

PART II

Essays

Reflections on a Common Purpose in Expanding the Frontiers of Global African Scholarship

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Abstract

The enormous contributions of global African scholars to the academic fields of arts, social sciences, and humanities cannot be understated. This accomplishment has not received adequate recognition in a world dominated by Western scholarship. This domination is not unexpected because the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge are historically charged, both politically and economically. It is not accidental that the domineering “international” publishers and journals in the global academy are based in the West. Knowledge production in the field of African studies has been affected by this reality. Hence, there is an urgent need to transcend current methodological and pedagogical approaches. Because knowledge is the bulwark of the survival of any group of people, global African scholars in the field of African studies have the mandate of heeding the warnings of the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop has argued that for African scholarship to attain the distinct recognition it deserves, scholars have the duty of uncovering the commonness and interconnectedness of global African peoples’ historical experiences. While it is correct that geography plays a great role in the production of historical knowledge, the direction of African studies can be aimed at creating a platform for a homogenized pan-African mandate. This paper charged that in achieving the mission of adequate knowledge production by African scholars for the use of global Africans and of the world, the African academy must necessarily be liberated from the dominance of Western scholarship. There will be a reliance on primary and secondary sources in making a case for an encompassing pan-African emancipatory scholarship.

Keywords: African scholarship, African studies, Western scholarship, historical knowledge, and global Africans.

Amos N. Wilson, the renowned African-American psychologist and social theorist, raised concrete and pragmatic polemics on the question of scholarship. In his final analysis, he was clear that scholarship, under whatever circumstance, ought to be systematized to defend the overall interests of a group and “ensure its survival.”¹

Notwithstanding the limitations of the decolonization struggles in the 1950s and 1960s in Africa, academia was generally perceived as a potential source of inspiration for a progressive postcolonial era. Because the colonial state actively exploited its educational system to ensure the socio-cultural, political and economic alienation of the colonized Africans, the pursuit of a progressive postcolonial African society, one built on a firm academic foundation, was prioritized. The murky quagmire that subsequently overshadow the state of postcolonial Africa has, however, thwarted the possibility of a progressive postcolonial African society and as well as academic scholarship. This reality is more apparent with the absolute dominance of the forces of neo-liberalism across the continent.

Insofar as scholarship in any society acts as the memory of the political, economic, and sociocultural purpose of the people, the backward condition of African scholarship is indeed tragic. The nonexistence or incoherence of a global African scholarship is symptomatic of the overall state of powerlessness of the people. Western scholarship has had a relatively long period of dominance because of the impudence of the Euro-American world in international politics—where the ultimate power resides. The merit of this assertion is that it exposes how inseparable knowledge production is from the nature and character of an existing dominant social class. As maintained by Olufemi Taiwo, knowledge is a product of the larger material and social modes of production.² As a matter of fact, the interrelationship that exists between knowledge and a dominant economic productive system can be traced back to the earliest human societies.

The production of knowledge in communal, slavery-reliant, feudal, and capitalist societies could not have existed without the strong influences of the nature of both the productive forces and the relations to production. Though largely contestable, the dominance of Western universities in the overall global rankings exposes the extent to which knowledge production is intermeshed

with the question of power. In recent times, the growing influence of Asian scholarship has been noticeable in the global academy simply because of the emerging importance of countries like China and Japan in the international market system. Fundamentally, with regards to the emergence of China, as it has been argued by Lijia Guo, et al.,³ the progression of the Chinese educational system was reliant on the collective experiences and socio-economic realities of the people. The nexus between scholarship and the overall advancement of any society thus cannot be undermined.

Over the decades, the field of African studies has gained prominence across global universities. This feat has not, however, provoked a radical transformation. The field not only faces the challenge of knowledge production and relevance, but also the infiltration of Western scholarship or Eurocentric perspectives as evident in a Euro-American pseudo-universalism. The overwhelming dominance of Western scholarship in the global academy is so effective that its methodologies and epistemologies are dominant in almost every field, and more so in those established to address the peculiar challenges of identity groups, gender, sexuality, etc. The political and economic power, the “White power structure” that accompanies Western scholarship, is responsible for this importunate domination. A case in point on this domination is the discovery that top “international” journals in the field of African studies are mostly controlled and managed by non-African, usually White, scholars.

In 1995, Atkins Keletso, John Higginson and Odhiambo Atieno noted that “. . .not a single mainstream Africanist academic journal in North America (or Europe) has a black scholar as a working editor. Similarly, there are no black editors of the principal Africanist book series such as the ones in the Cambridge University Press and Heinemann.”⁴ This is largely responsible for the domestication of most journal articles and books on African history in Western libraries and bookshops.⁵ Though the emergence of the internet has radically transformed access to information and other academic research materials, the technological regression of Africa has precluded the overall advantages of this important era. The retrogressive state of African studies, in practical terms, explains why African students in Euro-American universities, especially those in the field of African studies, are

constantly shocked at the depth of institutional racism in academic syllabuses and pedagogical approaches.⁶

Fredua-Kwarteng, in his work on an anonymous Canadian university, resolved that:

The organization of the African studies program, along with its pedagogical practices tend to prevent African students from participating in the useful intellectual activities of the university institution where this program of study exists. In addition, African students who took African studies courses experience emotional torture, disempowerment, intellectual deprivation, and cultural powerlessness due to the racist and propagandist manner in which the courses are taught in the classroom settings. As well, African students who took those courses invariably engaged in self-pity and psychological denunciation of their African identity and connectivity.⁷

In addition to the effect of this anomaly, the apparent monopoly of Western scholarship in the global academic activities of publishing, conference organizing, and workshop organizing usually overwhelm African academics. The assumed cultural superiority that accompanies this reality can be traumatic. Young global African students pass through the university under a wrong impression of themselves and their people consequent to the consumption and proliferation of Western scholarship.

