

RECKONING WITH THE PASTS AND REIMAGINING THE FUTURES OF AFRICAN STUDIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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When I was asked to give the keynote address, I readily agreed not simply because I'm the vice-chancellor of this fine university but also because I'm a student and scholar of the humanities and social sciences. But agreeing was easier than deciding what to say. I finally settled on framing my remarks around three anniversaries in 2019.

The first is the fiftieth anniversary of the contentious annual meeting of the US African Studies Association (ASA) in Montreal at which African and African American scholar-activists confronted the mostly conservative, white, and male-dominated leadership of the ASA. The Montreal crisis was an outburst—in the academic arena—of the intertwined movements of African decolonization and American civil rights, which were destined to recast the global order and US domestic politics. In short, I would like to share some reflections on the trajectory of African studies since independence.

The second anniversary that I'm mindful of is that of my own university. USIU-Africa is celebrating its fiftieth Anniversary this year. This will provide a segue into some reflections on the development of African universities

since independence. Insofar as the social sciences are embedded in the institutional architecture of universities with their triple mandates—teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and public service—their fate is inextricably linked to the changing contexts and conditions of higher education.

The final momentous event I'm mindful of this year is the four-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in what is today the United States of America. The story of the historic African diasporas captures most poignantly the place of Africa and Africans in the changing configurations of the world system. Since the ascendancy of Euro-American hegemony that was immeasurably facilitated by the exploitation of Africa, African social thought, as Samir Amin, the great Egyptian intellectual calls it, has been preoccupied with African positioning in the world.

I'll begin my presentation with a brief intellectual biography. Second, I'll proceed to outline some key features of the African studies enterprise that I was engaged in for the bulk of my professional life in North America. Third, I'll underscore the importance of embracing the diaspora and diaspora studies in the globalization of African studies. Fourth, I'll share brief observations about the challenges and opportunities facing African universities. I will conclude with a few remarks on the project of decolonizing African knowledges.

NOTES ON A PERSONAL JOURNEY

The three anniversaries are threaded together in the tapestry of my personal and professional life. This is another way of saying intellectual history: the history, ideas, and knowledge that produces institutions. In short, the processes of knowledge production are often inscribed by our social biographies as structured by intersecting institutional, ideological, and intellectual dynamics. I was educated as an undergraduate student in Malawi in the early 1970s in the waning years of the euphoria of independence. I became a graduate student in Britain and Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the promises of *Uhuru* had withered under the harsh glare of authoritarian and corrupt regimes.

As undergraduate students, we were caught up in the excitement of the struggles to decolonize the humanities and social sciences, to establish vibrant African universities, to reclaim indigenous knowledges and fashion

African agency out of the continent's triple heritage, as Ali Mazrui would later call it. Mazrui borrowed this notion from Kwame Nkrumah's treatise on the African personality.¹ Nkrumah, in turn, was indebted to the writings of Edward Blyden in the nineteenth century who saw African civilization as a confluence of indigenous, Christian, and Islamic streams.

Thanks to the indefatigable nationalist scholars at Africa's flagship universities from Dar es Salaam to Nairobi, Ibadan to Dakar, Cairo to Cape Town, and the publications of eager young writers mushrooming through Heinemann's African Writers Series, we discovered the infinite intellectual joys of African histories and literatures. We were exposed to the angry denunciations of modernization theories by dependency scholars, preeminent among them Walter Rodney, whose book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* became our bible. Aided by Frantz Fanon's searing indictment of the political class, *The Wretched of the Earth*, we discovered the postcolonial emperors were naked.²

We transferred our hopes for the realization of the historical and humanistic dreams of African nationalism—decolonization, nation-building, regional integration, democracy, and development—to the radical liberation movements of Southern Africa and socialist movements elsewhere. By the time I was writing my doctoral dissertation, we had found solace in Marxism and various insurgent social and intellectual movements from feminism to environmentalism.

I finished my PhD in 1982 and experienced the rest of the 1980s from two institutional locations. First, as a young lecturer at the University of the West Indies, where my Pan-African intellectual sensibilities and passions were forged; I was conscious that I took a position once occupied by the great Walter Rodney. Second, I worked at Kenyatta University in Kenya. At both universities, I was nurtured and mentored by some of the most accomplished scholars of the first post-independence generation who had committed their lives to the decolonization of the academy and were enraged by the apparent betrayal of the dreams of independence. It was during these eight years that my intellectual passions and ideological proclivities were sharpened.

