

# Bulletin

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## *Race in Africa: Past and Present*

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**Editorial: Policy Implications of the Absence/Presence of Race in African Studies**

Jesse Benjamin

This issue of the ACAS bulletin is devoted to generating and engaging debate about race and racism in Africa, a subject that is too often silenced and taboo in popular culture, as well as political and academic discourses in Africa and the West. It is probable that much of the difficulty in such discussions, a difficulty experienced similarly throughout the rest of the world to varying degrees, is that race is not just an historical phenomenon. Rather, race is an active and powerful social category that frames and shapes identities and social hierarchies in the societies in which these discussions are so difficult to find, let alone sustain. Race is an uncomfortable topic for those who wish to benefit silently from their racial privileges, whether in the academy or not, and race is also a troubling topic for those who wish to suppress their racial identities in an effort to improve their social standing by assimilating or passing into the ranks of more privileged racial strata, particularly by denying blackness, or Africanity. As such, race and racism in Africa today have numerous and consequential policy implications that are ignored at our common peril.

These phenomena are certainly not unique to Africa. The categories that colonial racism constructed and invented as part of its processes of rule, its “rule of colonial and racial difference,” continue to operate powerfully to apportion power and well-being in the world today. This is a central point of many new works on post-Civil Rights and post-Independence racial hierarchies. A good example is the recent work of Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto*, where he argues that global anti-colonial movements created the false impression to some that racial social cleavages had diminished or dissolved, when in fact they persist and have in many cases solidified. While his exemplary exposition might raise questions for some about genealogies of knowledge production, the central point is inescapable and salient.

The collection of essays in this ACAS Bulletin are an attempt to join in recent efforts to break the taboos and openly discuss race and racism in Africa. This was perhaps most forcefully achieved by the Durban World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001, which the US and Israel strategically withdrew from and boycotted. The conference Final Report noted “with concern the continued and violent occurrence of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that theories of superiority of certain races and cultures over others, promoted and practiced during the colonial era, continue to be propounded in one form or another even today,” and stood in “solidarity with the people of Africa in their continuing struggle” against these forms of racism and xenophobia. The Final Report also acknowledged the role of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, as well as colonialism, nationalism, and continuing economic underdevelopment and marginalization in the continuation of racism as a problem in the world today.

That same year, Mahmood Mamdani added to this important debate with his provocative work, *When Victims Become Killers* (2001), in which he sketched a schematic model of invented social hierarchies and ethno-racial conflicts for much of the continent. Regional scholars raised specific concerns with this ambitiously broad model, but few have taken up the broader implications of the conversation Mamdani initiated. Then the *CODESRIA Bulletin* (1 & 2, 2004) devoted a double issue to addressing some of these concerns, and succeeded in furthering and pulling together several diverse aspects of this debate. Much of this, necessarily, centered on post-apartheid South Africa, where both much and little has changed in terms of racial hierarchies and distributions of power in the contemporary social terrain. Here too, readers partook of the ongoing Mbembe-Zeleza debate, some of which is concerned with the critical underlying questions of whether anti-colonial

political economy or post-modern and post-structuralist models provide the most relevant frameworks for critical intellectual and political engagement in Africa today. While it is important that new models be employed and formulated from within African contexts, there is also concern that we should not be too quick to throw out useful analytic tools whose political efficacy may have dwindled in the current global alignment. Most recently, Martin Klein edited a collection in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (39:1, 2005), which contributed to the historiography of race and the legacies of racial chattel slavery in diverse regions of Africa. These works showed the significant “persistence of forms of servility,” and the fact that: “Most slaves stayed where they were. Slave-master relations were gradually renegotiated...” (Klein 2005: 2-3). This uncomfortable persistence would rather be ignored by those with privilege today, but cannot be contained indefinitely, so a strategic return to history is important in this context as we seek meaningful paths to a just future.

This should be a central concern: that the hierarchies of slavery, colonialism and their attendant racial models did not simply evaporate upon their juridical dissolution, but continued in cultural and political significance into the current moment. This was one of Winant’s central points, and in so doing he echoes the concerns, widely uttered at the very moment of decolonization, that what was really occurring at that time was simply neo-colonialism, or colonialism by new means. Perhaps this is why the 1960s and 1970s cautionaries about neo-colonialism were largely supplanted in the academy by the 1980s with talk of post-colonialism, and scholars today too often ignore the critical work of Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and many others so often read as activists/leaders rather than scholars. Yet, it must also be said that some of the best critical theorists writing today, who might be labeled post-structuralists by some, do not necessarily make these sorts of errors of academic segregation, but include these formulations and the movements that sustained them in their current critiques of power and identity in the present (Sylvia Wynter 2003,

Zine Magubane 1999, 2004). A recent work by Maghan Keita, Race and the Writing of History: Riddling the Sphinx, argues that race plays a central role in constructions of knowledge about Africa, and the epistemologies that enable them, meaning that race is not just experienced “on the ground,” but also by the academic and/or public media that represent [or misrepresent] these realities.

This special issue comes at a time when tensions around race in Africa are high. While there is pointed disagreement about it, the conflict in Darfur, Sudan has significant racial tones, and many would argue that conscious mobilizations of race are a primary factor in this conflict. The legacies of race and its ongoing significance can also be seen in places like Zanzibar, where electoral violence recently erupted again; or Morocco, where issues of African migration to France and Europe have flared into increasingly open conflict and questions of government mishandling and “dumping” of migrants in the desert. What is needed, and all too often absent, in these contexts, is nuanced and historically informed analyses of how race and racism play a part in these social issues, moving beyond efforts to dismiss race as a factor, but also beyond those who would deploy simple notions of black and white as well. Together with critiques of the French and Moroccan governments’ responses to issues of African migration, there needs to be discussion of Moroccans demonstrating outside detention centers chanting “We are all Africans,” and analysis of the impact of North and West African hip-hop and music generally on European cultures to the north. These discussions are especially timely as this issue comes to press, in the wake of the burning of the Paris suburbs and ghettos throughout France as low-income primarily African neighborhoods protested unemployment, police brutality, isolation and frustration brought on by racism and discrimination woven within the French social fabric.

The collection presented here is necessarily fragmentary and incomplete, and calls inherently for more discussions along these lines, more open debate, wrestling with the most contentious

of social issues of race and racism throughout the continent and spilling into its Diasporas. We open the issue with a timely historical contextualization of the Darfur conflict, by Alex de Waal. Excerpted from the new introduction to the second edition of his Famine That Kills, this portion of his general introduction attempts to connect his earlier analysis of famine and conflict in the region with the cataclysmic events now unfolding in Darfur. In the process, he provides readers with rare historical insight into some of the elements that lie behind this disturbing situation, including the role of Gaddafi's militarization of Pan-Arab identification as he recruited soldiers for an 'Islamic Legion' to fight in Libya's war with Chad, some of which is now spilling into and contributing to conflict in the Darfur region, and even Chad itself. De Waal's analysis is particularly poignant at this juncture for those of us trying to assemble some critical perspective on what is happening in Darfur, even as we work to support intervention into and resolution of the continuing human rights atrocities there. Thanks are extended to de Waal for his kind permission to reprint his explosive analysis here, and readers may also wish to see his extended work on this subject, with Julie Flint, in: Darfur: A Short History of a Long War (2006).

Babacar M'bow further stirs some of these issues into our much needed debate, as he engages in general terms the layers of both European and Arab racial formulations vis-à-vis Africa and Africans. Too often scholars stop at the point of deconstructing the European use of anti-Arab stereotypes to legitimize their chattel slavery and colonial depredations, rightfully refusing these reductive formulations. Yet, this has resulted in an inability by most to engage pre-colonial, non-Western, Arab, Jewish and Christian forms of racism and anti-Black sentiment, much of which provided the epistemological gateway for Europe's subsequent "scientific" racism. The recent work of Jonathon Schorsch (2004), demonstrates through analysis of Jewish texts, carefully embedded in their Islamic and Christian contexts, that anti-black views were well established in the pre-Columbian Mediterranean and Ottoman worlds, less regularized to be sure

than they would become in the following centuries, but solid and consistent nonetheless. The Hamitic hypothesis, and its gradual racialization is carefully traced, largely for the first time in such depth. M'bow challenges us to take seriously the works of C. A. Diop and Chancellor Williams, and the millennial expanse they traverse in their analyses, so that we can engage the Arab and white South African models of racial formation in the continent. This is not a simple anti-Arab intervention, but a necessary call to engage in issues which the academy has studiously chosen to ignore for the most part. Vigorous critiques of historical Arab racial attitudes and practices, as well as acknowledgements of less common anti-racist tendencies, are necessary components for contemporary co-existence. Future installments in this long-term dialogue will undoubtedly include critical Arab perspectives on these issues as well. Thank you to Babacar for gracing our issue with his honest and tough-minded engagement of difficult social issues, whose implications for politics reach far across wide portions of the African continent and beyond.

Turning to Zimbabwe, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni pushes in another important direction, by calling into question the ruling party's nationalist invocations of Pan-African anti-colonialism, and showing how, as has happened throughout many regions of the continent, these ideas have often become slogans papering over authoritarian rule. Gatsheni calls on us to move past facile colonizer-colonized dichotomies into discussions of the complex and layered ways in which communities resisted and yet necessarily engaged colonialism at political economic and epistemological/cultural levels. Anti-colonial discourses that reproduce colonial binaries of rural/urban, or reproduce the fetishization of technology and modernity may not be that anti-colonial after all. Since colonialism has necessarily and fundamentally altered the cultural landscape of Africa, the question is less of rejecting than critically engaging these legacies, beyond the very dichotomies imported by the European epistemologies that underpinned colonial transformations. Here again, the reader is lead directly from theoretical reformulations, in this case about colonial racial

and nationalist discourses, to direct policy concerns in the political struggles of Zimbabwe today.