Salvaging the field of African studies from its current moribund state is on an upward curve. Many miles, however, are yet to be covered. Contextually, only a purposeful African studies' scientific approach to knowledge production can propel the reemergence of a sophisticated African scholarship. In the course of this pursuit, African epistemological, methodological, aesthetic, and theoretical approaches will need to be prioritized because, as the renowned Edward Blyden warned, the entirety of the experiences of the African people need to be interrogated "not in relationship to Europe or in terms of European concepts."⁸ This request is not out of place considering that what is on trial is an aspect of the African people's *modus vivendi*. This argument, though, has been made countless times by radical and non-radical African scholars; the missing link has been the indifference, consciously or subconsciously, to the final contention of the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop. The scholar had posited that

African scholars will need to strive to locate the interconnection or commonness of the global African people in redefining their scholarship.

Kwame Nkrumah, the renowned African nationalist, also affirmed that insofar as the field of history as an aspect of African studies is concerned, it has to “create a distinctive African identity (not a Yoruba identity nor an Akan identity).”⁹ This approach, contrary to the present divisive state of the so-called African scholarship, ultimately has the capacity to act as a catalyst in unifying the global African community towards a common goal of redefinition, reaffirmation, and decolonization. The collective sense of belonging that the field of African studies can propel among global Africans is relevant to the cause of the ongoing attempt to redeem the image of the people politically, economically and socio-culturally. As clarified in the Marxist school of thought, because “the prevailing ideas in any class society are that of the ruling class,” pedagogues of African studies, in the course of reaffirming the importance of the field, cannot be indifferent to the counterproductive and undermining roles of the upholders of political and economic power both nationally and internationally.

The conscious failure by members of the African ruling class to sponsor or encourage relevant research in the field of African studies has crippled the possibility of a knowledge productive system. It is unsurprising that the best research grants in African studies are accessible outside the African continent, and ironically, in mostly European-owned and controlled institutions and centers. To achieve the “homogeneity aspiration” of Cheikh Anta Diop, the politics and economics that guide the production and proliferation of knowledge cannot be ignored. This paper will commence by determining the extent of the degeneracy of the field of African studies, after which a case will be pushed for an emancipatory pan-African scholarship.

How “African” is African Scholarship?

The conquest of Africa by European colonial forces during the mid-19th century was made possible through a number of efforts. Related to the central theme of this paper was the conscious attempt by European writers to write the continent and her people out of world history and civilization. To justify the

erroneous assertion that Africa was a “dark continent,” the history of the people was distorted with maximum severity. The several racist views¹⁰—views of savagery and barbarism—propagated by European anthropologists, historians, writers, missionaries, and others on Africans during the 18th to 19th centuries were aimed at providing the moral basis for colonialism. For these bigoted scholars, the history of Africa only began with the arrival of Europeans. In their view, any aspect of the people’s collective experiences without the imprints of Europe is not worth studying. The only angle with which Africa should be studied was for the justification of the dismemberment of the peoples’ lands and resources by European colonial powers. The mission was to paint colonialism as a “civilizing mission” under the management and control of Europeans.

It was argued that since the African people had no worthwhile past, the burden has fallen on the Europeans to create states, industries, schools, hospitals, and other institutions through colonialism. These sentiments were widely propagated in spite of a long history of state formation and technological, medical, and social advancements that have dominated the ancient pasts of the people. Fundamentally, European writers formed the intellectual weapon of the prospective colonial state. In fact, as was widely—and erroneously—proclaimed during this period, the history of Africa only began with contact with Europe. Friedrich Hegel, the German historian, in his own assessment contends that Africa lacks history and documentation¹¹. Another European scholar proclaimed that Africa is a “dark continent” only to be lit by Europeans.¹² Hume Trevor Roper, the English historian, also condescendingly claimed that, “Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at the present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness, and darkness is not the subject of history.”¹³

Through theories such as the Hamitic hypothesis, it was in fact claimed that any glimpse of “lightness” in the history of the African continent must have been triggered from the outside. As argued by proponents of the Hamitic hypothesis such as Seligman C. G., the Hamites—who were claimed to be Europeans or of White ancestry—“civilized” Africa. Seligman erroneously submitted that “the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites.”¹⁴ Kwame Nkrumah thus contextualized the *modus*

operandi of the colonial African historiography when he revealed the following:

We (Africans) were trained to be inferior copies of Englishmen, caricatures to be laughed at with our pretensions to British bourgeois gentility, our grammatical faultiness and distorted standards betraying us at every turn. . . We were denied knowledge of our African past and informed that we had no present. . . We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive. Our textbooks were English textbooks, telling us about English history, English geography, English ways of living, English customs, English ideas, and English weather.¹⁵

Be that as it may, the ultimate mandate of colonial African historiography was not accidental because, as postulated by Olu-femi, “. . . conquered countries usually become subordinate parts of conquering countries, and their productivity, *knowledge inclusive* (emphasis by author), becomes subsumed by their conqueror’s.”¹⁶ In the beginning of the 20th century, the contradictions of colonial political economy began to beget the continent’s agitators against the overall forces of colonialism. Across all domains, Africans began to expose the myths of the European superiority complex. The aforementioned deceptions and ahistorical views fabricated by European scholars to justify colonialism were not spared in any way. Concurrently with the wave of decolonization during the 1950s and 1960s, a class of radical African intellectuals emerged both within and outside the continent to squash the colonial African historiography. In different fields, especially in history, political science, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, these scholars made conscious and serious efforts to deconstruct the racist views upon which colonialism was built. These scholars collectively became the intellectual weapon of anti-colonial struggles in the same way in which the prejudiced European writers of the 19th century were the intellectual weapon of the colonial state.