I was truly fortunate to learn from the best about the need for uncompromising intellectual rigor and the transformative possibilities of acknowledging one's deep ignorance, which cultivates a spirit of intellectual striving and

humility. From my mentors, I came to appreciate the power of prodigious reading and immersion in the intellectual traditions and literatures of whatever field I was working on. Mentorship is an indispensable part of building social capital, empowering the upcoming generation, and keeping the older generation relevant! A good mentor, just like a good teacher, learns as much from their mentees and students, as the latter learn from them. This process of co-learning requires cultivating meaningful and mutually respectful engagement.

In 1990, I joined the trek to the Global North where I spent the next twenty-five years in the intellectual battlefields of Canada and the United States. By then it was clear that the promises of Uhuru had descended into the lost decades of the 1980s and 1990s, ravaged by the market fundamentalist gospel of neo-liberalism. The draconian regime of structural adjustment programs peddled by the international financial institutions wracked African economies, societies, and educational systems.

In the 1980s, many a young scholar abandoned the African academy altogether. Some found salvation in consultancies or drifted to greener pastures abroad. This difficult moment undermined the capacity of African universities to maintain primacy in the study of their own continent as they had tried to since the 1960s. The decolonization project virtually collapsed in the maelstrom of the massive devaluation of academic labor. Globally, the end of the postwar boom and the ascendancy of the dispiriting and destructive strictures of neo-liberalism proved a fertile ground for the deconstructionist paradigms of the posts—postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. The distrust of metanarratives found supporters among some African scholars.

On my part, these developments and experiences reinforced my radical inclinations and informed three areas of research that became my preoccupations—economic history, gender studies, and human rights studies. Later, I was to develop interests in other fields. This underscores the fact that our intellectual proclivities often reflect our times, prevailing ideologies and struggles, dominant intellectual traditions, and institutional contexts. In short, much of our individual scholarship is enmeshed in specific historical geographies, current political economies, and generational aspirations and anxieties. This observation is an invitation to self-reflexivity.

Regardless of our divergent intellectual and ideological orientations in

the 1980s and 1990s, I found that we were all forced to reckon with the apparent failures of African independence and, for those of us lodged in the heartlands of the global North, the assaults of Afropessimism were particularly debilitating. A few joined the bandwagon of vicious Africa critics saying that Africa was a “hopeless” continent, as *The Economist* infamously put it in one of its lead stories in 2000.³

The new African diaspora academics suffered from an acute form of the Duboisian “double consciousness” spawned by the contradiction between their high academic achievements and an inferiorized identity in America’s unyielding racial hierarchy, and between their alienation from Africa and the need to come to terms with their Africanity and to promote Africa. This produced three types of intellectuals, as noted by the Kenyan diaspora scholar Njubi Nesbit: the comprador intelligentsia (who cynically use their Africanity to authenticate the neo-colonial and neo-liberal agendas of the international financial institutions); the post-colonial critic (who see themselves as liberal interpreters of Africa to Euro-America and vice-versa); and the progressive exile (who seek to develop a dignified pan-African identity and solidarity).⁴

At the turn of the new century began the tentative resurgence of Africa, the reconfiguration of global power with the rise of the emerging economies, especially China’s relentless march to becoming the world’s largest economy—a position it had only relinquished for a couple of centuries following the triumph of European imperialism—and the massive disruptions of every economic and social sector, including higher education, brought by new information technologies. I witnessed these developments from three pedestals. First, as the director of one of the largest centers of African Studies in the United States at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a position I assumed in 1995. That is when I became deeply immersed in African studies and wrote extensively on the subject. This was a crucial part of my gravitation to the field of intellectual history, my fourth preoccupation.

Second, twelve years later in 2007, I became chair of the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. My interests in diaspora studies, which had germinated years before, were cemented by this experience. This became my fifth area of research. Finally, in 2009, I was appointed dean of the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. This marked my foray into the private

university sector and higher academic administration, and my drift from African Studies to higher education as a whole as I oversaw a broad range of social science and humanities disciplines and centers.

The expansion of my intellectual and institutional horizons received an immeasurable boost when I became vice president for academic affairs at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut which involved working with the university's nine colleges. This nourished my research interests, culminating in my most recent book, *The Transformation of Global Higher Education: 1945-2015*, the first single-authored book I'm aware of that examines the development of higher education on every continent over the seventy years of the postwar era.⁵

My story is not unique for members of my generation. Many of us have experienced the pain and pleasures of intellectual nomadism. We have been part of Africa's brain formation, brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation; we have followed the trails of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization; and we straddle Africa and the diaspora. As the younger generation of African academics takes over from us, I hope they will follow the injunction some of us have tried to follow from Ali Mazrui, one of the giants of African letters. In his celebrated television series, *The Africans: a Triple Heritage*, he implored us, echoing Alexander Pope: "A little modernity is a dangerous thing. Drink deep or taste not the western spring."⁶ I would rephrase it: "A little scholarship is a dangerous thing. Drink deep or taste not the academic spring."