Jesse Benjamin and Lindah Mhando both offer examples of the intersection of theoretical interpretation with policy and power in Africa today. Benjamin looks at three strands of narrative on coastal East African identity, post-modern Western perspectives on invented identities, 'neo-nationalist' Swahili perspectives on Swahili identity, and subaltern counter-hegemonic Mijikenda perspectives on the same issues. While the former two perspectives generally discounted nineteenth century Swahili and Arab racial formations under the aegis of growing British and French imperialism, the latter grounds its analysis in this period and accurately identifies its legacies in shaping today's social hierarchies and social categories as they play out in power struggles over land, historiographic representation and economic power. Similarly, Mhando stretches the theoretical categories of colonialism and identity formation to encompass the better part of modernity, with direct implications for contemporary understandings of both race and gender. Mhando deftly illustrates the direct relationship between the theoretical tools we use and the understandings of social stratification we construct, underscoring the necessity for socially committed scholarship.

Finally, Meredith Turshen rounds out our collection with a review of Amy Chua's *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*. Showing that Chua reflects the pro-democracy and globalizations of Thomas Friedman, Turshen reveals a broad conflation of the basic categories employed, such as tribe, ethnicity and nationalism. Also flattened are broad differences of "minority" groups under colonial domination and acting as agents of colonial domination, as well as differences between white settler and colonized subjects, all of whom are generalized within the same schemata. As did several of the authors of this collection, Turshen's review raises questions about many of the categories currently in use even in critical conceptualizations of Africa, and

the politics embedded in the division of the world according to them. This again reveals a powerful connection between epistemology and discourse on the one hand, and political economy and power on the other, or put another way, between theory and politics.

When a colonial model based on the notion that "only the whip can civilize the black," and which therefore saw extermination and subjugation as 'proper,' 'civilized' and 'modernizing,' ruled Africa and much of the world for the greater part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lindqvist 1996: 20 and passim), could the legacies of colonial racism be anything but extreme and manifold. Add the central element that British and other colonial models were explicitly based on developing local collaborators in their divide and rule policies, and the racial-colonial legacies become diverse and persistent. Unless scholars and activists more rigorously and thoroughly engage these living legacies, we are doomed to witness their reincarnation in ever new and old forms. It is hoped that this collection, in line with those that recently preceded it, will help further promote dialogue and debate on this most contentious of issues. Refinements, disputes, additions and corrections are warmly welcomed for future issues on this important subject.

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### Origins of the Darfur Crisis of 2003-04

Alex de Waal

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When I lived in Darfur, the region was at peace. Barely a month after I left, more than one thousand displaced Dinka were murdered in ed Da'ien, marking the beginning of Darfur's current era of bloodshed. In retrospect, the ability I had to travel the entire length and breadth of the region, with minimal security worries and no travel permit required, was a luxury that no subsequent researcher or aid worker has had. By 1987, political processes were in motion that led ultimately to the outbreak of war in 2003 and its escalation into genocidal massacre and displacement. It is deeply sad that Darfur should not only be a textbook study of famine, but of genocide as well.

Throughout Famine that Kills there are hints of coming violence. The discussion of the strained relations between the Fur farmers of Nankose and the nearby pastoralists (p. 52), and the disputes associated with moving herds through the settled areas of Goz Dango (pp. 155-6) are examples. But perhaps the most significant clue lies in Sheikh Hilal Musa's comments on the disturbed moral geography of Darfur consequent on drought (p. 87). It was in long discussions

with the ageing nazir of the Jalul Rizeigat at Aamo near Fata Borno in November 1985, that I became aware of how the changing ecology of Darfur also profoundly disturbed the moral order of society. Sheikh Hilal upbraided me for not speaking Arabic like an Englishman (colonial officers were trained in classical Arab), served sweet tea on a silver platter, presented me with a giraffe-tail fly whisk, and told me the world was coming to an end.

The entire text of Famine that Kills contains not a single reference to 'Africans', whether 'black' or 'indigenous.' The terminology and the concepts that underlie it were simply not in use. Identities were complex and overlapping. Individuals and groups could shift from one category to another. For example the Gimir people appear to have become 'Arabs' in the last two decades. In short, Darfur showed a characteristic 'Sudanic' pattern of permeable ethnic boundaries. Racism existed, evident in the reciprocal insults of Arab and Fur at Nankose when arguing over pastures. But Darfur's Arab-African dichotomy is an ideological construct that has emerged very recently, largely as a result of events outside the region. Arab

supremacism in Darfur was born in 1987 along with the region's 'Arab Alliance,' which owes more to Khartoum and Libya than to any realities in Darfur. This in turn led Fur and Masalit militants to adopt the label 'African', emphasizing a common political identity with Southerners and the Nuba. This simplistic dichotomization was encouraged by foreign commentators' casual use of the same terminology to interpret Sudan's civil war.

But neither must we create an idealized harmonious past for Darfur. Just as the point of historical reference for 1984-5 was the juju famine of seventy years earlier, there are obvious historical parallels for today in the 'turmoil and bloodshed' that marked the decades after 1874. Amid the struggles for resource and state power of those years we can identify millenarian and racist ideology. By the same token, what we know about the nature and scale of the atrocities committed today may give us insight into the unrecorded human experience of war, massacre, pillage and rape a century ago.

How did the conflict and massacres of 2003-04 originate? There is little writing in English on this issue worthy of note (for an exception, see International Crisis Group 2004). Let me briefly examine the roles of land, settlement of disputes, national politics, and ideology.

Land rights are key to understanding Darfur and the conflicts therein. One important set of issues surrounds communal land jurisdiction, notably the question of the still-uncertain legal status of the concept of a tribal dar, hakura, or homeland. In his overview of Sudan's land laws, Saeed el Mahdi noted cautiously that tribes have become 'almost the owners of their homelands' (1979, p. 2, emphasis added; see also Rüniger 1987). Let us note the anomalous situation of several pastoral groups that were not awarded dars by the colonial authorities. While the large Baggara groups of southern Darfur were all awarded de facto jurisdiction over substantial tracts of territory, smaller and more itinerant groups were either given more limited dars (Beni Hussein, Zayadiya) or none at all (Salamat and the three branches of the northern Rizeigat, namely Jalul, Mahariya and Ereigat). These latter groups were inevitably more dependent on the stability of the

'moral geography' of Darfur. When land was plentiful, this was rarely problematic, but the rapid using-up of free cultivable land and the degradation of the range meant that land disputes became more common and more bloody in the 1980s. Recall Sheikh Hilal's interpretation of the ecological changes in moral and cosmic terms. Perhaps it is no coincidence that his son Musa is the leader of the Janjawiid militia, and that the northern Rizeigat are the backbone of this force.

The maintenance of law and order and the resolution of disputes are two of the most basic functions of government. Neither has been consistently performed in Darfur since the 1980s. President Nimeiri's creation of a Darfur regional government in 1980, and his failure to provide it with resources, meant that local administration went into a steep decline from which it has not recovered. In the mid-1980s, the two big development projects in the region (Western Savanna Development Corporation and Jebel Marra Rural Development Project) and Save the Children Fund, which was handling food aid distributions on behalf of USAID, had larger budgets, more vehicles, and greater capacity to operate in rural areas than the government. If the police wanted to conduct an operation against brigands, they needed to commandeer agency vehicles and fuel. The governor was no longer able to cover the costs of lengthy or well-attended inter-tribal conferences.

As a result, law enforcement collapsed almost entirely, and the authorities compensated for the rarity of apprehending bandits with the savagery of the punishments they meted out. Communities acquired guns to deter armed robbers. Herders, having more valuable and more mobile capital stock, armed themselves more. Without mediation, disputes escalated. When inter-communal conferences were convened, government did not have the capacity to implement the decisions reached. The division of Darfur into three states and the revival of the Council of Native Administration, both in 1994-5, did nothing to address the basic problem of empty local coffers. On the contrary, assigning amarat ('principalities'—the new form of dars)

on an ethnic basis became simply a charter for militarized ethnicity and its corollary, ethnic cleansing.

Darfur has managed well in the past with a light hand of administration. Manipulation by successive governments in Khartoum led to war. The first conflict was sparked in 1987 when the Libya-Chad war overflowed into Sudan. For some years, Libya had hosted exiles from Sahelian Arab groups that ranged from the Sudanese Ansar (followers of the Mahdi, in exile opposed to the Nimeiri government) to Tuareg rebels from Mali. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi armed and trained them and recruited many into an 'Islamic Legion,' which served as a spearhead for his war in Chad. He nursed the dream of an 'Arab belt' across the entire Sahel. After 1986, through Gaddafi's partnership with Prime Minister Sadiq el Mahdi, Libyan-backed militia used Darfur as a rear base, and flooded Darfur with automatic weapons, advertised the impotence of local government, and brought an ideology of Arab supremacism. In response, the Fur organized village defence groups. It became a Darfurian civil war. Belatedly, in May 1989, popular pressure compelled al Mahdi to convene a peace conference in el Fasher.

