan Africanism actually meant produced deep disagreement between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. For instance, DuBois saw the African Diaspora in the context of working people who were part of the major plank of the development of American capitalism although he was reluctant to socially differentiate the black community. He advocated the unity of all oppressed people and argued for the organic unity of their cause. "...so long as black labourers are slaves, white labourers cannot be free" (Aptheker, 1987: 114). This was where he disagreed with Washington who saw the role of the blacks as that of merely getting trained for vocational jobs; and also with George Padmore who saw communism as dogmatic and dividing, and thus posed the alternative as "pan Africanism or communism". DuBios viewed this latter call as a no-option because he believed in pan Africanism with communism. Hence his view that democracy should be at the heart of the pan African clarion call. To him, more democracy will strengthen the pan African movement (DuBois, 1980). Garvey, on the other hand, saw no future for the African Diaspora in Babylon hence the movement back to Africa. According to Campbell,

> Garveyism was the profound response of the masses to racism, war, lynching, and the imperialist partition of Africa, colonialism and the economic consequences of white supremacy....The Garvey message was "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad" (1993: 31).

Garvey's pan-Africanism had the most profound and electrifying impact on Kwame Nkrumah. According to Nkrumah, Garvey's ideas "fired" his political enthusiasm.

As we hinted at the outset, it is analytically useful to separate pan Africanism as an intellectual concept from pan Africanism as a social movement. In this way it is possible to study and critique the main ideas and guiding forces behind pan Africanism. Diaspora Africa realised that their struggle required to be given well-articulated and defined meaning for it to be coherent and enduring. It is not an accident that DuBois who more or less became the doyen of the movement in America was the first African to obtain a doctorate degree from Harvard University in 1895. The title of his thesis is "The suppression of the African Slave trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870". It was the first systematic and scientific study of Afro-American history and the conspiracy of the U.S. government during the era of slave trade.

There was also the case of Henry Sylvester Williams (1869–1911). He convened the pan African conference in 1900. He was a Trinidadian who studied at University of Dalhousie and King's College, University of London. He obtained a degree in Law. He later went to the Cape Colony in South Africa where, along with Mahatma Gandhi, became the first non- whites that were allowed to practice law in South Africa. Their right to practice was granted only after a failed contestation and litigation by the Cape Law Society. Williams left the Cape and returned to London in 1905 (Bankie, 1995: 21). He was convinced about, and preached the breaking of racial barriers by black people.

The role of the 'recaptives' is very useful in the understanding of the intellectual basis of pan Africanism on the soil of Africa. Dr. J.A.B. Horton was the first West African on the soil of Africa who first systematically challenged the idea that Africans were inferior to the Europeans. In 1868, he published a book titled, *A vindication of the African Race.* He used anthropological arguments and his background as a Surgeon, to debunk racist biases against Africans. By the 1870s, Dr. E.W. Blyden made use of historical accounts to show the human dignity of the African and he was the first person to use the concept of *"African Personality".* He began to canvass vigorously for Africa's independence.

By 1896, Casley Hayford wrote several books including biographies of prominent African persons. His most famous book is titled *Ethiopia Unbound.* In that book, he urged Africans to appreciate their values and intrinsic worth. He particularly urged for unity between the Ashanti and the rest of the Gold Coast people. Some of his ideas influenced the formation of the Aborigine Rights Protection Society (ARPS). Hayford forged on by asking for the formation of a pan African movement in the West African sub-region. This culminated in the formation of the National Congress of British West Africa

(NCBWA). By 1906, Mensah Sarbah started to campaign against the use of such terms as "natives" in describing Africans. He saw the term as derogatory and objectionable. About that time too, Kobina Sekyi, one of the earliest Africans from the Gold Coast to attend the University of London, began to campaign against colonialism and for a return to pre-colonial mode of political system and education. He was on the executive of both the ARPS and NCBWA.

By 1898, the A.M.E Zion Church was founded in the Gold Coast and it had Trans- Atlantic contacts with the Diaspora brethrens. It exploited opportunities for further education for blacks. Here, Lincoln University and (then much later) Howard University, became the traditional universities for blacks.