THE AFRICAS OF AFRICAN STUDIES

When I became Director of the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois in August 1995, I was immediately struck by two things. First, out of the more than eighty Africanists in the university, only one was African American and there were only a handful of African immigrants. I realized African Studies was a white-dominated field, although it hadn't always been that way. Second, in November 1995 I attended my first meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA) on US soil. There was a special session devoted to an incendiary article by Philip Curtin—one of the doyens of African Studies—published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, titled "The Ghettoization of African History."⁷ He decried the growing numbers of Africans and African Americans teaching African History and the consequent "lowering" of standards. The session, attended by more than three hundred people, was

the most contentious I had ever seen. The second lesson I learned was that the field of African studies in the US was highly racialized and racially fraught.

I decided to delve into the history of African studies in the US and later around the world. In 1997, I published a book, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*, which was followed by a series of articles.⁸ It became clear to me that after World War II, two versions of African studies emerged in the American academy, what I call “Euro-American African Studies,” which eclipsed the older tradition of Afro-American African Studies. The former triumphed not because of its superior intellectual products but because of the greater support it received from the federal government as part of National Defense Act of 1958 that launched funding for area studies programs at American universities. Also, the major foundations such as Rockefeller and Ford jumped into the fray and directed much of their funding to the historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs).

My research showed that African Studies in the United States, as I wrote in one article:

has been in a perpetual state of crisis since its institutionalization in the 1950s. The crisis is rooted in the unyielding intellectual, institutional, and ideological solitudes and bitter contestations among the producers and consumers of Africanist knowledge who are divided by the inscriptions and hierarchies of race and nationality, locational and spatial affiliations, epistemological orientations, and ambitions. Particularly destructive is the continuing gulf between African American and European American Africanists and between the latter and African scholars. For African Studies to survive, let alone thrive, these solitudes must be confronted directly and transcended.⁹

The contestations ranged from divergent claims of the field’s own history to conceptions of Africa itself, to epistemic preoccupations. While African studies was pioneered at the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the 19th and early 20th centuries by African American scholar-activists such as W.E.B Dubois, arguably the greatest black intellectual of the 20th century, conventional histories of African studies from the 1960s gave “paternity” of the field to the historically white colleges and universities and white professional academics, such as Melville Herskovits. Clearly, histories of academic institutions and fields are used to stake positions, mark boundaries, and to confer authority in the perennial struggle for

intellectual, material, and reputational resources.

African studies entered the segregated corridors of the HWCUs after World War II out of three key imperatives. First was the security imperative. The area studies project was part of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Proverbial American ignorance of what was christened the “Third World” in the 1950s, comprising the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa, and the United States’ turbulent backyard, Latin America, was increasingly seen as dangerous for a superpower locked in mortal combat with the USSR to win hearts and minds around the world.

Second, there was the epistemological imperative to internationalize knowledge in the American academy while simultaneously reinforcing the supremacy of the Eurocentric disciplines. The social science and humanities disciplines strutting into the American academy remained resolutely ethnocentric. They concocted from sanitized American and European experiences universal models and theories that blissfully ignored the reality and diversity of global histories and geographies, cultures and societies, politics, and economies. The area studies project enabled the disciplines both to retain their epistemic superiority and acquire new testing sites for the affirmation of their supposedly eternal theoretical probity.

Third, given the centrality of race and racism in American society and social imaginary, the development of area studies was invariably tied to the fate of ethnic minorities. Euro-American African studies inherited the pervasive “scientific racism” that colored much of the work on Native Americans, African Americans, and other marginalized populations. The exclusion of these populations from American political and cultural citizenship necessitated the separation of their ancestral cultures and continents from disciplinary narratives. Ironically, it also propelled the exclusion of racial minorities from the area studies programs themselves in the spurious name of objectivity.