Brigadier Omer al Bashir launched his coup d'état while this conference was in session. At first, many Darfurians welcomed the coup, hoping that a military government would show the resolve to ensure security in the region. But political polarization was well in train, exemplified by the defection of a leading Fur Islamist, Daud Bolad, to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), whose leader Dr John Garang was seeking an alliance of all of Sudan's marginalized 'African' peoples. In 1991, Bolad led an ill-fated military expedition into the region, aiming to ignite an insurrection among the Fur. Bolad was captured by the military governor of Darfur, Tayeb Ibrahim 'Sikha'—his nickname meaning 'iron bar', for his skill at wielding that instrument at student demonstrations, when he was bodyguard to none other than Bolad. Helped by his capture of Bolad's notebooks, Ibrahim quietly and ruthlessly rounded up the rebellion's supporters. The Beni Halba militia, known as fursan

(cavalry), which had fought the SPLA unit, were rewarded with the provocative renaming of their district capital Idd al Fursan (it was formerly Idd al Ghanam). But Ibrahim also reached out to Darfur's non-Arabs, seeking to neutralize the Darfurian critique of their continuing marginalization in Khartoum politics. He praised their piety and stressed that citizenship was founded on Islamic faith, not race. It was an expedient stratagem, which reflected the wider ambition of Sudan's Islamist leader, Hassan al Turabi, to broaden the base of the Islamic movement from the riverain Arab elites to non-Arab Moslems.

The project of militant Islam in Sudan reached its peak in the mid-1990s. Thereafter, weakened by internal contradictions and regional antagonism, it began to implode (de Waal and Abdel Salam 2004). The movement split in 1999, when President Bashir dismissed Turabi from his position as Speaker of the National Assembly and later arrested him. Many of the leaders and most younger cadres followed Turabi into opposition. This split had several ramifications. One was that henceforth, the government's Islamism was rhetorical and defensive: it had abandoned its ambitions at social transformation. Another was that the division took on a regional or ethnic dimension. Most of the 'westerners' (from Darfur and Kordofan) went into opposition, while most of the riverain Arabs (and security officers) stayed in government. Shortly afterwards, Islamist 'westerners' produced the 'Black Book', which detailed how successive governments had marginalized Darfur and Kordofan. Some Islamists formed the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to fight in Darfur, and others supported it more or less openly. One dimension to the Darfur war is a civil war among the Islamists. The intimacy of this conflict among former comrades militates against its easy resolution.

Meanwhile, conditions were ripe for Darfur's radical secularists to revive the resistance movement that had aborted in 1991. The backbone of this is lawyers, schoolteachers and community leaders, from the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa, who formed the Darfur Liberation



Front. After beginning military operations in early 2003 they renamed themselves the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army, in a deliberate echo of the SPLA. The Islamist and radical secularists found themselves in an improbable coalition. The SLA quickly showed military panache and capacity, attacking (among other targets) el Fasher airport and destroying military aircraft.

The Sudanese state is weak, but for short periods of time it can unleash formidable destructive forces. For a decade, the Islamist alliance shielded Darfurians from the historic processes of violent depredation of the Sudanese peripheries by the Sudanese state, and when that shield was lifted, war and massacre duly followed. Was this assault driven by a powerful and explicit ideology (cf. Kuper 1981)? For its 1992 Kordofan jihād, the government had sought an elaborate fatwa to justify their onslaught. Other genocidal episodes in the Sudanese civil war, including the militia raids into Bahr el Ghazal in the late 1980s and the clearing of the oilfields of western Upper Nile during 1998-2002, had only the thinnest ideological veneer. No Islamist legitimation has been attempted for the Darfur campaign—not least because the JEM has better Moslem credentials than the government forces, which have further spoiled their record by desecrating mosques. The latent ‘ideology’ of ‘Sudanization’, namely the spread of specific social and cultural values, economic and political relations, associated with the riverain core of the Sudanese state, is at work, in tandem with the Arab supremacism of the Janjawiid leadership. However, the conjunction of these specific forms of Arabization is surely too weak an explanation for the viciousness of today’s assault.

The Sudan government’s military strategy is the principal reason for the massacre and displacement. Following a twenty-year-old practice, it has fought a low-budget counter-insurgency, using self-financing militias and the cheap weapons of scorched earth and famine. Local components contributing to the growth of militias include economic deprivation and failure to resolve disputes (de Waal 1994b), but

the most important factor is the strategy adopted by security agencies, notably military intelligence. Recurrent untrammelled violence by paramilitaries has been a particularly horrible feature of the war. More Sudanese citizens have died from hunger and disease than by massacre and assassination. In pursuing the militia strategy, the security cabal has often acted beyond the purview of the legislature and executive, and even in opposition to senior officers of the regular army. The security-militia nexus has thrived amid the division and irresolution of different ruling cliques and institutions. It has regularly sought to delay or derail peace negotiations with the SPLA. Arguably, it is the very core of the Sudanese state.

In this context, it is unsurprising that when the SLA and JEM insurrection intensified in 2003, the security cabal should seek out a local militia to arm and support. Candidates were available including the Beni Halba fursan and other armed nomads. The result was the janjawiid. The motives are power, pride, greed and the sheer habit of taking counter-insurgency to its annihilatory extreme.

Is it genocide? Here we encounter problems of definitional bluntness, similar to those encountered when asking what counts as famine. In contrast to the rich conceptual history of ‘famine’, the term ‘genocide’ is a neologism barely sixty years old, whose coinage was coincident with its legal definition in the 1948 Genocide Convention. Because it is a crime, the diagnosis of ‘genocide’ hinges on the perpetrators’ intent. Its lay usage is identified with the extreme and paradigmatic case, the Nazi Holocaust of European Jewry. What is happening in Darfur is not Genocide (capitalized) in this sense of the absolute extermination of a population. It does however fit the definition contained in the Genocide Convention, which is much broader and encompasses systematic campaigns against ethnic groups with the intention of eliminating them in part or whole. This (uncapitalized) ‘genocide’ is a legal term of art, and there is no a priori reason why it should straightforwardly correspond to lived experience or ethnographic

complexity. Despite the caveats outlined above, Darfur's ethnic groups are readily identifiable (e.g. by native language). Moreover, genocidaires invariably seek to obliterate any ethnic complexities and indeterminacies with a simplistic labeling of their target group, exactly as is occurring now. The violence is far in excess of what would be considered proportionate for counter-insurgency purposes, including the deliberate killing, raping and starving of civilians, and the destruction of their livelihoods. Genocidal intent can be shown.

When genocide is diagnosed we must respond. Leaving aside the question of military intervention, we should note that an effective response to Darfur's crisis will be complicated, comprehensive and long. Moreover, in the spirit of *Famine that Kills*, we should attend to the understandings of genocide and its cognates by the people of Darfur (victims, perpetrators and bystanders), and take these concepts and viewpoints into account, rather than privileging an external viewpoint, however legally expert

that may be. Let me conclude with just one preliminary observation on the challenge of an ethnographically-literate response to genocide in Sudan. Outsiders should be humble in the face of the lived experience of surviving genocide. The people of the Nuba Mountains, forgotten by the world, withstood the genocidal assaults of 1988-92 entirely through their own efforts (African Rights 1995). It would have been preferable for them not to have been tested to such limits. But, given that these remarkable people have faced oblivion and survived, scholars, activists and practitioners need to learn from their demonstrated expertise. The people of Darfur have shown comparable resilience in surviving famine: let us hope they have the same skills when faced with genocidal massacre.

Alex de Waal  
Addis Ababa, July 2004

Excerpted, with author's permission, from: Alex de Waal, *Famine That Kills: Darfur, 1984-1985*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

## From Yoke to Yoke: Race and Racism in Africa

Babacar M'Bow

Visible differences between humans have always been observed. However, the conception of these differences in a notion of race is more or less recent in terms of formulation. It has appeared in the era of modern science and derived from the practice of classification into species and sub-species, which was first concerned only with the vegetal, and animal. The discourse of race began in the sixteenth century with regard to the human species. Its corollary-Racism is an ensemble of 'scientific' theories considering the existence of different human races within the human species generally corresponding to large continental ensembles of ethnic groups through a constructed hierarchy. Racism is also a political doctrine advocating the domination by a race said (pure or superior) of others said (impure or inferior). Other meanings include xenophobia and ethnocentrism in the

sense of an attitude of contempt and hostility that can lead to violence towards individuals belonging to a different ethnic group.

While racism in the theoretical and attitudinal sense is still present in practice and policy, recent scientific works have discredited its scientific foundation. The works of Joseph Graves in the Human Genome Project<sup>1</sup> have dismantled the last remnants of its scientific credibility. However, this has not erased the discourse on race and race-based practice at the social, political, and academic levels. We see the discourse migrating from anthropology to other disciplines of the humanities hence the justification for this contribution.

Historical and contemporary discourses on race and racism in Africa have mostly been

articulated from Arabo-European paradigms locating the African at the periphery as either victim or receptor of an epistemology in which his identity is erased. Two central problematics shape these discourses: Calls for the de-linking of race from Africanity by the Arabs and other western descendent groups in Africa on the one hand, and the othering of Africans by Europeans in the process of subjugation. As such, discourses on race within the continent continue to be explored in norms and terminologies making it impossible for African populations to have a clear understanding of the reality in an epistemological framework within their grasp.

### **The Arab Yoke: From Thebes to Darfour**

The situation in Southern Sudan and the Darfour region in particular, the past events in Mauritania and the recent dumping of Africans *refoulés*- expelled illegal immigrants from France in the middle of the desert by the Moroccan government make it all the more necessary to re-open the discourse on race, and racism in Africa. However, some clarifications are required here as tenets of the divide and conquer doctrine always quick to drive a wedge between third world peoples, could see this re-opening as a validation of their Machiavellian strategy of postmodern imperialism. This is to say that while acknowledging Arab historical and contemporary racist practice in Africa, we are mindful of our necessary solidarity with Arab masses in their struggle against both internal and external oppressions.