Majola Agbebi and Herbert Macaulay were among the second generation pan Africanists with strong intellectual inclination. Two points need to be stressed here. First, the condition of colonialism in Africa and racial oppression in the Diaspora were automatically given the same connotation and contextualisation by the pan-Africanists. It was therefore impossible to oppose those oppression and prejudices without being pan Africanist. The second point to note is that the articulation of the pan African ideas normally translated into the formation of movements that were to be the harbingers or carriers of the banner of the struggle for the realisation of such ideas. It is in this context that the various pan African meetings and congresses held between 1900 and 1945 should be viewed.

During the pan African conference held in Manchester in 1945, there was a large African presence or representation. The future leaders of Africa began to adopt the language of pan Africanism to express or interpret the conditions and aspirations of their people, in their respective countries. And as each of those leaders went back to their respective colonial homes they began to filter and domesticate those ideas into the struggles of their peoples. For Senghor it was *Negritude*, for Kenyatta it was *Harambee*, for Nkrumah it was *Consciencism*, for Nyerere *Ujamaa*, for Kaunda it was *Humanism*. These ideas were an admixture of cultural and political types. There was no one view of what pan Africanism was or should be. However there was a consensus about the need to end colonialism, racial oppression and to make "life more abundant" for the Africans. Those ideas became part of state ideology after independence. Popular forces and resistance movements were defeated or subordinated and incorporated into the working politics of state ideology. This created fundamental problems. Statist pan-Africanism which took over after independence in Africa was not an ideology of progress or mobilisation of the people but an ideology of conservatism, co-optation, disempowerment and repression. On the intellectual plane, it was an ideology of cultural revivalism.

Pan-Africanism was conceived as a movement for political change with deep emphasis on the identity and oneness of Africa. Henry S. Williams was

the convenor of the first pan African conference in London in July 1900. The general issues discussed were the strategy for the struggle against racism, rights for the black Diaspora and freedom for the African colonies. The first pan African meeting however held in February 1919 in Paris at the instance of DuBois who was its leading force. The core issues discussed there were slavery, dignity for the black working class and Africans' rights to participate in government.

The second pan African congress held simultaneously in London, Paris and Brussels. Its approach was more all-encompassing and radical. It adopted the "London Manifesto" perhaps following the pedigree of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels. The emphasis of that manifesto was on the rights of the Negro people. The third pan African Congress took place in London, in November and December 1923. The emphasis of the resolutions of the meeting was on land rights, and control over produce and the right of political representation of the black people. The fourth congress held in New York in August 1927. Its resolutions reinforced those taken at the previous (Third) congress and this time there was a slight inclination towards the USSR. This was partly due to the influence of DuBois. The fifth congress was the most famous. It took place at Charlton Hall, Manchester in October 1945. At its core were George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah. Nationalists from various parts of the African continent (most of whom were also students in Europe) attended that congress (Esedebe, 1980: 161–180). So did trade unions and other mass organisations. They took far-reaching decisions including strategy on how to confront colonialism. The impact and effect of the Second World War and the Atlantic Charter greatly influenced their clamour for rights and freedom. In 1958 Nkrumah called the first pan African meeting on the soil of the Africa continent, in Accra. It was called "All African Peoples Conference". DuBois, in a note to Nkrumah, said that for the first time pan Africanism has come to Africa where it truly belonged. DuBois himself could not attend the meeting. His wife represented him at the conference. Way back in the United States, the Government was already questioning the right of DuBois to an American passport. This was in light of a law that banned all communists from being issued or allowed to carry an American passport. DuBois later went to settle in Accra to work for independent Ghana, his American passport was not renewed on the ground that he was a communist and there was a law in America that banned the issuance of American passports to communists! He died and was buried in Ghana, so also was his wife (his first wife died and he re-married) who was cremated.

The sixth pan African Congress held in June 1974 in Dar-es-Salaam with 52 delegates in attendance mainly from the African Diaspora. Walter Rodney who was then at the University of Dar-es-Salaam was central to its organisation. He could not attend the conference due to ill health. His

speech had to be read on his behalf. An earlier attempt by people such as Boutros Ghali to convene the Congress failed. The issues addressed at the Dar-es-Salaam meeting included, class struggle, neocolonialism, imperialism and underdevelopment. However the machinery to confront all those problems was not put in place (Abdul-Raheem, 1996: 8).