Euro-American African studies benefitted from two other trends after World War II. As I argued in another paper, the growing commoditization and corporatization of academic culture:

forced and facilitated the divorce of academics from social movements, civic engagement, and public intellectualism. Intellectual life became increasingly

professionalized thanks to the explosive postwar expansion of university education and the growth of middle-class comforts, consciousness, and conservatism, all of which spawned a social science research culture that valorized objectivity, detachment, and a mindless chase for theory. This expedited the separation of African studies from domestic African American constituencies and reinforced the use of deductive methods and models, in which Africa was reduced to a testing site for theories manufactured with faddish regularity in the American academy.¹⁰

The second trend was the emergence of the development industry. I had interrogated modernization theories in my earlier work in the 1980s on economic history. I noted how the language of development in the British Empire emerged with the Colonial Development Act of 1929, which was further elaborated by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945.¹¹ Development discourse was part of the ideological armory of colonialism. By the late 1920s, the narrative of colonialism as a civilizing mission was already losing its Social Darwinian currency. It was finally buried in the aftermath of the ghastly barbarisms of World War II. In the context of the Cold War in which the Soviet Union and Marxist ideologues blamed Third World poverty on colonial exploitation and imperialism, liberal western scholars found succor in modernization paradigms and prayed to the gospel of W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*.¹²

Development discourse gave area studies, including Euro-American African studies, the prescriptive muscle of the massive development industry. The paradigmatic and political gulf between the two solitudes of the HBCUs and HWCUs in African studies widened. In the latter, the field drifted to policy and development-oriented research and professional encounters with Africa, away from posing large civilizational and cultural questions and popular engagement valued by Pan-African intellectuals and many in the HBCUs. Moreover, while the Africa of the Afro-American tradition was continental, that of the Euro-American African studies was largely truncated to the sub-Saharan contraption: a conception of Africa deeply rooted in Eurocentric thought.

This was sanctified by the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel who infamously dismissed "Africa proper" as "the land of childhood which, lying beyond the day of history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night."¹³ "Africa proper" excluded North Africa, which was within the bosom of history. Hegel's ghost roamed the corridors of African studies centers in the HWCUs. As center director at Illinois, where North Africa was incorporated into the

Center for Middle Eastern Studies, I fought this Hegelian separation and diminution of Africa and sought to reclaim the entire continent as “Africa proper.”

Ironically, in the 1960s African studies departments in the HWCUs were the main beneficiaries of struggles for civil rights. As I noted in a paper on the development of African studies, African American studies, and Africana Studies, “there were intense reverberations between decolonization in Africa and civil rights in the US, which had epistemological and institutional consequences. Both independence and decolonization brought more African and African American students and faculty to predominantly white American universities. Independence brought more Africans to the US seeking education to develop their postcolonial nations, while the civil rights movements opened doors for African Americans to enter white-dominated institutions, as well as migrants from Third World regions.”¹⁴

The racial minorities entering the white campuses encountered racism and curricular exclusion. For African American and African students, this engendered struggles for studies of the histories and cultures of African peoples across the Atlantic. Thus:

the African American studies movement was both an ally and a foe of African studies. Many a reluctant university administration was forced to develop African studies programs in direct response to the institutional, intellectual, and ideological challenges posed by militant African American students... whose demands for courses on the Black experience soon turned into calls for Black studies departments, centers, institutes, or programs that should both be independent and involved in community service.¹⁵

In short:

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 African studies, and emphasizing the collective black experience, it challenged African studies in which the study of Africa and the African America and the African diaspora more generally were strictly separated.¹⁶

As more African academics arrived on American campuses in the 1980s and

1990s fleeing authoritarian states and impoverished universities, a third Africa entered the American academy that had complex, often contradictory relationships with the two long-standing Africas. The entry of African-born academics offered African studies both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, I wrote:

many were not always sensitive to the racial dynamics and demands of American society and the academy; some even internalized the dominant's society's negative stereotypes of African Americans, which often made them accomplices with European Americans in America's eternal racial war, for which they were sometimes rewarded with preferential hiring and promotion over African Americans.¹⁷

However, the longer the African migrants stayed in the United States and as their children navigated the treacherous racial quagmire of low expectations for peoples of African descent, the more they increasingly gravitated towards African American grievances. These were reinforced by their own long-standing grumblings about the marginality of African voices in African studies and the gatekeeping functions of white scholars in publications on their countries of origin.

Out of these complex dynamics and other structural developments in the American academy, including growing fiscal constraints that generated pressures for consolidation of academic programs in some universities, the institutional architecture and intellectual division of labor in African studies began to creak. Joint programs of African and African American Studies started emerging on many campuses. Although there were tensions over nationality, gender, discipline, and modalities of public engagement, which manifested themselves principally over faculty searches, course scheduling, and extra-curricular programming, the trend towards more comprehensive Africana studies became unmistakable.