An analysis of race and racism with regard to Arab practice in Africa requires a going back in time to African prehistory at least 3500 years. In this process, a look at the map of Africa would reveal the position of the Arabs on the African continent, which in itself reveals the historical strangling of African peoples and their cutting off from the sea thus from world exchanges at least towards Asia. The fact that Egypt was the eastern region of Ethiopia is no longer subject to debate nor is the race of Egyptians of antiquity. (Williams 1976). Secondly, there is no longer any doubt about the first inhabitants of what is today North Africa or the Mediterranean from Tunisia to Libya, I mean before the advent of the

leucoderm ‘peoples of the sea’ in these areas (Diop 1997).

Similarly, a heartland of the black covering the six cataracts of the Nile, constituting the watermarks in the heartland of the blacks, is also no longer in doubt. The creation of Egypt - through the unification of the two lower and Upper lands - by Menes, which gave rise to the Egyptian Civilization has also been established. From these historical and geographical positions, we can enter the ‘race’ discourse still locating ourselves in these times to explore the population of these African regions. Beginning with Menes and the first dynasty, we trek forward to identify various black dynasties and the racial dynamic that emerged with the in-between dynasties of what Williams called the Afro-Asians. This is a central point in the discourse because as Egypt turned from black to Brown due to the interbreeding of the races, which began around the northern perimeter, the half brothers of the Africans that were the outcome of the melting pot set out to distinguish themselves from the race of their mothers - African. They bitterly objected to being identified as African and usurped old appellations of Africans such as Egyptians, Moors, Carthaginians etc. To crown their new identity, a doubtful physical anthropology provided the space by artificially creating first a “Black Africa” and later a “Sub-Saharan Africa.”

However, ancient Greeks, the Bible, and the Koran have testified to the fact that black Africans populated these areas (Diop 1997). Diop and Williams’ works are important in that they allow us a more complex reading of contemporary events that may appear unconnected to race. Marc Lavergne’s statement, “The militias could be qualified as Arabs because they have been ‘Arabicized.’ They have been so since longtime, longer than the Massalits, Arawa tribes called Africans but the latter have also been Arabicized ...” in *Le conflit du Darfour n’est pas racial* (The Darfour conflict is not racial),<sup>2</sup> is a classical example of contemporary readings of historical problems.

“Slaves? Nouba! Do you have a God? Break your fast! Even we with light skin do not observe the fast. And you who are black and Ugly pretend....We are your God! Your God is Omar Bechir. You have disfigured the country! We have come to burn you... We will kill your husband and your sons and we will sleep with you! You are our women”<sup>3</sup> -- A Janjawid

What Laverne fails to realize is the impact of the waxing and waning of time that makes historical phenomena so obliterated that their origin is sometimes forgotten and may appear contemporary. The reality is that this conflict is racial. It covers many centuries back into prehistory and is similar to what took place in Zanzibar, Mauritania, and Chad. It has never stopped since five thousand years - that is since Menes. The fact that the two parties seem to be of the same color is just illusory. Fanon described this form of cultural alienation in which a dominated people ends up making its representations supplied by the oppressor in a dominator/dominated dialectic.

The raiding and raping of black women as announced by this Janjawid is not new in this part of the continent. Modern Africanists have ignored the most damaging developments from the Arab impact on Black peoples. From the earliest times, to the seven and actual centuries Arab and Muslim onslaughts of Africans have been going on. What happened was that European imperialism in Africa eclipsed Arab imperialism, blurring historical facts as oppressed peoples of the earth attempt to unite.

### **The European Yoke: Taking Over in the Nineteenth Century**

In the western world, with regard to Africa, the notion of race, and its practice - racism emerged as a “modern” smoke screen in Europe’s ‘civilizing’ ‘humanist’ argument. The discourse of inferiorization of the other [African], by a superior race [European] was presented as justification for all kinds of domination and oppression. The result was seen in genocides such as those of the Herero in Namibia by the

Germans, of massacres of tens of millions of Africans in the Congo by Belgium resulting in the reduction by half of that population, in the massacre of Africans whose only fault was to fight for the defense of a Republic at the banks of the River Seine.<sup>4</sup> Europe’s racial discourse and practice on Africa was then of a genocidal character.

European discourse on race seems to be a legitimization of crimes against humanity, a historical stain in the heart of human “modernity” to justify domination after the enslavement of Africans. Hannah Arendt is right: “racism as the principal ideological weapon of imperialistic policies is so evident that a number of scholars give the impression to prefer to avoid the rehashed paths of truism.”<sup>5</sup>

The eugenic scientific discourse of Sir Francis Galton in 1865, and the work of his cousin Charles Darwin reinforced the idea of an inferior race in an evolutionist perspective. Physico-racial anthropology integrated the notion of inferior races at the end of the XIX century, at the height of European colonial expansion, constituting the ideological basis on which entire generations of scholars were trained. At the beginning, and in the middle of the xx century, modern anthropology recognized a “tropical tropism,” a “traditional” but also a “Neolithic vestige” to the Other, and took care to silence the ethnic and territorial piecing undertaken by European colonizers hence contributing to the “falsification of history.” (Diop) This was a way of constructing an ‘other’ for their convenience.

Hence, we must be cautious in our acceptance of notions and concepts that may appear to exclusively refer to an African reality. A more critical attention to the lexicography would yield many surprises - that is Europe’s reproduction of its own internal contradictions, which it attempted to transpose to Africa. Just as the concept of voodoo dolls is so tied to Haitian traditional religion while it is a known fact that the French exported the concept to Saint Domingue (Ferere 2000). Europe’s gaze on Africa then reproduced its own internal model as reflected in the colonial geographic apportionment of Africa at the Berlin

conference. What followed was a thinking of the other [African] in terms of Europe's own internal realities.

Consequently, we saw the Wallon/Flamand ethnic reality reproduced in Belgium's territorial "share" from the Berlin raping of Africa. The Hutu/Tutsi dynamic is a reproduction of the Belgian model above mentioned; yet, a historical dimension of this magnitude is barely mentioned in academic discourse. We now know the consequences of this model's reproduction in the case of Rwanda.

Africans never recognized this European internal dynamic as a founding element of their heritage and culture. Most wars fought between African states after independence were due to these transposed European realities. The Cote d'Ivoire conflict is another classic example of the unraveling of the French ethnic reality. The colonizer has thus segmented in ethnic terms intersocietal relationships between different local groups. In Senegal, this reproduction led to a class differentiation between the indigenous and the 'citizens'. As such, my mother from Rufisque acceded to a constructed 'Frenchness' that her sister could not afford simply because she lives two hundred miles from the constructed 'identity' site. These were/are the phantasmagorical morphologic characteristics formulated by the colonial power in its racial deliriums.

Europe's notion of race was thus constituted by archaic and fictive representations inseminated in Africa for ends of domination. The notion of ethnic group is a European notion. The ethnic reading grid of the conqueror was thus applied to conquered populations in a model pushing the colonized to identify with the discourse of the oppressor. The consequences are still visible in a neocolonial "African writing of Self."<sup>6</sup>

### **Dispatch from the African Tower**

Relocating to Africa, we hear the re-emergence of the discourse on race smelling from a petrified *ecthyma gangrenosum* of Dispatches of

White Africa<sup>7</sup> in a post Apartheid South African expanding to the continent and resulting in the Council for the Development of Research in Social Science (CODERIA) dedicating its bulletin number 1 & 2 of 2004 to the issue. The wondering of an existence of a "deep malaise anchored in the African psyche that would impeach Blacks to self-govern themselves in an environment of modern democracy" come to us from a white 'African,' Graham Boyton, whose autobiographical work, *Last Days in Cloud Cuckooland: Dispatches from White Africa*, laments the loss of happy white days of Apartheid in a eulogy to Ian Smith and the "old convinced conservators."<sup>8</sup>

Boyton's "nostalgia of colonialism," not of the "violent oppression of Apartheid" he quickly points out, is even more problematic in its hope for Africans to cede them the center of the narrative of our own experience in the hands of their fathers. This is the *ecthyma gangrenosum* that smells from the discourse. However, we need to be aware of the contagious nature of this 'gangrenosum'. It has already invaded former healthy bodies in Africa and sucked all the 'red cells' of reason leading some to believe that: "History shows that the notion of race is not a 'logical' or scientific problem..."<sup>9</sup> It is the cloth that the monk is distinguished and the argument according to which it is Africans' responsibility to construct a 'non-racial center' in which whites and other non-black inhabitants of Africa could feel comfortable - that is a center in which "Africanity is reduced to a diversity consisting of that of individuals and not of the groups..." We heed the injunction by Lansana Keita on the problem between "Africanity' and the "Black race,"<sup>10</sup> by seeking a lexicographical clarification, not only in the *Webster's Ninth New Collegial Dictionary*, but also in the Wolof of Senegal: Xeet - *race* is defined here as a group of people with a common origin. Consequently, when a band of joyful young white men yelled Niggers at my friend Neuville Guarik and me on the River Front of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, they certainly did not know that he was Jamaican and I was Senegalese.