In the field of history, it was argued that the African people not only had a worthwhile history but one that birthed humanity and its first civilization.¹⁷ The reliance on written, scientific, and oral sources backed these claims. The field of history led this liberation movement, as several history departments and institutes were established across African universities during the

1960s. In postcolonial Nigeria, historians such as Kenneth Dike, Adiele Afigbo, J.A. Atanda, J.F. Ade Ajayi, and Obaro Ikime led this noble intellectual campaign. In one of his works, Ade Ajayi exposed the processes upon which colonialism was able to distort the histories—cultures and traditions of the colonized African people.¹⁸ The birth of this radical African historiography to some extent formed the basis for a political ideology in some of the newly independent states. Overall, the different methodological approaches deployed by these intellectuals to rewrite the history of the African people laid the basis for the rebirth of African scholarship and indeed, the field of African studies.

It is important to state that African studies within this context comprises the existence of independent core academic disciplines such as history, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology. Until the establishment of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, in 1961, there was no existing independent and multidisciplinary field of African studies on the continent. With the establishment of more institutes of African studies across African universities in the 1960s and 1970s, Africa-centered disciplines such as African law, African medicine, women's studies, African visual arts, and African peace and conflict studies were incorporated into the field. What the birth of the institutes of African studies did on the continent was to move African scholarship away from parochialism and ethnocentrism. Africa and the people became a central focus of African scholarship. This period also witnessed the emergence of radical or leftist-leaning schools of history across African universities. Following the enormous contributions of scholars in the 1950s and 1960s from the Ibadan, Zaria, Dar es Salaam, and Dakar schools of history to radical African historiography, the study of Africa and her people became fascinating and productive to several audiences on a global scale. This development further empowered the field of African studies during the earliest times.

In spite of the heroic intervention of these scholars during the 20th century, it has been argued by a number of African scholars that this effort was “fruitless” in the long run because the focus of this generation of intellectuals was to “test circumstances in Africa against some accepted standards and norms from Western and European scholars.”¹⁹ The renaissance of African scholarship during this period, as argued by some scholars,²⁰ was

not independently fashioned because of the heavy reliance on Western conceptual frameworks and notions. The renaissance in the above sentence is important because, as corroborated by Diop, for several centuries, ancient Egypt was the world's center for learning and culture (scholarship). Almost every ancient society derived its earliest knowledge of civilization from Egypt. This feat can be concretely considered as an earliest influence of African scholarship to the world. The subsequent invasions of Egypt and by extension, Africa, changed this trajectory as the continent witnessed a forceful imposition of other peoples' scholarship. An important case in point would be the spread of Arabic art, learning, and culture consequent to the invasion of the 7th century. It is important to stress this point because some of the earliest universities recorded in history were located in Africa, for example, the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, in present-day Mali.

Whatever the limitations of the radical scholars of the 1950s and 1960s, this paper is convinced that they fulfilled the mission of their generation to a degree. This class of Africans were among the first in line to receive Western education. They could not possibly have totally undone the entrenched prejudices of colonial African historiography. In the late 1960s, the resounding euphoria of the radical colonial historiography began to vanish momentarily. Actually, not enough studies have been carried out on how the political turmoil of this era—the military coups, civil wars, and the overall emergence of the forces of neocolonialism and imperialism in postcolonial Africa—considerably weakened the growth of African scholarship. Since there is a symbiotic relationship between scholarship of any kind—progressive or retrogressive—and politics, as revealed in the invention of colonial African historiography for the purpose of colonialism, the gradual emergence of neocolonial states across postcolonial Africa, decades after the “flag” independence, set in motion the repression of African scholarship.

The situation worsened in the late 1970s and the 1980s when agents of the international finance capital began to direct the economies of these countries. Through loans and aids from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other Bretton Woods institutions, these countries had their economies patterned along neoliberal policies of privatization, devaluation, and deregulation. In effect, the African academy, on a global scale, was infiltrated by curricula driven by the mandate

of neoliberalism. These international financial institutions also became dominant in African polities, as governments during this period were persistently “advised to emphasize primary and secondary education, while downplaying tertiary education.”²¹ Not only did research grants and funds collapse in countries like Nigeria, but African studies-related fields such as history were also consciously purged from schools by the government. The dominance of Western capitalist countries in the international finance capital system became reflective in the entrenchment of an odious global system of knowledge production rooted in individualistic social values across schools, universities, institutes, and so forth.

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the defunct Soviet Union, the capitalist unipolar world, under the leadership of the United States of America and her allies, created several mechanisms such as the forces of globalization to infiltrate the academies of countries in the global South. Added to this was the sudden decline in government funds for research and university funding as a whole in Africa. In turn, this period kicked off what would become a long era of mass exodus of African scholars to the Western academy in search of greener pastures. The effects of this brain drain on knowledge production and, indeed, the development of the field of African studies in the African continent cannot be overemphasized. In the same manner in which the continent serves the interests of global capitalism as the producers of raw materials, Africa serves only the purpose of accumulation and exportation of raw information that is needed in institutes and centers of African studies under the control and management of the Western academy. The African continent today plays a peripheral role in the field of African studies. And it does this just as Africa is the dumping site and trash can for all capitalist consumable goods and services.

On the infiltration of African scholarship by Western scholarship, Martin Staniland asserts that it has affected the ability of the field of African studies to “identify her intellectual or cultural mission, and to understand the nature of the sort of political, social, professional, or intellectual commitment required by such mission.”²² Muiyiwa Falaiye argued that, to move forward, there must be a conscious attempt to “redirect academic focus away from fruitless diatribes to the more rewarding enterprise of laying

a foundation for pragmatic-realist approaches to the academic discipline of African studies.”²³ In his final analysis, Muyiwa made a case in favor of African philosophy. He explained that African philosophy should be the lens through which African or non-African scholars will interpret people’s political, economic, and sociocultural experiences.