I was part of this trajectory when I became chair of an African American studies department as it sought to expand its African curriculum. In 2008, I became president of the African Studies Association and in my presidential address the following year, I spoke on "African Diasporas: Towards a Global History."¹⁸ I urged the African studies community to incorporate diaspora studies and abandon parochial Eurocentric approaches to the study of Africa and US-centric methods to the study of African global diasporas. I had previously argued at length on the need to globalize African studies in several books, including *Rethinking Africa's Globalization. Vol. 1: The Intellectual*

*Challenges, and The Study of Africa Vol. 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters and Vol 2: Global and Transnational Engagements.*¹⁹

Volume 1 of *The Study of Africa* examines how the continent has been studied in all the major humanities and social science disciplines and interdisciplinary fields since the 19th century. Volume 2 interrogates African studies in different world regions, including Asia-Pacific (China, India, Japan, and Australia), Europe (Britain, France, Germany, and Russia), and the Americas (Brazil, Caribbean, and United States), as well as international and global frames of analysis. Time does not allow me to elaborate on the two books, except to encourage you to buy them! Suffice to say, each region and nation has developed its own Africa in terms of intellectual preoccupations, ideological tendencies, and institutional organization. This often reflects the history of relations between the country concerned and African countries, the dominant intellectual traditions, and the country's relative positioning in global scholarship and affairs.

Thus, African studies within each discipline and across various world regions have their own distinctive features, which is an argument against facile homogenization and the tendency to put the United States on a global pedestal. I get worried when some critics inadvertently recenter or reinscribe American hegemony by assuming it is the global center of African Studies. I was recently reminded of this by an article that complained about the "gentrification of African studies," as if this is a new phenomenon.²⁰ Indeed the dominant version of African studies in the United States, Euro-American African studies, was never established to serve Africa, or even its own African diaspora, the second largest in the world after Brazil.

EMBRACING THE DIASPORA

The diaspora has always played an important role in modern African history. As I noted in an essay on diaspora knowledge production:

the diaspora has been a critical site of knowledge production on Africa for a long time...As both a place and a project, a cultural and cognitive community, the diaspora has provided an unusually fertile space for imagining and writing on Africa... During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as colonialism reconfigured the global civilizational presence of Africans and reconnected Africa to its diaspora, the diaspora became crucial to the (re)constructions of Africa as an idea, Africa as an object of study, Africans as academics, and pan-Africanism as a project.²¹

In short, the HBCUs where the Kwame Nkrumahs and Nnamdi Azikiwes attended college in the 1930s—the HWCUs were not yet open to them—“were in the forefront of producing both knowledge and personnel, counter-hegemonic discourses and developmental capacities for the diaspora itself and Africa.”²² The HBCUs continue to employ a significant proportion of African-born academics today. The political contributions of the historic diaspora are significant. As I remarked in an address on the diaspora a few weeks ago, “The first thing to note when discussing the political contributions of the diaspora to Africa’s transformation is the fact that the African nationalisms that brought about decolonization were incubated by the Trans-Atlantic Pan-African movement which first emerged in the diaspora.”²³

Contemporary African governments and communities value the diaspora for their economic contributions, especially remittances. The new diaspora is Africa’s biggest donor, eclipsing official development assistance and investments from the USA, EU, and China, not to mention the purveyors from the entertainment industry of the mercy development complex that feast on African commiseration. In 2017, diaspora remittances reached \$69.5 billion. If one adds diaspora philanthropy, investment, and human capital flows, the scale of diaspora socioeconomic contributions becomes truly staggering.

As previously noted, the historic diaspora has been an intellectual asset. The new diaspora constitutes a source of intellectual capital—an intellectual remittance—that Africa needs to mobilize more systematically and strategically. I’ve been involved in this endeavor for some years, borne out of my own diaspora condition and fascination with the field of diaspora studies. This fascination began in the 1990s and became stronger in the 2000s as I increasingly reflected on my personal and professional circumstances, not to mention those of my family. The joint appointment I held at the Pennsylvania State University in the departments of history and African and African American studies reinforced my understanding of the complex institutional history and academic politics of African American studies.

It was while I was at Penn State that I embarked on my global project on the African diaspora, which was aided by a generous grant from the Ford

Foundation that enabled me to travel over a period of four years to sixteen countries in South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia to research the history of African diasporas. Out of these amazing trips, I published an academic travelogue, *In Search of African Diasporas: Testimonies and Encounters*.²⁴ In the mid-2000s I began publishing essays and books in which I sought to understand both our theoretical conceptualization of the diaspora and the historical mapping of the diaspora.²⁵ For the latter, I became interested in three things: the patterns of dispersal of African peoples around the world, the processes of diaspora formation in different regions, and the changing dynamics of diaspora engagement with Africa.