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**Grappling with the Ambiguities of the Colonial Encounter and the Nationalist Paradigm in Zimbabwe<sup>1</sup>**

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>2</sup>

**Introduction**

Since the defeat of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in the Constitutional Referendum in February 2002, President Robert decided to retreat into hard line nativist and emotional nationalist paradigm underpinned by a consistent bashing of colonial history on the one hand and glorification and romanticization of nationalist and the liberation war history on the other. Every negative development in the country was blamed squarely on the colonial legacy including the shortage of basic commodities and the general crisis engulfing Zimbabwe at the moment. At the international level, ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe tirelessly projected the party and its leader as the true inheritors of the pan-Africanist and nationalist liberation tradition in Africa and the Third World.

In Zimbabwe itself, the ruling party and its leader again made a concerted effort to awaken the whole nation to what it termed the looming danger of re-colonization of Zimbabwe and set

the nation on the path of the so-called *Third Chimurenga* (a new nationalist struggle for economic emancipation) predicated on fast track land reform programme and farm invasions. The Zimbabwean youth were taken away from the mainstream society into National Service Training Centres, where they were to be taught the ideals of the liberation war and inculcated with what was termed 'patriotic history.' The emergent opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) under the veteran trade union leader Morgan Tsangirai was lumped together with the white commercial farmers and then *othered* into the so-called 'running dogs of imperialism,' an enemy of Zimbabweans, and a front for re-colonization of Zimbabwe that was not supposed to be tolerated at all. The slogan 'Zimbabwe Will Never Be a Colony' again reverberated on radio and television and Britain (the former colonial power) and its leader Tony Blair was presented as the vampire imperial power that harboured an insatiable desire to re-colonize Zimbabwe. Violence was generally tolerated as long as it

was targeted on the so-called enemies of Zimbabwe, which included white commercial farmers, their workers and all those who supported the MDC.

All this was happening within a context of exhausted nationalism and triumphant neo-liberalism, where ZANU-PF and President Robert Mugabe were no longer too popular.<sup>3</sup> The forces of post-nationalist politics were crystallizing around civil society and the opposition MDC as a counter-hegemonic wave to the liberation nationalist politics represented by ZANU-PF. The country was nose-diving and plunging into an unprecedented crisis that has been variously termed the governance crisis, executive lawlessness, collapse of constitutionalism, economic crisis, the limits of patriarchal model of liberation, unfinished business, exhaustion of nationalism, mutating millennial crisis, neo-colonialist conspiracy, as well as leadership crisis.<sup>4</sup>

### **Patriotic History and its Limits**

Within the academic sphere and political discourse, a new brand of history, which Terence Ranger depicted as *patriotic history* occupied the centre stage of Zimbabwe with its dose of romanticization of the nationalist history and emotional bashing of colonial history. Also, a new crop of what ZANU-PF preferred to term *patriotic scholars* were given state support to shun out a skewed narrative of the colonial encounter and a highly politicised, partisan, propagandistic and emotionally charged nationalist history. This has put the nationalist paradigm in a mess, as it is adulterated, distorted and expropriated in defence of a particular political establishment.

This has led Terence Ranger, long regarded as one of the most articulate representative of the nationalist scholarship in Africa, to defend his position vis-à-vis the advocates of patriotic history as well as the critics of the nationalist paradigm. Ranger had to clarify his stance in a recent article entitled *Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe* where he wrote:

In my own case, I maintained, my first two books about Zimbabwe-*Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* and the *African Voice in Southern Rhodesia*-had been 'nationalist historiography' in the sense that they attempted to trace the roots of nationalism. They were historicist in so far as they presented narratives leading to its triumphant emergence. But my more recent books, particularly those on Matebeleland, had been histories of nationalism as well as histories of religion and landscape and violence. Nationalism as a movement, or set of movements, and as an ideology, remains central to contemporary Zimbabwe and still requires a great deal of rigorous historical questioning.<sup>5</sup>

Ranger also defended his more recent books in these words:

I don't think that either *Voices* or *Violence and Memory* take a merely reaction view to African responses to colonialism but that they are full of ambiguities, internalization, etc. And I don't accept that my critique of patriotic history is a rejection of the significance of studying anti-colonialism, which is significant but not the whole. However, historiography always leaves the battlefield strewn with historians mowed down by over-simplifying generalizations.<sup>6</sup>

I agree entirely with Ranger that if properly subjected to rigorous historical questioning studies crafted within the nationalist and anti-colonial lenses of inquiry can still enrich African studies in general and Zimbabwean history in particular. This is particularly important in Zimbabwe where the nation as well as the academic community is being suffocated with politicization and propaganda that is currently stifling scientific analysis.

My intervention in this debate is two fold that is, critiquing orthodox nationalist paradigm and theorizing and historicizing the colonial encounter predicated on the case study of the engagement between the Ndebele and the early white Rhodesians in the period 1898-1934. One

problem with a majority of Zimbabwean historical studies is that of timid empiricism devoid of critical theory. Therefore, in this essay, I brought theory into the interrogation of the colonial encounter while at the same time deploying historical questioning.

One of the main problems of orthodox nationalist interpretation of the colonial encounter was to reduce this encounter to domination and resistance. The second problem was that the colonial encounter was understood largely as a political phenomenon, excluding its cultural and epistemological aspects that are equally important.

The theoretical insights to understand the colonial encounter and Ndebele responses to it are drawn from Frantz Fanon's psychoanalysis of the colonial moment and his concept of alienation, Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity, Mahmood Mamdani's theory of the bifurcation of the colonial state into 'citizen' and 'subjects', Shula Marks' thoughts on ambiguities of dependence, as well as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff's analysis of Christianity, colonialism and consciousness.<sup>7</sup> These ideas are employed in an endeavour to understand and to explain the overlapping and intersection of the language of modernity with the language of tradition, continuity and change, complicity and resistance, in the complex interactions and relational engagement between the Ndebele and the early Rhodesian settlers.

This is a largely interpretative intervention that is in a way critical of previous orthodox nationalist scholarship that simplistically presented every aspect of Ndebele action and behaviour, be it passive or active, political or economic, agrarian or religious, as part of common resistance and anti-colonial politics. It failed to realize that Ndebele reaction to early colonialism was equally characterized by crucial ambiguities as they tried to appropriate traditional, modern, Christian, rural, urban, liberal, and colonial settler influences. These were mixed with theories of individual, divine, secular as well as collective rights in their responses to settler colonialism.

At the empirical level, Zimbabwean historians, besides Ranger who wrote the book, *African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* covering the period 1898-1930, have not shown any interest on this period. The concentration of studies is on the Ndebele-Shona Uprisings (First Chimurenga) 1896-1897, and later period of the drama of mass nationalism and liberation movements, usually traced to the late 1950s. The period, 1898-1934 is viewed simply as a pre-history of Zimbabwean nationalism. However, I find this period of Zimbabwean history to be very significant. First, it was a crucial time of the construction of the colonial state characterized by crucial ambiguities and contradictions not only on the part of the early Rhodesians but also on the part of the Ndebele; second it was a period of initial direct engagement between the whites and the Ndebele; third it was a period of routinization of the subordination of the Ndebele, and on the part of the Ndebele it was a period of learning how to cope with the shock of conquest. If one uses Fanon's psychoanalysis of the colonial encounter, the period 1898-1934 becomes even more significant as it allows one to ponder on some the most fundamental and searching historical questions of the colonial encounter as:

- What was it like for the Ndebele to find themselves transformed into colonial subjects?
- What were the psychological effects of colonialism for both the Ndebele and the early Rhodesians?
- What was the nature of engagement between the Ndebele and the early Rhodesians?
- How did the early Rhodesians try to indigenize themselves as the new rulers?
- What was the nature of Ndebele political consciousness in this period?
- How did the Ndebele contest white power?
- What strategies were used by the Ndebele to fit themselves into the contours of the colonial state?

This essay responded to these questions through a double move combining historical



interpretation and imagination on the one hand, and employment of various shades of post-colonial theories as the torchlight to navigate the darker corners of the colonial encounter in Zimbabwe.

Using these post-colonial theoretical lenses, I was able to discover complex dynamism within the colonial encounter that far transcended the old-fashioned binaries of domination and resistance. The encounter between the Ndebele and the early Rhodesians exhibited overlapping and intersection of the politics of modernity with tradition, continuity and change, complicity as well as mimicry, hybridity, and resistance. It emerged that the early Rhodesians were not as powerful and confident as the orthodox nationalist paradigm wanted us to believe. It became clear that between 1898 and 1934, the economic geography of Rhodesian settler colonialism was very uneven as was its geography of power.

This enabled the Ndebele to exploit the fissures within the colonial establishment to push forward their own agendas about entitlement to land, cattle ownership, and some degree of cultural and political autonomy. The question of how colonized people sought to build their lives in the crevices of colonial power via deflecting, appropriating and reinterpretation of the colonial encounter is lacking from the traditional nationalist scholarship.

During the initial stages of colonial engagement between the early white Rhodesians and the Ndebele, the elites (Ndebele chiefs) emerged as the wealthiest people in the post-Matopos Indaba that concluded the Ndebele Uprising of 1896. This happened in the context of Cecil John Rhodes' (the leading colonialist in Southern Africa) tactic of placating the Ndebele and strategy of making sure there was no further Ndebele political revolt. To achieve this Rhodes masqueraded as a peace-maker (Umlamlankuzi) and gave back a lot of the looted cattle to the Ndebele chiefs, making them confident within the early colonial environment. Besides giving the Ndebele chiefs some cattle, Rhodes also made the following undertakings in accordance with the Amnesty of August 1896:

- Provision of agricultural seeds to the Ndebele
- Abolition of the hated Native Police
- Continued Ndebele occupation of their traditional lands around Bulawayo.

This made the Ndebele to enter the colonial social order more confident rather than as a completely defeated and submissive people at the mercy of white power.