The seventh congress held in Uganda in 1993 amidst two contending perspectives: whether pan Africanism should be encouraged from above or from below, whether African leaders still have relevance or stake in the pan African discourse/project, given their relationship with imperialism and the donor clubs.

According to Campbell, there are three major tasks that should guide, and that indeed informed the meeting at Uganda, thus:

> The first task is to make an impact on the people in the process of transforming the nationalist consciousness of the twentieth century. Second, we must make a decisive impact on world opinion with respect to Africans at home and abroad. And third, we want to be able to realize the spirit of dignity for the renewal of the human spirit. Western European narrative of modern and postmodern variants devalued the spirit of dignity... (Campbell, 1996: 225).

The other issues that Campbell raises relate to youth, women and religion. He concludes:

> pan African liberation is not only linked to the quest for a new social system, but also one in which the development of productive forces is not simply linked to the production of goods but also to the creation of new human beings. This perspective of the transformation of gender relations, free men, free women and children, of cultural freedom, of harnessing the positive knowledge of the African past now forms part of the conception of the struggle for pan African liberation in the twenty-first century (Ibid: 227)

There are two points to be made here. First, Afrocentricity was always the intellectual thrust of the pan African struggles of old. However, this mode of knowledge and consciousness is to a large degree, and in spite of the fact of the variants of it, not racist; although the racial question is a cardinal issue on its agenda. The second point to be made is that Afrocentricity, which derived from pan African struggle and indeed complemented it, is an ideology of hope and not despair, of inspiration and not lamentation. Part of the reason for this is because pan Africanism was an ideology of struggle and Afrocentricity in this sense helped to delimit and shaped the contours of that struggle. Afro-pessimism did not have a place in that equation.

Afrocentricity Since the Second World War

Two things happened after the Second world war. The first is that the anthropological, sociological and historical construction of black people as a backward race had gained ground and was already institutionalised in syllabi

of schools. The ideology of fascism or more particularly Nazism, reinforced this. But the rethink on Africa was given consideration as Africa came on the verge of decolonisation; and the shift of attention was to how the ex-colonies will 'modernise'. Along with this there was interest in *Area Studies*, in terms of what constitute the peculiar problems of backward societies in the post independence period, typically defined as ethnicity. This was how the Africanist school emerged from about 1960. The point is that the prejudices of old were not discarded, instead, they were reinforced by many of the Africanists. It will not be fair to homogenise the Africanists especially their non-African component.

As Zeleza surmises, "By Africanist I mean the entire intellectual enterprise of producing knowledge based on the western epistemological order in which both educated Africans and non-Africans are engaged" (1997:v). Some of the Africanists are sympathetic to a more sober and honest academic study of Africa, while some are arrogant and bask in their over-bloated prejudices against Africa and Afrocentric (not necessarily African) intellectuals.

The dominant Africanist perspective is devoid of commitment to Africa. It is informed or directed by availability of research grants, by the brief of home Governments and donor-Foundations and climate (e.g. winter, tourism and so on). Many Africanists work from the answer to the problem and not from the problem to the answer. They view Africa as a zoo containing animals and they experiment on Africa in the true tradition of *vivisectonomy*. They collect their data in haste and over a few days or weeks. They seldom update the data, which they recycle through decades. They prey on the systematic deterioration of the living standards of their African academic counterparts and whom they often (ab)use, in the conduct of fieldwork. They often employ senior African scholars as field assistants and data gatherers, with utter disrespect for their status or rank in the Academy. Such African "compliant collaborators" (Mkandawire, 1997) are offered token sum and space in books or journals edited by these Africanists, who also serve as gatekeepers (referees, peer reviewers and so on). In collaborative work, the African compliant collaborators are offered junior status no matter their academic rank, at home or abroad. When given posts in universities in the west, they are dumped in African studies, generically so composed, and they are seen as constituting a "ghetto" in western academy. Most Africanist studies obscure rather than illuminate, distort rather than uncover, do analysis-by-analogy rather than by concrete investigation of the peculiar or specific conditions of the various systems, cultures and peoples of the African continent. Africa is viewed as a country and not a continent and its people are not conferred with the status of agency. I am not generalizing this assertion. But the dominant and most vocal tendency in Africanist

scholarship is certainly guilty of this. This partly explains why Africa falls within the ambit of "Area studies".