One of the greatest joys of my intellectual life is that my diaspora work led to my being commissioned by Carnegie Corporation of New York in 2011-2012 to undertake a study on the African academic diaspora in Canada and the United States: their size and scope, their patterns of engagement with African higher education institutions, and these institutions' perspectives on how best to build effective modalities of engagement for mutual benefit.²⁶

In 2013 we established the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP) under an innovative model in international education exchanges involving four organs—the Carnegie Corporation providing funding, the International Institute for Education providing administrative and logistical support, the Advisory Council of prominent African academics and administrators in Africa and the diaspora providing strategic direction, and USIU-Africa hosting the secretariat. To date, the program has exceeded expectations. It has awarded fellowships to a total of 385 diaspora academic projects. Altogether, 187 African universities have applied to host a fellow, and 107 universities have been selected.

Clearly, there is huge demand by African institutions for diaspora academics and there is a need to expand beyond fellowships to other modalities of engagement to appeal to different stakeholders. Based on CADFP's experience, success and lessons learned, it was decided at the first Higher Education Summit held in Dakar in March 2015 to establish the 10/10 Program to sponsor 1000 academicians in the diaspora, both from the historic and new diasporas anywhere in the world across all disciplines, every year, to anywhere on the continent.

In pursuit of this agenda, CADFP, in collaboration with various partners, including USIU-Africa, organized a conference at Harvard University in March

2017 that brought together key stakeholders from government, business, universities, and philanthropic organizations to explore the establishment of the 10/10 program. Plans are now advanced to hold a follow-up meeting in June 2019 in Nairobi to reflect on the Dakar Summit, refine the key action points of the Harvard meeting, and launch the Consortium of African Diaspora Academic Programs.

REVITALIZING AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

In my work on African universities, I have identified three broad periods: what I call the golden era that lasted from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the crisis era from the late 1970s to the turn of the 2000s, and the recovery era over the past decade and a half. The golden era was characterized by the excitement of building new universities and expanding old ones; vigorous efforts to decolonize the disciplines; stable, if not vibrant, state support; and relatively good relations between the intelligentsia and the political class.

The crisis era was marked by the financial assaults of structural adjustment and the political onslaught of authoritarianism. Universities were no longer seen as essential to the national project but as bastions of subversive “foreign” ideologies and student radicalism. Many had long fulfilled their original mission to create the cadre for Africanization of the civil service, which in any case was being decimated under SAPs. The old systems, structures, and stabilities of African higher education disappeared, and academics increasingly found themselves casualties. Battles of various kinds and intensities were waged within and outside universities over missions and mandates, legitimacy, and their status as producers, disseminators, and consumers of scientific and scholarly knowledge.

As African economies began their hesitant recovery in the 2000s, and the importance of knowledge economies and societies were trumpeted, a period of reform began accompanied by the explosive growth of the university sector. In the two-volume study, *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century*, which I co-edited, we identified the broad contours of the reform agenda centered on five issues, namely, the philosophical foundations and mission of African universities; the challenges of quality control, funding, and governance; the dynamics of teaching and learning, and the volume and value of knowledge production; the role of universities in the pursuit of the historic project of African nationalism and in helping to manage and resolve the crises of development; and their capacity to promote the Pan-African

project and pursue more equitable internationalization for African higher education systems.²⁷

As indicated at the beginning of my remarks, USIU-Africa is celebrating its golden anniversary this year. As noted in my book, *The Transformation of Global Higher Education*, when the university was being established in 1969, there were only 170 universities across the continent, 35 of which were private. The number of universities increased to 446 in 1989, out of which 112 were private. In the 1990s, 338 new institutions were established, and in the 2000s another 647. By 2015, private universities outnumbered public universities: 972 out of 1639.

Currently, according to the World Higher Education Database, there are 1,682 universities. The majority are private. Clearly, this is nothing short of phenomenal. Yet, in global terms, Africa has the smallest number of universities of any region, except Oceania. Worldwide there are 18,772 higher education institutions, putting Africa's share at 8.9 percent. Asia boasts the largest share at 37 percent, followed by Europe with 21.9 percent, North America at 20.4 percent, and Latin America and the Caribbean with 12 percent.