The Ndebele revolt had shaken white confidence to a considerable extent so much that the early whites were very cautious not to provoke another Ndebele revolt. This reality made the early white Rhodesians to spend much of their time in search of a less provocative colonial dispensation.

The colonial authorities found themselves in a dilemma whereby they had to strike a balance between fulfilling their promises to their white constituency that wanted quick wealth, avoiding provoking Ndebele revolt and putting in place a colonial framework of governance. The colonialists, therefore, took the following steps:

- Established some amicable working relationship with the Ndebele chiefs who eventually occupied the lowest rank of colonial civil servants within the hierarchy of Native Department. This was part of the colonial search for some legitimacy and an indirect way of intervening in the life of the Ndebele.
- Native Commissioners projected a patronizing attitude that was less provocative to the Ndebele. They even developed a lingua franca known as *isilaphalapha*, a combination of English and Ndebele in their communication with the Ndebele.
- The Native Department's intervention on Ndebele life was projected as an emancipatory as well as law and order project beneficial to the Ndebele as well. The intervention was covered under the garb of eliminating hitherto undemocratic

and repugnant practices such as witch-hunting and forced marriages.

- Even the leading colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes, adopted a less arrogant characteristic and projected himself as a peace-maker *umlamlankunzi* prior to his death in 1902.
- King Lobengula's sons were removed from the mainstream of Ndebele society in an endeavour to extinguish the Ndebele desire for a monarchy. Cecil John Rhodes took them to South Africa where they were to be inculcated with Western civilization and mannerism amenable to the colonial dispensation.
- Early Rhodesians were not too quick to remove the Ndebele from their traditional lands, fearing provoking a rebellion.

One of the pertinent issues in the studies of the colonial encounter is that of the agency of the colonised and how they contributed to the shape of the colonial dispensation. In traditional nationalist interpretation of the colonial encounter the agency of the colonized was reduced to revolt and resistance. Post-colonial theorists have taken this further and enriched the debate on the agency of the colonised.

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff raised a crucial point in their analysis of Christianity, colonialism and consciousness that subordinate populations with strong communal identities were able to deploy resilient ideologies that survived military conquest. The Ndebele were indeed one such group. So my analysis of Ndebele responses to early settler colonialism was guided by this analytical framework.

Ndebele responses consisted of a complex admixture of tacit (even uncomprehending) accommodation to the colonial order at one level and diverse expressions of symbolic and practical contestation of colonial order. The chiefs and the royal houses politics tended to revolve around issues of royal privileges, cattle ownership, entitlement to land as well as restoration of an Ndebele monarch. Lobengula's eldest son (Nyamanda) who escaped Rhodes's action of sending other sons to South Africa, became very active in advancing Ndebele

grievances as well as trying to secure a niche for himself as a royal person. The slant of this politics was more backward looking, premised on pre-colonial Ndebele ideologies of entitlement to land, cattle ownership and rule by a traditional monarchy. This politics was also crafted around Rhodes' promises to the Ndebele. Some of which were unfulfilled and others were being repudiated by the colonialists in the face of the Ndebele. Cleavages emerged within the chiefly circles as the 'royals' specifically the sons of Lobengula sometimes demanded royal privileges that had the potential to even disadvantage some Ndebele chiefs. The chiefly families were the first to protest against white land monopolies because they had large hers of cattle which needed large grazing lands. Their option was to go to the reserves, but this meant leaving behind some of their subjects who were now working for the white farmers and miners.

At the religious level, the Ndebele imbibed Christian discourses as well as continuing with their pre-colonial Ndebele religious beliefs. With the collapse of the Ndebele state, Christian missionaries were able to make inroads into Ndebele way of life. Their discourse of equality was attractive to the Ndebele in a new colonial environment that was surely demonstrating a clear slant towards racial inequality. The Christian Church, therefore, offered a non-state institution where Ndebele critical imagination could be expressed. However, some Ndebele were soon to realize hypocrisy within the church and came face to face with early Rhodesian arrogance even within this institution. This led to the emergence of Independent African Denominations that mimicked the white church first and then turned the gaze on white power. The Christian ideology was therefore appropriated by the Ndebele to challenge some of the iniquities of the early colonial state. Independent Churches were a clear case of hybridity and mimicry in practice, introducing a mode of practice that interacted with indigenous cultural forms to yield a Christianity that stood in vivid contrast to colonial orthodoxy. In religious terms, the majority of the Ndebele had one foot remaining deep in their traditional pre-colonial rituals and another foot astride into the new Christian religion. What then emerged was

hybridity, a blending of what was considered beneficial from both religions.

The Ndebele also grappled with other emerging modern ideas associated with urbanization and migrant labour, making them to imbibe nascent worker and proto-nationalist politics prior to 1934.

### Conclusions

The colonial encounter was not a mere theatre of domination and resistance. It was more complex than that involving the contradictory agencies of the colonizer and the colonized. It was a complex phenomenon of institutions, behaviours and beliefs operating dialectically rather than simply through violent imposition and domination. This implies that orthodox nationalist paradigm missed the complexities of the colonial encounter that operated above the domination-resistance mode. African nationalist like Robert Mugabe has taken advantage of the domination-resistance binary to hide behind the legacy of colonialism.

Drawing inspiration from post-colonial theorists, and extending one's imagination to the contemporary African condition, one realises that Africa has not managed to transcend the legacy of colonialism. African nationalists' language is still revealing its colonial origin, fixed between nativist nostalgia, romanticization of African past, bashing out of colonialism, while at the same time embracing some of the modernistic visions initiated by colonialism.

For instance, the binary of urban and rural in Africa has been inherited and was later reinforced by African nationalist leaders. In Zimbabwe this binary is being exploited by Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF to claim support in the rural areas, whereas the MDC is popular in the urban sphere where the ideas of citizenship, civil rights and modernist are dominant. The urbanites are free from the suffocating control of traditional authorities that have been appropriated by ZANU-PF for political reasons. The so-called Operation Murambatswina (Operation Clean Up) that has been condemned throughout the world can be viewed as Mugabe's strategy to put more people

under rural traditional structures now dominated by ZANU-PF political functionaries and where it is easier to trample on people's right without the notice of the media. Mugabe is using a colonial strategy of evicting people from the urban sector.

Africans still face the dilemma of remaining either as mimic persons or charting a new identity going beyond the legacy of colonialism. Such initiatives as the African Renaissance are attempts to transcend the enduring legacy of colonialism. The Africans are still searching for the 'lost self' and identity. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff's argument that the colonial encounter altered everything and everybody in Africa remains very valid because what has remained after colonialism are mimic men and women as well as hybrids who are busy trying to transcend colonial acculturation while at the same time reproducing it every day.

### Notes:

1. This essay is a summary of a long paper entitled, *Transcending the Nationalist Paradigm and Grappling with the Ambiguities of the Colonial Encounter in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of the Ndebele and the Early Rhodesian Settlers, 1898-1934*, presented at *The South African Historical Society Biennial Conference on the Theme: Southern Africa and the World: The Local, the Regional and the Global in Historical Perspective*, University of Cape Town, South Africa, 26-29 June 2005.
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3. Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya (eds.). *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neo-Colonialism and the Search for Social Justice*, (Weaver Press, Harare 2003).
4. Ibid. See also the following scholarly diagnosis of the Zimbabwe crisis; Amander Hammer, Brian Raptopoulos and Stig Jensen (eds.). *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and the Nation in the Context of Crisis*, (Weaver Press, Harare, 2003); Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Kings, Settlers and Nationalists in Zimbabwe: Connecting the Past and the Present" (Post-Doctoral Research Project Proposal, 2005); Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Dynamics of the Zimbabwe Crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century” in *African Journal in Conflict Resolution*, Volume 3, No.1, (2003); Horace Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation*, (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2003); Terence Ranger (ed.). *Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights In Zimbabwe: Volume Two: Nationalism, Democracy and Human Rights*, (University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 2003) and many others.

5. Terence Ranger, “Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle Over the Past in Zimbabwe” (Paper presented at the Britain-Zimbabwe Society, St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford, 2004).

6. E-mail communication with the author of this essay 2005. Ranger wrote this comment following

reading my long paper on the nationalist paradigm and the colonial encounter in Zimbabwe from which this essay is based.

7. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Peguin, Harmondsworth, 1967); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (James Currey, London, 1996); Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependency in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in the Twentieth Century Natal*, (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1986); John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier: Volume Two*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997) and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, London, 1994).

## Legacies of Race and Racism at the Coast of East Africa: Historiography and the Suppression of Subaltern Epistemology

Jesse Benjamin

As much as issues of nationalism are now openly discussed and debated, issues of race and racism remain largely absent in African studies, either suppressed, ignored or downplayed. In the case of East Africa, which I briefly review here, I argue that an impoverishment of historiographic interpretation has led directly to policy implications in the present. I show that some of the best representative examples of critical contemporary scholarship share lingering colonial assumptions that contribute to skewed interpretations and power relations on the ground in the region today. Specifically, post-modernist and critical Western scholars such as Justin Willis down-play the nineteenth century and refuse the voices of the marginal in coastal society. Even Jonathan Glassman, whose work restores the “plebian” elements to coastal history, circumvents the critical element of racial analysis. And Mazrui and Shariff, like Ali A. Mazrui and others that form what I would call a Swahili neo-nationalist perspective, avoid both the nineteenth century and racial analysis, even in their most salient works. I will argue that their specific deployments of colonial historiography, and especially their

misreading of nineteenth century elite Swahili and Arab collusion with British and European colonialisms are central to the maintenance of politics and power relations at the coast today.