Though the interventions scholars such as Muyiwa, who are genuinely interested in the transformation of the field of African studies, are progressive, the frequent lacuna in the analyses of these scholars has been the unscientific assumption that the problem of African studies is an academic challenge. This paper contends that the problem of the field of African studies, and any other regressive area studies, as a matter of fact, is a political-economic problem and not an academic problem. Because the nature and character of academia is inseparable from the political mission of the larger society, this assertion is concrete.

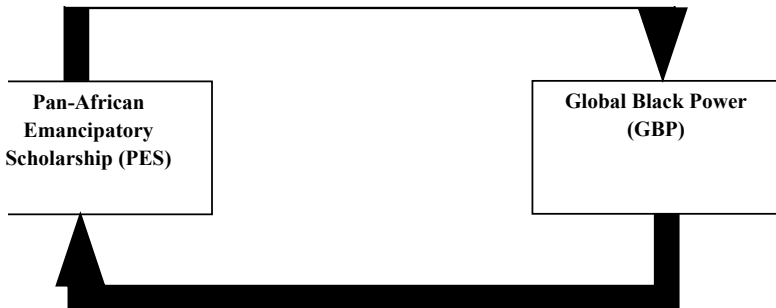


Fig. 1: A diagrammatic illustration constructed by the author to emphasize the interrelationship between a productive African scholarship and the survival of the global African people.

The Political Economy of African Scholarship towards Liberation

The relationship of knowledge and scholarship to the African people, as it has been to other people in history, should unarguably be about the protection of their interests. Nkrumah has pointed out that knowledge for the African people must generate a “loyalty to the African cause.”²⁴ It is indeed not a story that African studies currently resides outside the African continent—a

place that ordinarily ought to be its home. The bases of Asian, European, Middle Eastern, Latin American studies, and of course other area studies, are not situated in territories where the larger experiences of the people never existed. This paper, however is not unaware of the cosmopolitan nature of African studies, nor of the existence of the compelling African diaspora. As the great Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey warned, "Our success educationally, industrially, and politically, is based upon the protection of a nation founded by ourselves. And the nation can be nowhere else but in Africa."²⁵ Even in the diaspora, as we have seen with other area studies, the ultimate universal inspiration of African studies has to reside in Africa.

As argued by Muyiwa, since scholarship is about making a meaning out of the existence of a people and also enhancing their quality of life, there has to be a new direction for African studies, as it has been unresponsive to the collective will and purpose of the global African people. A consequential number of African scholars have suggested that in order to rescue the field of African studies from its current powerless state, there must be a deliberate attempt aimed at decolonization. African culture, history, philosophy, and other relevant pedagogical tools, based on the social realities and conditions of the people, will need to be at the base of decolonization. Muyiwa, in his own assessment, posited that in order to achieve a level of cultural development among African people, the field of cultural studies must commune with history.

The purpose of decolonization has been to destroy the current neocolonial physical and psychological state of the African people. Chinweizu Ibekwe made allusion to this in his work.²⁶ The activist-scholar argued, in summary, that African scholarship must have the capacity of liberating the African continent from "imperialism, neo-colonialism, powerlessness, and from the world's contempt" and create a "Black Africa that has a technologically robust culture; is autonomous in its economy, culture, and politics; and is prosperous and Afrocentric."²⁷ As Garvey declared, "the [African] race needs workers at this time, not plagiarists, sophists, and mere imitators; but men and women who are able to create, to originate and improve, and thus make an independent racial contribution to the world and civilization."²⁸ Thus, the field of African studies cannot be apolitical.

At the moment, narrowed historical works on African ethnic groups or nationalities are common amongst continental African historians. However relevant these studies might be, the ultimate merit of historical works targeted at the collective experiences of the African people—continentally and globally—stand indispensable in the attempt to resurrect African scholarship. In fact, because a greater chunk of African scholars are interested in the narrow experiences of their nationalities, foreign scholars have attained a monopolistic right over research on regional and continental African issues.²⁹ This is scandalous. Added to this challenge is the unfortunate attempt by some scholars to limit the field of African studies to the African continent. The field in the late 19th and early 20th centuries notably sourced its inspiration from the works of Africans in the diaspora. In their struggle against the consequences of Atlantic slavery, Africans in the diaspora, especially in the U.S., turned to Africa intellectually to acquire the necessary inspiration to defeat racism, socioeconomic and cultural deprivations. These scholars formed the foremost ideological basis for pan-Africanism because they had no illusions about the interconnectedness of their struggles with the continental African people. The distortions anchored by colonial African historiographers were dispelled.

African scholars in the diaspora during this period dug into the histories of ancient African civilizations, cultures, and traditions in a bid to establish the contributions of global Africans to the development of world civilization and humanity. These scholars³⁰ established, concretely and scientifically, that the history of the African people did not start with the arrival of the Europeans nor with Atlantic slavery. The first modern attempt to connect the past of the African people conjointly was masterminded by these African scholars. The ancient Egyptian civilization, built and controlled by Black Pharaohs, was linked with other civilizations and experiences of earliest proto-feudal states in Africa by these scholars.³¹ Their approach to African history, or studies, was neither parochial nor ethnocentric in nature, unlike the narrow-minded effect of the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference. This explains why their works were, and still are, relevant for every part of the continent. Critics have accused these scholars of wild generalizations and inaccurate assumptions.³² Adebayo Olukoshi argued that the weaknesses of these scholars rests on their inability to

have gone “beyond the counterfactual to produce an autonomous narrative of the African experience that is powerful enough to propel a complete paradigmatic shift.”³³ At any rate, the works of these scholars were the ultimate backbone, consciously or sub-consciously, of the epistemology and methodology of the earliest Africa-based nationalist historiographers.