Seen in this context, the Afrocentric discourse has two objectives. First is to continue with the same pan African intellectual orientation of the activist-past and second, to transcend Africanists distortions by inspiring and sustaining hope and confidence in the African people; in re-telling and reconstructing their history based on endogenous and indigenous modes of understanding and tools in the reconstruction of African historiography.

Quite naturally therefore the doyen of modern or post-Second World War Afrocentricity is Cheikh Anta Diop. Famous for his "cradle" theory, he argues that worldviews should develop their own theories and epistemology, as they are consistent with their cultures. In other words, that there is need to find a cultural basis for all claims to knowledge (Henderson, 1995:83). Although there are several limitations to his work, however, Diop provided a framework of a new discourse that holds out its own and that knocked off the moral and epistemological basis of Africanist scholarship. There are two major schools of thought in this new epistemological quest. These are the Temple and Howard schools of thought (Gocking, 1993:42-43). They are the most renowned for their adherence and commitment to the Afrocentric worldview as a distinct subject of thought. According to Gocking, "Afrocentricity is fundamentally pan African in its inspiration" (1992:3). Whilst to Mazrui, Afrocentricity entails constructing methods of inquiry that investigate Africa and it tries to understand the role and place of Africa in world history, by noting and saying, "That's an African event" (1993: 8). He distinguishes between "Gloriana Afrocentricity" i.e. those who romanticise or glorify the African past, and "Proletariana Afrocentricity": i.e. those who put the people (constructed as the proletariat) as the motive force of history.

To Asante, the African psychology will be derailed without Afrocentricity–it is the definition of the entire life and being of the African. To him, "Afrocentricity is the belief in the centrality of the Africans in post modern history. It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif and our ethos exemplifying our collective will…." (1988:6). The major characteristics of this worldview are six; skin recognition as black, personality awareness, commitment to black culture, conscious waging of struggle with mind and body for liberation and environmental recognition of the abuses of blacks. We caution that being black is not a qualification for being Afrocentric. The ideology and consciousness of the African people and a humanist disposition to the oppressed blacks on account of the quest for a more just world order is even more persuasive qualification.

To Myers, the objective of Afrocentricity is not to capture the spirit of the ancient world but to try and live with its inward coherence so that our outward materiality will "take shape" (1987:78) Afrocentricity means under-

standing the old world of Africa in a new sense (Myers, 1988; Oyebade, 1990). To Prah,

> Afrocentricism is not and should not be gross myth making dressed up as knowledge. What constitutes an Afrocentric approach is the situation or location of Africa and the African society at the centre of the way Africans view themselves and the rest beyond their social and cultural words. It is not facts (which have universal validity) which need to be reworked, it is rather the relationship between facts which need Afrocentric attention (1998:29).

On his part, Karenga contends that "...Afrocentricity is essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interests of African people.... It is supportive of the just claims African people have and shared in common with other humans in terms of freedom from want, toil, and domination, and freedom to realize one's self in one's human fullness..." (Karenga, 1988: 404).

As may be discerned from the foregoing there are as many interpretations and definitions of Afrocentricity, as there are Afrocentric intellectuals. But what seems to undergird all that they have in common is the production of indigenous knowledge, reinterpretation and understanding of Africa from a perspective that informs the African being and above all waging struggles in the context of a shaped Afrocentric perspective. There is the curious question whether the method of inquiry of Afrocentric scholarship should conform to western standard. It does not have to be, because this will neither obviate their scientific status nor will it vitiate their reliability (Methinhoue, 1997: 44–49). Anybody can be an Afrocentric scholar so long he or she is committed to Africa and treats Africans as human beings by sharing in their hopes, aspirations, anxieties and tribulations. Those who claim to be Afrocentric scholars today have not been in the most critical intellectual and political tradition. Asante, Mazrui and so on, do not belong in the same school as Issa Shivji, Archie Mafeje, Nzongola-Ntalaja and Wamba dia Wamba.