In short, by over-representing the British colonial period [1895-1963], and underplaying the role of the Arab/Swahili period of slave trading and plantation production [1837-1895], the social relations these set in place and which remain in place today can be overlooked and laid solely at the feet of the British, who are now largely removed from the picture. In various ways, I show that these misinterpretations are also the product of the very social relations of the present they simultaneously prop up. These two short, 60-year colonial periods of external hegemonic domination, both Busaidi [Omani] and British, left lasting, even over-lapping legacies of racial stratification. Even before the ratcheting up of global Islamophobia after 9-11, intersecting racial and religious hierarchies strongly contributed to the terrains of power and politics at the coast of Kenya. As fights over land, fishing resources and the tourist economy rage under the pressures of the

market economy, scholars and activists alike should acknowledge the role of race in these conflicts; their under-reporting in academic debates is part of the problem.

### **Justin Willis and the Epistemological/Racial Limits of Post-Modern Scholarship**

Justin Willis, in his pivotal historiographic intervention, Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda (1993), opened new conceptualizations of the socio-historic construction of both Swahili and Mijikenda identities. His monograph was received with general acclaim, becoming a benchmark of sorts, but has yet to be sufficiently criticized. In this essay, I discuss how this example of critical theory, influenced by post-modernist and invention-of-ethnicity/tradition trends within western social thought, contributes to extending colonial style biases in interpreting coastal social history and politics in both the past and the present. Whereas, as the title suggests, the Swahili are presented as already existing as a coherent social entity, the Mijikenda are presented as being constructed in the mid to late colonial era. The problem here is that, while this is partially true in terms of current Western conceptualizations of identity, it is certainly no more true of the Mijikenda than of the Swahili, and to stress this fabricated and willed aspect of identity disproportionately in respect to Mijikenda or other marginal coastal peoples and less so in relation to Swahili peoples and identities, works subtly but surely to reinforce colonial-era hierarchies that persist in the present, making an ostensibly objective academic work far from disinterested in terms of contemporary political economy and politics.

It is remarkable that in his entire work, covering the period from the decline and final abolition of slavery to the end of high colonialism<sup>1</sup> Willis never employs a racial analysis, or even uses the terms race or racism, and neither are these categories included in his index. Certainly there are more racially significant analyses and discussions within his work than in earlier political-economic studies of the colonial period,<sup>2</sup> yet it is remarkable that Willis is able to consistently maneuver away from such concerns, given the social and historical material covered.

The equalization of social relations in the nineteenth century has something to do with this, because this then allows for equalization in the colonial era. Willis goes as far as equating the colonial state with the authority of rural Mijikenda homestead heads, and he consistently dismisses Mijikenda perspectives and oral histories. One example will have to suffice.

While the power of Mijikenda homestead heads was cultivated and deployed by the colonial authorities, it is odd that there is no mention of the racial “authority” and privilege of the Swahili community, its patrons, colonial power brokers and civil servants, as additional causes for Mijikenda assumption of a similarly, bounded ethnic identity. Mijikenda migrants were not simply avoiding lower-status, more exploited identities in the interior, but claiming historical rights to a consistently (for 100 years at that point) and increasingly more powerful racial identity at the coast. I describe this as a Swahili bias in Willis’ interpretation because it reflects current Swahili [and British/Western] interests to this day to avoid discussion of slavery and racial privilege in history, and especially their connections to the present. This ubiquitous racial erasure has a concomitant negative impact on Mijikenda people who still suffer from lower status being attached to them as a result to residual categories of analysis that derive from the slave era, such as the label *Waungwana*, which signifies elite Swahili culture, but means literally “freeborn.” It is probably more than coincidence that one of the only analyses of the suppression of racial memory stemming from the slave era in East Africa comes in the work of Joseph Harris (1987), an *mgeni* or outsider to coastal life, but also a prominent African American historian, who in US culture undoubtedly faced similar sorts of historical denials. The denial of racial-colonial history and privilege is a phenomenon with as global a reach as colonial history [in the broadest sense] itself, and it is certainly still rife in East Africa and its historiography.

The Swahili bias that I am trying to discern here is admittedly subtle, yet becomes clearer in contrast to his treatment of Mijikenda history and sources. Whereas effort is made to cast the Swahili as victims of colonialism (pp. 188), which in part of

course they were, their privilege and power is rarely seen vis-à-vis the Mijikenda. When it is seen in passing, the agency of Swahili discrimination is rarely acknowledged, except to say that they clamored for ‘non-native’ status to avoid repressive labor and tax legislation. While Swahili used reputed Arab lineages to make such claims, this too is never analyzed in explicitly racial terms. Absent are the still common forms of derision and discrimination against “Africans” by some Swahili claiming higher [whiter] racial status. But perhaps most egregious in this regard, and further along the lines of his equalizing agenda, Willis discounts Cooper’s (1980) meticulous study of land privileges sustained by the Swahili community against [often indistinguishable] ex-slave and Mijikenda peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Willis acknowledges that “Arabs and Swahili had a clear advantage in selling land, having better access to the registration of transactions, which was carried out in Mombasa by a Muslim scribe...” (pp. 121). Yet, without any significant evidence his next sentence discounts this: “But Nyika too took part in this process. The suggestion that the Nyika were the helpless victims of fraud was a distortion or reality; but it played an important part in shaping and justifying policy.” In no way am I suggesting that Mijikenda were “helpless victims,” but neither does this mean that they were not widely dispossessed of land that they had occupied during and immediately after the slave period. Cooper (1980) has meticulously demonstrated that the land registration process was racially and ethnically biased, and that colonial policy specifically aimed to “prop-up” the former slave owners by making them into a landed elite, such that former slaves and Mijikenda migrants to the “coastal strip” subsequently became in legal status “squatters” on the land they worked, subject to rental payments (usually in kind) and vulnerable to eventual eviction and displacement, should the land become more valuable as a commodity to its new “owners,” and be sold outright.

This is no small matter. Cooper’s classic study showed how the colonial state laid the groundwork for much of the institutionalized social inequality that still exists at the coast. If Willis maintains

that Mijikenda were also “taking part in this process” of land registration, how is it that the “coast strip” was divided into land parcels among former slave owners in the 1920s and 1930s, while the so-called Nyika Reserves [the interior] have only begun to be surveyed and allocated in the recent neo-colonial period? This disjuncture in land ownership is at the root of the social inequality that divides the coast, and yet Willis here attempts to deny this through equalization. In a previous, unpublished thesis (Benjamin 1992: 369-420), I demonstrated how land distribution to former slaveholders, propping up this aristocracy and subordinating the Mijikenda and ex-slaves to squatter status ala Cooper, played out in the last decades of the twentieth century. The uneasy squatter arrangement that Cooper describes was based on the fact that the landowners could only make their land productive by squatter labor. However, as Cooper had predicted, when the land further commodified and came to have value in and of itself, the owners could use their title to evict the squatters and sell the land to the highest bidder.<sup>4</sup>

My case study of one town showed how, disregarding the claims of ex-slaves and Mijikenda farmers living and working on the land, 14 former slave owners were in 1923 [sixteen years after the abolition of slavery] granted huge tracts of land in Shariani, a coastal town 25 miles north of Mombasa. Decades later they gradually divided and sold their properties, evicting “squatter” families who had lived there three and four generations or more. Numerous colonial settlers were, in the 1940s and 1950s, granted massive parcels of what was now designated [de facto “vacant”] Crown Land. But it was in the 1980s and 1990s, when the coastal tarmac road had become well established and Mombasa’s suburban and commercial expansion significantly escalated, that Shariani took on a new role as potential bedroom suburb and small development site for Mombasa residents and entrepreneurs. Land division and evictions escalated with dire consequences for the population, hundreds of families became homeless, most forced to urbanize and abandon their ancestral grave sites, trees and other crops, and others forced into a new one acre neighborhood called *Dzihoshe*, a Mijikenda term meaning “squeeze together.”

Dzihoshe was a disturbing new phenomenon. It was essentially a dense urban slum of more than 800 people living in wretched poverty with no social services or infrastructure, located on the edge of a 1000-acre plot where this community had formerly lived as “squatter” farmers. The land was owned by “Basheik” Stambuli,<sup>5</sup> a Zanzibar-based descendant of former slave owners who returned to Shariani in 1987 to claim his inherited privileges and immediately capitalize them through mass eviction, division and resale to speculators and investors.

This brief review of my own case study shows that the implications of Willis’ equalization are great. Mijikenda, especially at the coast but also in the interior, did not significantly participate in the survey and adjudication of land according to colonial law, while the Swahili elite did do so, precisely as delineated by Cooper. This reinstated the slave-owning Arab and Swahili planter aristocracy during the colonial era, in a new and somewhat feebler form as a landed aristocracy devoid of a labor force and thus dependent on squatter labor. Certainly not all Swahili were able to benefit from this process, but very real class and race privileges were carried over from the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, many surviving all the way into the twenty-first. Even without landed wealth, Swahili identity still provides sentiments of superiority over “pagan,” “African,” Mijikenda and other coastal peoples. To see this in the present, one need only observe the relationship between the stone-town Swahili core of a village like Takaungu<sup>6</sup> and its mud-and-thatch periphery populated by (generally) subordinate and/or dependent Kauma and other Mijikenda from whom brides, artisans and various sorts of laborers are drawn but with whom equality is still very much elusive.