The earliest works of Henry Sylvester Williams, W.E.B Du Bois, George Padmore, Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, and others sparked the consciousness upon which continental Africans built their intellectual struggle against colonial African historiography. In colonial Lagos, newspapers such as the Lagos Times, the Lagos Standard, and the Lagos Weekly Record frequently reprinted the speeches and works of Garvey and Padmore in their columns, especially during the 1910s and 1920s.³⁴ Indigenous cultural intellectuals of this era, such as James Johnson, Mojola Agbebi, and John Payne Jackson, were greatly inspired by the works of the renowned 19th-century African-American Edward Wilmot Blyden. Blyden was a Pan-Africanist par excellence. According to Falola and Aderinto, “Blyden established the foundation of Africa’s historical and cultural thought, developing themes that many thinkers and academics would reexamine during the twentieth century.”³⁵ He went to great lengths in placing African scholarship on a stimulating pedestal based on the ability to demystify the presumptuous European superiority complex and the African inferiority complex.

Some of Blyden’s ideas penetrated the consciousness of some African Christian missionaries and academics, laying the very foundations for the emergence of the 20th-century African churches and the field of African studies, respectively. Over the decades, in spite of its radical antecedents, the field of African studies has lost its political and economic relevance in the global African community. As explained previously, the penetration of international finance capital agencies undermined the growth and development of the African academy. It is against this backdrop that the dominant methodological and pedagogical approaches to African studies are derived from the Western academy. This reality further articulates the interrelationship between scholarship and power—political or economic (See Fig. 1). This also underscores the audacity that is rife amongst Euro-American scholars in their attempt to dismiss the necessity of a decolonized African studies.

African studies is intrinsically about the documentation of the collective experiences of the global African people towards with objective of race consciousness and liberation. The detracting suggestion of a blend of African studies with diaspora studies or international studies, as argued by scholars such as Henning Melber,³⁶ is extremely counterproductive and unnecessary. This attempt will further polarize the ultimate purpose of the field. The unifying purpose of African scholarship, as suggested by this paper, itself inspired by Cheikh Anta Diop, would mean that African scholars, globally, will need to take the driver's seat in documenting the collective experience of the people. This is not to suggest that non-African scholars in the field of African studies are not eligible to document any aspect of this experience; however, more often than not, these scholars have expressed, openly or subtly, that their studies are not necessarily for the African people. More so, J.H. Carruthers had warned passionately that "the revival of African thought (scholarship) is a job for Africans only; that is, only Africans can do it. If Europeans do it, it would only mean that they defeated us again."³⁷

In analyzing the objective of the European-based Nordic African Studies Institute, Henning Melber made a long list of issues and, unsurprisingly, a great deal of them have nothing whatsoever to do with the current social realities and conditions of the global African people. It is not abnormal for non-African scholars to be attracted to the field based on the financial incentives provided by non-African governmental and non-governmental agencies. Organizations such as the Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur foundations, as well as several other Western non-governmental organizations, are at the frontline of sponsorship of programs and activities in the field of African studies and other area studies in the Western academy. For a significant number of non-African scholars in the field of African studies, the endeavor cannot be anything but academic. A 2008 report compiled on knowledge production in Africa on behalf of the World Bank analyzed how the institution had spread its "infrastructural systems" across the continent.³⁸ There was an apparent and intentional dearth of prognoses on the likely benefits of the program to the African people.

Because of the above tendency, the interests of most non-African scholars in the field of African studies are tied to

“knowing Africa” and not “radically transforming Africa.” African studies among non-African scholars is unapologetically centered on the needs of those scholars’ societies or of the sponsor organization. Olukoshi suggests that African studies in the Western academy “is not just about simple, routine academic engagements; it carries—and quite often projects the power—of its sponsors who are also a primary end user of its ‘products.’”³⁹

As careful observation has shown, the interests that transnational and multinational corporations have displayed recently vis-à-vis international finance agencies in the sponsorship of Western-based institutes and African studies centers is related to the need to accumulate intelligence reports to guide their activities in Africa. In retrospect, the colonial intelligence reports (located in most national archives) that many historians rely on today were put together by contracted European writers to guide the activities of colonial administrators. This affirms that, ultimately, applied knowledge is power.

The development of area studies in the American academy after the end of the Second World War in 1945 was sponsored by the government chiefly because of the then-emerging ideological Cold War with the USSR. The ultimate need to study the cultures, traditions, and histories of Middle Easterners, Africans, Latin Americans, Asians, etc., in the American academy arose to serve to the political and economic interests of the American state. Because the chase for a unipolar world during the Cold War targeted global supremacy, the acquisition of basic and non-basic information about countries in the international system was a prerequisite for the two parties. Specifically in Europe, the growth of African studies was a byproduct of nationalist struggles in the African colonies. Consequent to the impending political independence of these colonies, European colonial governments began the process of establishing African research centers in both Africa and Europe in order to provide the intellectual impetus for the emergence of a postcolonial Africa under the grip of neocolonialist forces. As revealed by Olukoshi, the pioneering staff of the newly established institutes or centers of African studies in European and African universities “included a significant number of former colonial provincial and district officials.”⁴⁰