The Afrocentric discourse in post colonial Africa has resulted in the intellectual and political contestation over neo-colonial knowledge and activities in Africa: the ideology of developmentalism, non-alignment and imperialism. These were not just empty sloganeering as they formed part of the concrete attempts to deal with the realities of Afrocentricity in a new context. This is why it becomes impossible to dismiss the Dar es Salaam, Kenya and Zaria debates (Tandon, 1982; Beckman, 1983; Sil, 1993, Cowen and MacWilliam, 1996). At the heart of those debates was the question of the role of the toiling people in liberation. Why is the social condition of the people deplorable? Who is responsible and what is to be done? Those debates addressed the specific and concrete ways in which the people reproduced their lives and sought to explain how they interpreted their realities; and how they are mobilising themselves to resolve the contradictions that

define their daily existence. The ideology of that era was the ideology of hope and not of despair. This was so because in spite of the limitations of the ideology of developmentalism, it had at its core the social responsibility of the state to citizens. But the essence of adjustment reforms is non-interventionism, which implies the state's abdication of its social responsibility to citizens, hence the freeing of more wealth to the ruling class or taxing the poor and subsidizing the rich. The ideological shift by African leaders is succinctly captured in a Swahili metaphor, "The leaders of Africa have ate the fruits of independence, now they are eating independence itself".

Sklar is partly correct when he avers that:

> The idea of Afrocentricity and its methodological corollaries have been misunderstood and trivialized by polemicists, who have either endorsed or disparaged highly debatable arguments for the...African origins of various other civilizations.... Essentially, methodological Afrocentricity ordains that those who interpret Africa should acquire a sympathetic understanding of African thought and values (1993: 99).

Although some of the assertions of Sklar about Afrocentric scholars are contestable, they, however, draw attention to the need for caution in homogenising or taking an absolutist position about those who are either accepted as Afrocentric or rejected as Africanists. Certainly as Sklar asserts, race and culture should not be the qualification but commitment to the African and humanist cause. In this regard, for instance, Thomas Hodgkins, Basil Davidson and Bjorn Beckman, are the better examples to cite as being qualified to be tagged Afrocentric scholars although they are non-Africans. Their qualification stem from their methodology and commitment to Africa. They view Africa not as a zoo or garden but as being inhabited by human beings.

The final point to be made about this claim relates to the African contribution to the generation of knowledge about themselves as Africans. Ideas or knowledge production is a social and collective enterprise. It is first culturised or is rooted in a specific cultural milieu before it can be universalised. The cultural context of Afrocentricity cannot deny its universalism. Indeed, a culturised-universalism is far more scientific than a universalised-culturalism. This is the major argument against Eurocentric scholarship which refuses to accept the European and cultural contexts of such scholarship and which urges the rest of the world to uncritically behave and imitate the west! In doing so, as a matter of course, they should abandon their own cultural context in order to do things the western way.

The Transition into Afro-Pessimism: the Price of life Versus the Value of Death

The introduction of adjustment reforms in the early 1980s, the wars, famine and hunger that besieged Africa, the mounting economic and par-

ticularly the debt crisis and above all the end of the cold war marked another era in Africa's quagmire. It saw the arrogant celebration of neo-liberalism as heralded by the works of Fukuyama (1989) and Huntington (1993). Rational choice theorists and post modernists reinforce this. All this took place in the context of the current political and economic malaise in Africa and the deepening crisis of, particularly, the educational sector in Africa. This has created a new social configuration and re-alignment of social forces. All explanations of the African milieu provided by many Africanists have failed, if anything, they have complexified an understanding of the crises in Africa. The new cliché is, Africa is a hopeless continent whose problems defy solution or cannot be solved except by some providential or fatalistic means. Afro-pessimism is a product of the failure of western models to explain the political, social and economic character of Africa. This is because many of them never understood the real meaning of Africa. Afro-pessimism also marks "the end of history" for some Africanists, many African governments and their mentors in the North. Rather than accept their failure, however, these Afro-pessimists turned to the toiling people of Africa, who have been victims and guinea pigs all these years, by placing the blame on them. The Africanists and the donor community sparingly chastised the African leaders. They often abused them as "corrupt", "authoritarian", "hedonistic", "patrimonial", "prebendal" or "criminalised". Little wonder that the state in Africa has also acquired such descriptive epithets. All of these concepts do not *explain* anything about the character of the social and political systems of Africa. Worst, they do not pose any threat to African leaders.