Equally revealing is data on enrollments. In a presentation at the Annual Conference of the Commission for University Education last October, I noted that according to UNESCO data, enrollments in Africa remains relatively small. The total number of students in African higher education institutions in 2017 stood at 14,654,667.7 million, out of 220,704,239.5 million worldwide, or 6.6 percent, which is less than the continent's share of institutions.²⁸ Forty-five percent of the African students are in Northern Africa. To put it more graphically, Indonesia has nearly as many students in higher education institutions as the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (7.98 million to 8.03 million). Enrollment rates tell the story differently. In 2017, the world's average enrollment rate was 37.88 percent, compared to 8.98 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 33.75 percent in Northern Africa. Only Algeria and Mauritius boasted enrollment rates higher than the world average: 47.72 percent and 38.84 percent, respectively. Kenya's stood at 11.66 percent in 2016 behind twelve other African countries that had data.

Clearly, we have a long way to go. In 2017, the enrollment rate of the high-income countries was 77.13 percent, for upper-middle-income countries it was 52.07 percent, for the middle-income countries 35.59 percent, and for

lower-middle-income countries 24.41 percent. The proverbial development case of South Korea is instructive. As pundits never tire of pointing out, in 1960 the country's level of development was comparable to some African countries: its enrollment rate in 2017 was 93.78 percent! And China, the emerging colossus of the world economy, had a rate of 51.01 percent. Put simply, not enough Africans are going to university.

However, the challenge is not simply to grow the number of universities, which is essential for our countries to meet the pressures of the youth bulge, the fastest growing in the world, but to grow in a smart and sustainable way. Much of the growth in Africa's higher education sector has been haphazard. This has predictably led to declining educational quality. Equally critical is the question of research, the other key product of higher education institutions. Here, too, African countries and universities face many challenges.

According to UNESCO data, in 2013 gross domestic expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP in Africa was 0.5 percent, compared to a world average of 1.7 percent, and 2.7 percent for North America, 1.8 percent for Europe, and 1.6 percent for Asia. Africa accounted for a mere 1.3 percent of global Research and Development (R&D). Global spending on R&D has now reached US\$1.7 trillion, 80 percent of which is accounted for by only ten countries. In first place in terms of R&D expenditure as a share of GDP is South Korea with 4.3 percent and in tenth place the United States with 2.7 percent.

In terms of total expenditure, the United States leads with \$476 billion followed by China with \$371 billion. What is remarkable is that among the top 15 R&D spenders, expenditure by the business sector is the most important source, ranging from 56 percent in the Netherlands to 71.5 percent in the United States. In contrast, for the 14 African countries that UNESCO has data, business as a source of R&D is more than 30 percent in three countries, led by South Africa with 38.90 percent, and is less than 1 percent in four countries. In most countries, the biggest contributor of R&D is either government or the outside world. The former contributed more than 85 percent in Egypt, Lesotho, and Senegal and more than 70 percent in another two countries, while the latter contributed a third or more in four countries. Higher education and private non-profit hardly featured.

Not surprisingly, other research indicators are no less troubling. In 2013, Africa as a whole accounted for 2.4 percent of world researchers, compared

to 42.8 percent for Asia, 31.0 percent for Europe, 22.2 percent for the Americas and 1.6 percent for Oceania. Equally low is the continent's share of scientific publications, which stood at 2.6 percent in 2014, compared to 39.5 percent for Asia, 39.3 percent for Europe, 32.9 percent for the Americas, and 4.2 percent for Oceania. The only area Africa claims dubious distinction is in the proportion of publications with international authors. While the world average was 24.9 percent, for Africa, it was 64.6 percent, compared to 26.1 percent for Asia, 42.1 percent for Europe, 38.2 percent for the Americas, and 55.7 percent for Oceania. Thus, like our dependent economies, African scholarship suffers from epistemic extraversion and limited regional integration.

CONCLUSION: THE DECOLONIZATION OF AFRICAN KNOWLEDGES

In short, the project of building the continent's research capacities remains as pressing as ever. This has to be an essential part of the decolonization project. It is gratifying that decolonization of African knowledges is back on the agenda among faculty and students in many of our universities, especially in South Africa. I was privileged to give a public lecture on the subject at the University of the Free State in May 2017. I began by making the following observations.²⁹

Ever since Africa's modern encounters with Europe in the 15th century, African thinkers have confronted the epistemic challenges of Eurocentrism, not to mention the existential and economic threats of European imperialism more generally. Eurocentrism frames African humanity and history as less than, mimetic, and becoming Europe: perpetually infantile. The epistemological, ontological, and historiographical tropes of Eurocentrism permeate intellectual and popular discourses on Africa, distorting, disparaging and demeaning African realities, lives, and experiences. Predictably, Eurocentrism has elicited countervailing affirmations of Africa and Africanness, of African purity, parity, and personhood, as well as defiant assertions of African difference from Europe, equality with Europe, and authenticity without Europe.