Against this backdrop, area studies of whatever nature did not emerge in the Western academy to serve the political and

economic interests of the people being studied, but rather of the funding governments. In the same way in which colonial African historiography was invented and propagated by the forces of European colonialism in the 19th century, American, British, and other Western scholars were recruited into the field of area studies with the ultimate goal of extracting information on other people vis-à-vis the institutionalization of a global process of Americanization and Westernization of knowledge. This contest became apparent after 1989 as Western epistemological and pedagogical approaches to knowledge were superimposed structurally across World academies. It became the framework within which every “other knowledge” must exist. In other instances, Euro-American scholars through this medium emerged as the “powerhouse of solutions” to the problems of knowledge production and utilization across the globe. As revealed hitherto, the 2008 World Bank report on a *Development Program for Knowledge in Africa* exposes how the “global academy” has been a Euro-American one. Despite the fact that this report was compiled by Euro-American scholars, the authors expressed the need “to accumulate a richer understanding of the plurality of knowledge storage practices within African local contexts in order to design systems which can flourish within that context.”⁴¹

The development of area studies in the global North was meant to legitimize the interpretation of the globe with Western lenses. Other lenses are not just to be “ghettoized” or “underdeveloped,” but assumed to be primitive and inadequate. As argued by Zeleza Paul, “the pernicious fictions were born and bred that area studies were concerned with the parochial and particular, while American studies, and their civilizational cousins, European studies, were intellectual parables of the human condition.”⁴² In the American academy, the marginalization of African studies was indeed a priority considering the racial discrimination of White American society against African American society. It is against this backdrop that the field of African studies, continentally and globally (i.e., of African diaspora communities), cannot be surrendered to the whims and caprices of non-African scholars. That the American historian Phillip Curtin erroneously warned in his arrogantly titled article “Ghettoizing African History”⁴³ that this will lead to a decline in the quality of works in African studies in fact underscores this paper’s argument.

Curtin's reaction confirms the belief that the field is not within the reach of African scholars. It is typical for non-African, especially Euro-American scholars, in the field of African studies to be dismissive of the counterproductive state of the field to the global African people. In the course of this research, a substantial number of works authored by Euro-American scholars have revealed how rooted Euro-American pseudo-universalism is in global academy. However, the political economy of the resistance of Euro-American scholars to the consistent attempt by global African scholars to reposition African studies to their advantage must be understood. As has been stressed, progressive scholarship is the basis upon which the survival of any group is built; thus, Western governments and organizations have an incentive to maintain the current underdeveloped state of the global South and of Africa in particular; hence the consistent sponsorship of Eurocentric perspectives aimed at painting the continent and the people, globally, as objects of "White man's burden."

When Henning Melber asserted in his work⁴⁴ that African studies should not be about a "we-they" dichotomy "between Europeans and Africans or Africans and the rest of the world," he deliberately dismissed the imperativeness of decolonization. What Euro-American scholars like Melber have deliberately and presumptuously ignored is that global African scholars would not be concerned about the deconstruction and decolonization of African studies had their Euro-American ancestors such as Trevor Roper and Friedrich Hegel not successfully written the African people out of world history. In spite of Melber's relative clear-headedness on the challenges of African studies, it is not too strange that he would publicly raise this notion because of the depth of the Euro-American superiority complex. Not only White scholars hold this unacceptable illusion; there are indeed African scholars, usually Africa-based, who are also convinced that the decolonization of the field of African studies is a "continued cultivation of self-pity and a pseudo-radical 'Afrocentrism.'"⁴⁵

Of course, Euro-American scholars like Melber are quick to reference some of these bourgeois African scholars or to swiftly make a comrade out of them because of their distorted and crass analyses. They are usually indifferent to the scientific and dialectical works of radical African scholars such as Walter Rodney, Cheikh Anta Diop, and John H. Clarke, who were clear about

the necessity of a decolonized Africa and Africans at large. However, in the same work where Melber dismissed the need of a decolonized African studies, he made a surprising case for an emancipatory knowledge as inspired by the works of Steve Biko, Walter Rodney, Ruth First, and others. Still, this author is not convinced by this submission, as the scholar also argued, confusingly, that Western thoughts should not be rejected in the process of his “emancipatory potential of African studies.” The inconsistency in this assertion is Melber’s assumption that Amilcar Cabral, Rodney, and other radical African scholars advocated a syncretism of African studies with Western thoughts. These scholars were, in fact, vocal in their struggle for the decolonization of African studies and the restoration of African epistemology as the ultimate lens for African scholarship. Overall, Melber’s analysis can be understood as a classical example of a Euro-American double standard expression of the state of the global academy.

It is true that African American scholar-activists have played an extraordinary role in precluding a completely “Whitewashed” and “Americanized” form of African studies through their large body of scholarly works on Africa and Africans.⁴⁶ In sustaining the tradition engendered by the 19th century scholars, these scholar-activists have consistently argued in their works that African scholarship and, indeed, the field of African studies should be about the protection and elevation of the overall interests of the global African people. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement in the United States provoked many more Africa-centered scholarly works. Because this era witnessed a radical shift in the liberation attempts of members of the African American community, who were still confronted with socioeconomic, political, and cultural deprivations—the effects of White racial oppression—a more significant number of scholarly works in African studies were churned out. The 1960s development of the progressive historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) propelled the emergence of academic journals, research centers, associations, and institutes interested in telling the African story for the benefit of the African people. Amos Wilson, Chancellor Williams, John H. Clarke, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, and others were participants and products of this era. As Zezela Paul wrote:

By challenging Eurocentric paradigms and the rigid barriers between academic

disciplines, the African American studies movement helped legitimize the study of non-Western cultures and multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies; but by pointing to the configuration of European American power and domination in the American academy, even in the African studies, and emphasizing the collective Black experience, it challenged African studies as constituted at the time.⁴⁷

The development of Africana studies in the African American academy in the 1980s and 1990s furthered the notion that African studies should focus on the overall experiences of the global African people. The leadership provided by African American scholars in African studies was subsequently supported by the contributions of some Africa-based scholars. Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, Walter Rodney, Aimé Césaire, and others actively worked to redirect the focus of African studies. Whilst Diop scientifically proved the connection of Black people to the ancient Egyptian civilization, Rodney dialectically revealed how Atlantic slavery and colonialism truncated African history and, indeed, the peoples' developmental path⁴⁸. However, the legacy of this intervention by Africa-based scholars was weakened by the firm grip of neocolonialism, the crisis of underdevelopment (propelled by the failures of the African ruling class), and the overt control of international finance over the continent's academy.