According to Molobi, "...Afro-pessimism is interpreted differently by different people. For the regimes in power, it justifies the selective economic austerity which is imposed on them and which they put into practice. For the opposition, it justifies their struggle for power..." (1991: 534)

Thabo Mbeki's "African Renaissance" has offered the specific political response to the challenge of Afro-pessimism. However, a cursory look at the thrust of that neologism shows that it is a mere cliché with only economic component and not social and political parts (Meek, 1998 and 1998b). The economic arguments made do not take us too far; they are not different from the market-driven economic logic. Mamdani (1998) has responded to the ideology of Renaissance, particularly with an eye on the case of South Africa. For him, there is no intellectual component to that new cliché. But what is clear is that Renaissance, as such, is not new in pan African and Afrocentric discourses. However, its usage in the past had been original, mobilisational and people-focused (Azikiwe, 1975:161–169). The current call for Renaissance is essentially, though not exclusively, economic and market focused. Although the current renaissance was meant to address the

renewed crises on the continent, however, it is too deeply obsessed with the theology of the market or market *fundamentalism.*

A leading Afro-pessimist, Ali Mazrui, in total resignation and despair, proposed that small African countries needed to be re-colonised by the big ones such as Nigeria and Kenya (1994). His views understandably raised serious objections (Mafeje, 1995; Adejumobi, 1995).

Ahluwalia best captures the meaning of Afro-pessimism. He states thus:

The ascendancy of Afro-pessimism... has a tendency to homogenize the 'African Tragedy', concluding that Africa has neither the political will nor the capacity to deal with its problems. The African condition, it is claimed, is largely of Africa's making and therefore there is little or no hope for improvement. Afro-pessimism resonates in metropolitan centers where both former colonial powers and the United Sates, in the aftermath of the Cold War, are seeking ways to disengage themselves from Africa. This is a convenient way for the West to wash its hands of a problem largely of its own making.

This does not mean that Africans and in particular their leadership can be absolved of the responsibility for the crises (2000: 30).

An emancipative pan-African discourse must begin to focus on how the people produce and reproduce their lives, gender roles, the issue of child and youth rights, the urban poor and an inclusive political system. There are threats to the right to education of the youth, the incomes and livelihood opportunities of the working people, the reproductive health of women. It must address issues of marginality, victimhood, social and political exclusion and equity. Such a discourse must pose the following questions: what kind of education do Africans need? How does their past reflect on their future? What is the implication of state commodification of social policy and individuation of social relations? What does democracy mean to the toiling people and how can they be agents (catalysts) in shaping their own destinies? What is the nature and character of the household economy? How do they sustain livelihood? What does information technology mean to the toiling people?

In a sentence, how can we construct a new mode of politics through emancipative discourse for the people? To get on the tract of Afrocentric discourse, there is need to begin to interpret the realities of the African toiling people from the way they materialise, understand and appreciate their realities: their hopes, aspirations and anxieties. An Afrocentric discourse must pose the issue of gender relations in Africa (Imam, Mama and Sow, 1997). It must interrogate issues of citizenship and migration in Africa; it must also discuss the issues of basic social and economic rights and political empowerment.

The fundamental intellectual dilemma in Africa is that it is too often assumed that the toiling people are "ignorant" and "backward" and as such are not perceptive- they are not a thinking mind, they do not have a mind

of scientific curiousity. Hence they can not input into policy or state pro-
grammes or indeed determine what policy they want. This is clearly wrong.
The peasant may not know where the office of the IMF is situated; he or she
will however perceptively analyse the implication of devaluation on his/ her
children or produce; its consequential effect on prizes of fertilizers, pesti-
cides and insecticides. The peasants understand the politics of land or the
land question from Tanzania to Zimbabwe and South Africa; and they
appreciate the contestation for social and economic space which they have
to go through with Agri-business. On a generic note, in spite of all the
name-calling the peasants provide food for most of the people of Africa. The
Agri-business supplement what the peasants supply. This is so despite the
colossal sums of money spent by African states in the various World Bank-
financed agricultural projects.