The imperatives for refashioning the Eurocentric narratives on Africa have mutated during the long historical geographies of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. These three moments constitute the conjunctures through which the unequal exchanges and engagements, confrontations, and contestations between the African and European worlds were produced

and reproduced. Clearly, the way these eras were experienced in different parts of Africa varied. Consequently, the trends, tempos, and textures of responses and resistances to Eurocentric knowledges, and reclamations and reconstructions of Africa centered knowledges differed.

The struggles over the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “whys” of African knowledges, about the producers, content, periodicity, spatiality, and meaning of studying, researching, and knowing this most ancient and infinitely complex and diverse constellation of peoples called Africa are dateless. They go back millennia to the emergence of African social thought long before the tragic encounters of Africa and Europe in modern times. The historical geographies of these epistemological and ontological battles vary across Africa in their manifestation and intensity. They tend to be captured by the term decolonization.

Both as a temporal condition and analytical or discursive term, decolonization dominated African countries in the heady days of nationalist struggles and the immediate aftermath of independence. The imperatives and contestations over the reorganization of national political, economic, cultural and social life, including education, were particularly heightened in the early decades of the post-colony. For the majority of African countries, this happened from the 1950s to the 1980s. It is not surprising that the debates about the decolonization of knowledge, of the curriculum and academic texts, of scholarly and popular discourses, of modes of being and speech, are currently so hotly contested in South Africa, the last country to join the ranks of postcolonial African states following the end of the grotesque system of apartheid in 1994.

The term decolonization is both illuminating and limiting, combining as it does epistemic desires for decentering Eurocentric knowledges, but in its consuming deconstructive drive it often inadvertently centers the latter in the archives of African knowledges. This is to argue that just as colonialism is not the sum total of African history, Eurocentrism should not be allowed to overwhelm African knowledges of their capaciousness. Africa has different libraries of which the Eurocentric is only one. A project that seeks to liberate African knowledges must begin by understanding the variety, development, and intersections of Africa’s multiple libraries. It must go beyond Afrocentric injunctions of proclaiming Africa’s eternal difference and recognize the enduring and complex conversations of cultures and ideas within Africa itself and between the continent’s societies and civilizations and those of

other continents beyond Europe.

In my work on African intellectual history, I identify four libraries that emerged during the four broad phases in African historiography, each of which embodied various traditions. The first phase is the ancient era that spawned what I call the Afro-Christian, Afro-Islamic, and griot libraries. The second phase is the slave trade era that gave rise to the colonial library. The third phase is the colonial period when the colonial library was consolidated. We are in the fourth phase, the post-independence era, during which the four libraries are locked in fierce contestations. The question is: what are the prospects for a new library to emerge out of the synthesis of these four libraries? And what will this library look like in the era of big science and the digitization of knowledge, work, and social life: an era of artificial intelligence, the internet of things, robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and so on?

This is to make a simple request: let us truly immerse ourselves in African and global histories of knowledge. This proposition is, of course, predictable coming from a historian. I urge us to take seriously the studying of African and world histories and not to apologize for Africa's centrality—certainly to itself and also to the world—in our efforts to recenter Africa and its knowledges and to decenter Eurocentrism and provincialize Europe. The struggle indeed continues.

NOTES

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4. F. Njubi Nesbitt, "African Intellectuals in the Belly of the Beast: Migration, Identity, and the Politics of Exile," *African Issues*, 30, 1 (2002): 70-75.
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10. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Past and Futures of African Studies and Area Studies," *Ufahamu* XXV, 2 (1999): 12.
11. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa," *Transafrican Journal of History* 14 (1985): 139-161.
12. Walt Whitman Rostow's, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
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(New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 91.

14. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "From African Studies and African American Studies to Africana Studies in the United States," *Afrika Focus* 24, 2 (2011): 15.
15. *Ibid.*, 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 15.
17. *Ibid.*, 18.
18. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "African Diasporas: Towards a Global History," *African Studies Review* 53, 1 (2010): 1-19.
19. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *The Study of Africa, Volume 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters* (Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, 2006); Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *The Study of Africa, Volume 2: Global and Transnational Engagements* (Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, 2006).
20. Haythem Guesmi, "The gentrification of African studies," *Africa is a Country*, December 22, 2018. <https://africasacountry.com/2018/12/the-gentrification-of-african-studies>.
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22. *Ibid.*, 219.
23. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Leveraging Africa's Global Diasporas for the Continent's Development," (presentation, conference on "Contribution of the Diaspora to Sustainable Blue Economy for National Development and International Solidarity," University of Nairobi, Kenya, November 26, 2018).
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