Unsurprisingly, a number of sub-fields under African studies in Africa-based universities do not offer core courses on the origins of humanity in Africa; the Egyptian, Nubian, Axum, and Bantu civilizations; migration and state formation in proto-feudal Africa; or African languages, cultures and traditions. Approaches that have the potential to integrate the African people politically, culturally, and economically are largely nonexistent. The illusion of the diversity of the people is, however, dominant in the African academy. In addition to this quagmire, ideas that could inspire the masses of African students in the field of African studies, and indeed, in any other field, towards greatness are extensively absent. Because it gives little or no representation to the social realities and conditions of the African people, the African academy, in most instances, operates concretely in the image and likeness of Western scholarship.

Thus, the neocolonial state of universities across Africa has seriously reduced African studies on the continent to a parochial adventure contrary to the collective memory and purpose that they were mandated to produce. As noted by Briggs and Weathers, a great number of continental African scholars' contributions to journals on international politics focus more on their distinct countries than the shared experiences and realities of the global African people—an area the authors argue has been dominated by non-African scholars.⁴⁹ It is extremely odious that a significant number of Africa-based scholars often express, consciously or subconsciously, their indifference to the racist condition of the White imperialist domination of the global academy. In fact, whenever some of these scholars attend international conferences, seminars, and workshops in Europe or America, they further contribute, through their works and presentations, to the racist stereotypes that Western scholarship had institutionalized in the field of African studies and other area studies.

Conclusion

The field of African studies will need to expand its frontiers to other fields in the sciences in order to concretely establish the Pan-African Emancipatory Scholarship (PES) this paper has advocated. This is relevant for the collective purpose of scientifically determining the interconnectedness of the people. Because the longevity of any scholarship rests on its ability to defend and further the interests of its people, African scholarship will need to be developed with racial pride, dignity, and solidarity. As Maina wa Kinyatti warned, African scholarship must unapologetically further the interests and survival of the global African people:

We are Africans first, historians second. Unlike our so called African specialists, we do not merely wish to research and write just for the sake of writing or for the sake of being historians. We wish to consciously and actively use our historical knowledge for the liberation of our people.⁵⁰

To achieve this mandate, a progressive postcolonial African state must be knowledge-driven. The absence of regular government research grants and funds in most African universities is symptomatic of the current parochial and ethnocentric status

of African scholarship. The role of African universities in the remaking of African studies must be taken seriously because, as Olukoshi warns, the “health and well-being of the African university, as the highest site of research, is central to the fortunes of African studies”⁵¹. Global African universities must encourage joint publications, seminars, conferences, and workshops towards achieving the goal of a homogenized African studies. Scholar-activists will have to join other activists and trade unionists at the barricade in the demand for a well-funded educational sector.

As Olukoshi noted, the development of radical African scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s was fundamentally possible because African universities of this era were “strong and growing on all fronts, with the members of the academic community enjoying the necessary mobility to enable them to constitute local reference/epistemic communities while simultaneously participating in international networks.”⁵² Because a broader approach that addresses the collective experiences of the African people would require an extensive research methodology and epistemology, the question of funding cannot be dismissed. Since non-African scholars in the global North are more often than not well funded through organizations, centers, institutes, and governments, they have consistently occupied the driver’s seat of African studies. This circumstance is reflected in the dominance of non-African scholars as reviewers and editors of most African studies journals.

Insa Nolte noted that in order for a pro-African editorial policy to emerge, journals must devise strategies to increase the number of African authors.⁵³ This paper calls attention to this necessity. Ultimately, journals based in the global North are not fundamentally designed to defend and further the pro-African interests of African studies. For Western governments and their allies, the documentation of Africa has the ultimate purpose of affirming their socioeconomic and political grip on the African continent. Thus, as this paper affirmed and as pointed out by Olukoshi, for African studies to truly be in the service of Africa, the methodological approach will need to change from foreign to local.⁵⁴ The onus ultimately lies with global African scholars to strive, in spite of overwhelming challenges, to rebirth an encompassing African scholarship that can forcefully propel the Black power global project that Chinweizu envisages.

Notes

- ¹ Amos Wilson, *Blueprint for Black Power: A Moral, Political, and Economic Imperative for the Twenty-First Century* (Afrikan World Infosystems, April 2000), 20.
- ² Olufemi Taiwo, "What is African Studies? African Scholars, Africanist Scholars, and the Production of Knowledge," in *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives, Vol. II.*, eds. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho (Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012), 966.
- ³ Lijia Guo, et al., "Education Development in China; Education Return, Quality, and Equity," *MDPI Journal, Sustainability*, 11, 3750 (June 2019).
- ⁴ K. Atkins, H. John, and A. Odhiambo, "The Significance of Race in African Studies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (1995): 3.
- ⁵ Steven J. Jackson, Archer B. Batcheller, Paul N. Edwards, Geoffrey C. Bowker, Steve Cisler, and Susan Leigh Star, "Extending African Knowledge Infrastructures: Sharing, Creating, Maintaining," World Bank Knowledge for Development Program, March 2008, 30.
- ⁶ See Fredua-Kwarteng, "African Studies in a Canadian Academy: A Tool for Liberation or Marginalization?"; a paper presented at the Annual Dean's Graduate Student Research Conference: Diverse Perspectives in Education, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 24-25, 2006.
- ⁷ Fredua-Kwarteng, "African Studies in a Canadian Academy: A Tool for Liberation or Marginalization?"; 6.
- ⁸ C.A. Ambler, "A School in the Interior: African Studies; Engagement and Interdisciplinary"; *African Studies Review*, Vol. 54. No. 1. (2011): 3.
- ⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1963), 52.
- ¹⁰ See Joseph Harris, *Africans and their History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 13-28.
- ¹¹ G.W. Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Buffalo Prometheus Books, 1991), 99.
- ¹² Henry M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent or the Sources of the Nile around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean* (CITY, STATE: Dover Publications, 2011), 12.
- ¹³ Hume Trevor Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 30.
- ¹⁴ Joseph Harris, *Africans and their History*, 24.
- ¹⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, 45.
- ¹⁶ Olufemi Taiwo, "What is African Studies? African Scholars, Africanist Scholars, and the Production of Knowledge," 966.
- ¹⁷ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987), 23.