Conclusion

If anything, it is African leaders, palace intellectuals and their mentors that
have failed the African toiling people. These latter people have not failed
themselves. The leaders fail to make sacrifices while calling on the people
to do so. The toiling people subsidise the extravagance of the ruling class.
There can be no meaningful African Renaissance where the children of the
poor cannot have access to knowledge because it has been priced out of
their reach; where every day the poor are impoverished and humiliated;
where the poor continue to subsidise the state and its retinue of hangers-
on. Afrocentricists will need to have confidence in the people and explain
and interpret their realities. What is the rationality in having a situation
whereby through *human decision* over 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu
where killed in Rwanda in 1994, and massacres went on in Somalia,
Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Liberia and so on. Above all, Afrocentric
intellectuals are expected to combine scholarship with activism, this is a
challenge for both diasporic and African-based Afrocentrists. They must
struggle with the working people. This was the original position of the
doyens of pan-Africanism; it is a position whose truism is *transhistorical.*

   Africa is now in the twenty-first century as a *beggared neighbour.* This
was not what the toiling people sought. Theirs can not be the *original sin.*
Although they are represented in various UN reports on Human
Development Index (HDI) as scoring low, and in spite of the recklessness
and insensitivity of African leaders, they still have hope in themselves and
the future of their children. This is a new century, unlike DuBois claim over
the last century that the "color bar" will be a critical element, this century
is going to be challenged by the clamour and struggle of humanity against
oppression by the network of international economic forces who combine
technological, military and information might to rule the world. This is

already taking place by the attack on the Brettonwoods institutions even by the youth of the North. It happened in Quebec, Guttenberg and Seattle. These uprisings are urging for reforms, for a better and humanist world than what was conceived in the New International Economic Order (NIEO). But these reforms cannot come about until there is a new social outlook, social movement and a "new mode of politics".

According to Wamba-dia-Wamba,

In Africa, we must move away from the unpatriotic 'territorial nationalism' of compradore modernizers, a process of 'nation-building-from-above', rooted in colonial legacy and insisting on political unanimity (national unity). This process has blocked people's creativity and mass enthusiasm and complicated the treatment of differences among the people by the people themselves. We must move away from developmentalism which is based on a mere transfer of economic, cultural, political and social models arrived at through an outside controlled process of decision-making. We must de-construct the colonial legacy and the fixity of traditions (traditions invented or imagined by colonials and claimed to be African and adopted by Africans); these 'traditions' are used to justify, embellish and make bearable, the post-colonial state which we have to de-imperialize. Thus, we must move away from the process of 'de-indigenizations' of 'traditional society' and 'indigenization' of the colonial state. Our economies have continued to be 'denationalized' i.e. privatized by international capital, keeping them away from the possible control by the people through their 'democratic state' yet to be constructed. We must have control over our integration into the world economy. We must democratize the knowledge process now completely dominated by the outside. Without a new historical mode of politics, a new vision of politics, which would de-marginalize the large masses of people (women, youth, workers, poor peasants, people without-identity, the invisible majority), de-freezing their creativity and allowing them to move themselves to the center stage of history-making in our countries, we cannot succeed (1994:257–8).

At the risk of repetition, Afro-pessimism is not a feeling shared by the African toiling people. However to emancipate those people, to get them started and involved in politics will require a new form of *social organisation* of politics and power. Again we fall back on Wamba-dia-Wamba:

Our starting point must be: in Africa..., *people think* and this is the sole material basis of politics. We must investigate the internal content of what they actually think. It is through an analysis of these forms of consciousness that we will grasp the forms of political consciousness characterizing the antagonism with the existing overall socio-political order (Ibid: 259).

The African Union project has been consummated with the signing of the treaty by many African Heads of State. It is however on a cautious note that the Union is being welcome by the African toiling people. This is because there is nothing in many of the states presided by those leaders that suggest that they are genuinely working for Africa's integration or union-politically,

economically and socially. If the concept of the African Union is squandered on the alter of opportunism of African Heads of State, then it will become nothing more than it predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).This leaves a lot of room and challenge for the African Renaissance movement.

The toiling people of Africa yearn for transformation in spite of globalisation. They are optimistic about their future and the future of their children. This is why the ordinary toiling people of Africa, the street parliamentarians, urban and rural poor, youth, women, and workers, are the most critical of government and its programmes and not the opposition politicians. Social movements and civil associations have done more in reforming African politics than the opposition politicians. Afro-pessimism has no historical pedigree in Africa. The will to struggle and survive is very strong among the toiling people of Africa.

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