- ¹⁸ Ade Ajayi, "Colonialism: An Episode in African History," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, eds. L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- ¹⁹ Muiyiwa Falaiye, "African Studies in African Universities," *Faculty of Arts Lecture Series, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye* (June 27, 2016): 8.
- ²⁰ See A.E. Afigbo, *The Poverty of African Historiography* (Lagos: Afrografika Publishers, 1977); Afigbo, "Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography," *Nigeria Magazine*, Nos. 122-23, (1976); E.A. Ayandele, "How Truly Nigerian is our Nigerian History," *African Notes* 5, No. 2. (1969).
- ²¹ William Lyakurwa and Olu Ajakaiye, "Policy Advise and African Studies," in *On Africa: Scholars and African Studies – Contributions in Honour of Lennart Wohlgenuth*, ed. Kenning Melber (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007), 41.
- ²² Staniland Martin, "Who Needs African Studies," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 26. No. 3/4. (1983); quoted from Muiyiwa Falaiye, "African Studies in African Universities"
- ²³ Muiyiwa Falaiye, "African Studies in African Universities"; 9.
- ²⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, 50.
- ²⁵ Marcus Garvey, *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey* (USA: Dover Publications, 2005).
- ²⁶ See Ibekwe Chinweizu, "Marcus Garvey and the Black Power Movement: Legacies and Lessons for Contemporary Black Africa," in *Chinweizu Articles: Compiled by Ambakisye-okang D.*, 6252, (2010).
- ²⁷ Ibekwe Chinweizu, "Marcus Garvey and the Black Power Movement: Legacies and Lessons for Contemporary Black Africa," 376.
- ²⁸ Marcus Garvey, *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, 20.
- ²⁹ Bethwell A. Ogot, "African Historiography: From Colonial Historiography to UNESCO's General History of Africa," *Working Paper*, 75.
- ³⁰ See Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, (USA: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 210-219.
- ³¹ See Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*.
- ³² A.E. Afigbo, *The Poverty of African Historiography*; A.E. Afigbo, "Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography,"; E.A. Ayandele, "How Truly Nigerian is our Nigerian History"; 10.
- ³³ Adebayo Olukoshi, "African Scholars and African Studies," in *On Africa: Scholars and African Studies – Contributions in Honour of Lennart Wohlgenuth*, ed. Kenning Melber, (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007), 16-17.
- ³⁴ See, National Archives Ibadan, "Newspaper Section, Lagos Standard, 14th of July 1914"; "Lagos Weekly Record, 3rd of June 1905."
- ³⁵ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*,
- ³⁶ Henning Melber, "The Relevance of African Studies," *Vienna Journal of African Studies*, Nr. 16, (2009), 190.

- ³⁷ Quoted in Michaela Krenceyova, "Who is allowed to speak about Africa? A reflection on knowledge, positionality, and authority in Africanist scholarship," *Africa Insight* 44, no. 1 (2014), 16.
- ³⁸ Jackson et al. *Extending African Knowledge Infrastructures: Sharing, Creating, Maintaining*, 29.
- ³⁹ Adebayo Olukoshi, "African Scholars and African Studies," 12.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Jackson et al. *Extending African Knowledge Infrastructures: Sharing, Creating, Maintaining*, 29.
- ⁴² Zezela Paul, "The Pasts and Futures of African Studies and Area Studies," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 25, no. 2 (1997), 9.
- ⁴³ Philip Curtin, "Ghettoizing African History," *African Studies Association* 28, no. 4 (1995). 21.
- ⁴⁴ Henning Melber, "What is African in Africa(n) Studies? Confronting the (Mystifying) Power of Ideology and Identity," *Africa Bibliography*, Vol. 2013. 2014.
- ⁴⁵ Henning Melber quoted Achille Mbembe in his work, Henning Melber, "What is African in Africa(n) Studies? Confronting the (Mystifying) Power of Ideology and Identity," xiv.
- ⁴⁶ See Arthur Schomburg, *The Negro: A Selected Bibliography*, (USA: Kessinger Publisher, 2010).
- ⁴⁷ Zezela Paul, "The Pasts and Futures of African Studies and Area Studies," 14.
- ⁴⁸ See Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (London: Bogle-L'ouverture Publications, 1972).
- ⁴⁹ Briggs Ryan and Scott Weathers, "Gender and Location in African Politics Scholarship: The Other White's Man Burden?" *African Affairs* (2016), 115, 460.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in Krenceyova, "Who is allowed to speak about Africa? A reflection on knowledge, positionality, and authority in Africanist scholarship," 15.
- ⁵¹ Adebayo Olukoshi, "African Scholars and African Studies," 15.
- ⁵² Ibid. 13.
- ⁵³ Insa Nolte, "The Future of African Studies: What can we do to Keep Africa at the Heart of our Research," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, (2019), 11.
- ⁵⁴ Adebayo Olukoshi, "African Scholars and African Studies," 16.