Jonathon Glassman, writing a few years later (1995), gave us a similarly important work on plebian cultures at coastal East Africa, similarly groundbreaking, and similar in its avoidance of race as an analytic category. After reading his rich text, one is still left to wonder how, for example, can we explain that even interior non-slave immigrants to the coast -- of longer standing than recent Hadrami and other Arab immigrants of the

last seven decades -- nevertheless remain in a much lower social status, unless we include racial formulae into the class-based equation? Race, in fact, seems in large part to be determinative of class in this instance -- more so than the other way around, and far more than religion or any other single form of difference. How and why did race become such a central axis of status and power, when did this happen, and what are the contours of struggle in this regard today? How do such contemporary debates build upon received histories, and how is the contestation of history central to both the advocates and opponents of racial hierarchies in coastal society today? My contention is that Glassman has opened the way, and a racial-labor history remains to be written for the various regions of the East African coast.

In his review, Bruce McKim argued that Glassman’s sources limited him in his interpretation of East African history:

Although the book provides a detailed picture of patrician institutions and attempts by non-elites to participate in them, it does not sufficiently delve into other rebel hopes and goals. Despite his efforts to read against the grain of European and Arab prejudice, the author perhaps unwittingly reflects the biases of his sources by focusing primarily on plebeian and outsider aspirations to be accepted by Shirazi elites. He is critical of the urban-elite orientation of previous Swahili cultural studies. Yet at times, a distinction is implicitly drawn between a dynamic cosmopolitan Shirazi culture and a geographically unspecified, evidently static “village culture.” The reader does not gain a full understanding of where hinterland peasants come from and what aspirations they might have (other than becoming Shirazi patricians). (1998: 140)

McKim raises some challenging issues for students wishing to go beyond Glassman’s benchmark, by focusing, as I have been saying all along, on the non-elite, non-Muslim and/or non-coastal peoples who constitute the majority. Willis, on the other hand, and as might have been expected, focused in his own review (1996: 141-142) on his discomfort with Glassman’s focus on the Omani, particularly as the intended targets of

rebellion. Willis felt this unfairly took away from the more traditional anti-European focus, and it muddies his own work in Mombasa, where nineteenth century socio-racial configurations had already begun to take hold but remain ignored in his narrative.

### **A Swahili 'Neo-Nationalist' Perspective and the Racial Politics of Middle Elites**

Turning to the group of scholars whose work I generally designate as Swahili neo-nationalist, the exemplary work of Mazrui and Shariff (1994) is sociologically and historiographically more satisfying than that of their contemporaries, because they do directly engage the issue of nineteenth century coastal culture and the place of Arabs and Arabness therein. Nevertheless, throughout their text there is a discernible discomfort with and avoidance of the racial dimensions of coastal history *before* sole British hegemony and formal colonialism.

Certainly, I do not wish to imply that nineteenth century Arab-based constructions of race were identical to twentieth century British conceptions, or to other Western or Western-inflected social patterns elsewhere in the nineteenth century. My point is that nineteenth and twentieth century cultural constructions of race in East Africa, under both Busaidi and British hegemony, were far more integrated than most scholars wish to acknowledge. Mazrui and Shariff's subsequent discussion of racism in Swahili culture during [formal] British colonialism is among the best in the literature,<sup>7</sup> yet problematic in that it distinctly formulates nineteenth century Arab and twentieth century British racial formations as discrete and even opposite from one another (p. 28). We see this residual assumption of temporal separation in a subsequent passage discussing the implementation of the divisive colonial legal apparatus: "the law planted dangerous seeds of disunity among the Swahili. If they had in the past always considered themselves as one people, with a sense of common destiny despite their variation in origins and color, this was now shattered at the altar of British colonial expediency" (p. 39).<sup>8</sup> We are returned to the image of formal British colonial rule creating the racial divisions in coastal society out of whole cloth, in the first decades of the twentieth century. Ignored is the fact that, after

the passage of the 1873 and 1876 restrictions of the sea and overland trade in slaves, direct slave raiding in the interior "shattered" the prevailing 'unity' of coastal society (Salim 1973, Cooper 1980, Sheriff 1987). To recognize this, the locus of responsibility for the history of racism has to shift to *include* Arab and Swahili society, together with the British, with all the attendant implications that this entails.

A few pages later, Mazrui and Shariff briefly acknowledge the late nineteenth century spike in slave production, but see this only as a result of the changing international division of labor (p. 42), thereby avoiding the significance this had for local racial politics.<sup>9</sup> This is the only time in their book that this is even briefly mentioned.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in any discussion that includes the testimonies of Mijikenda and/or ex-slave people, this is one of the primary issues referenced. This is why Justin Willis could not reconcile the work of Thomas Spear (1978, 1981, 1982). Not because it was factually incorrect, but because Spear's work centers Mijikenda oral traditions, which in turn center their historical and epistemological perspectives. And common to most Mijikenda historical narratives is a naming of the late-nineteenth century shift in socio-racial relations as absolutely pivotal, as when everything tilted and the present state of social relations took shape. This is also why most Swahili scholars can not dwell on this period and its meaning for the present: how it shaped the meaning of freedom in the decades to come.

Invoking the work of Nicholls (1971) to diminish the impact of the nineteenth century, Mazrui and Shariff simply identify the fact that "use of slave labor in local production and trade was not a phenomenon of the entire Swahili society; it was, rather, restricted to sections of the Arab and Swahili 'bourgeoisie'" (p. 42). While this is true, and is also empirically true of most modern chattel-slavery-based societies, the distribution of power and privilege in nineteenth and twentieth century Swahili societies has been little studied. How was white privilege distributed throughout society? What factors were central to the calculus of the 'wages of whiteness'<sup>11</sup> in East Africa? How did Arab identity get located and locate itself between the poles of British Aryan culture, on the



one hand, and African blackness/Negroness/Nyikaness, on the other? Was orientalism here equivalent to blackness/Africanness, or did the other split here into further hierarchy? What fissures in the hierarchy emerged over time, and how did the hegemonic structure of social relations engulf and survive such challenges?

### **Katama Mkangi and Subaltern Mijikenda Epistemologies**

The recent and untimely passing of Katama Mkangi in a road accident in Kenya has left the scholarly and activist communities of this part of the world devoid of a lone voice of reason and dissent, counter-perspective and subaltern Mijikenda viewpoint that we are otherwise now largely without. A novelist and political activist, political leader and graduate of the Dar es Salaam School of radical African historiography, Mkangi's work spanned numerous genres, decades and issues. I am most concerned here with the fact that as a sociologist, Mkangi was one of the only non-Swahili coastal social scientists working in the social and historiographic area of the Kenya coast region, where he himself was from.

Mkangi's indigenous perspective has the potential to shake up East African scholarship, yet it has so far gone largely unrecognized in the academy. The question of power is not far off when we note that the preponderance of indigenous [Mijikenda or other non-Swahili] perspectives question the prevailing discourses and epistemology. It is interesting that generally speaking it has been indigenous peoples, from a variety of class backgrounds, that have advocated a subaltern perspective. Mkangi's contributions show the potential of marginalized, subaltern voices in academic and popular discourses, as a clearly counter-hegemonic cosmology and culture are thrust into the fore. Almost every issue Mkangi touched is seen from a counter-hegemonic epistemological perspective, making him a voice in the wilderness of coastal scholarship. Let me briefly review some of his contributions.

Perhaps Mkangi's most important intervention for this study, his discussion of the relationship of Mijikenda people to Islam, begins by locating the Mijikenda as a people contiguously enmeshed within coastal society's other peoples, the

"Waswahili, Wasegeju, Wasanye, Wapokomo, Wasagala and Wataita in that order" (1995: 110). Gone are the discrete ethnic notions of anthropologists, and instead we have a nuanced, overlapping set of identities that determine one another in their similarities and differences. Mkangi also directly identifies the "two historical factors which have contributed to Mijikenda's perspective on Islam... the Eastern Africa Slave Trade and European Christian colonial domination" (ibid.). This seemingly common-sense orientation to Mijikenda history is actually refreshingly new in its inclusion of nineteenth century Arab domination in the loci of power relations to be understood and examined today. We have seen how commonly this important factor is ignored or downplayed, and what the implications of doing so are for historical interpretation and the understanding of identity and power in the present.

Contrary to Willis, Mkangi takes Mijikenda oral histories and memories seriously, for example, when he relates that:

"Raids by the Arab – assisted by the Waswahili – into the Mijikenda hinterland in search of slaves, [are] well remembered among the Waribe through an incident when the slave-raiders fired a canon into their kaya which destroyed a tamarind tree. Stories also abound narrating the tricks which were used by the slave-raiders into luring the unsuspecting Mijikenda victims into slavery." (1995: 110-111)

I have seen similar stories stemming from my own research in Shariani. While Willis dismissed these narratives, Mkangi and I would maintain that they are indeed central to the history of the coast and serve as critical diagnostic tools for interpreting current social relations there. As Mkangi follows the issue up, "Families have stories of how some of their relatives disappeared only later to be discovered having been "swahilized" in one of the Waswahili towns and settlements along the Coast." (p. 111) Thus, the nineteenth century practices of forced enslavement and subsequent social ascription into Swahili society may be seen as continuing along similar lines in the twentieth century as these social groups retain their relative standings in terms of relational power.

Mkangi's discussion of the Swahili-Mijikenda interface is far more balanced and nuanced than those discussed above. While Mijikenda often become Swahili after making coastward migrations, they are also seen to maintain their Mijikenda identities even for several generations at a time, as evidenced in continued matrilineal and Mijikenda-descent land claims in the interior by coastal "Waswahili" peoples (ibid.). Mkangi's discussion of "*mudzomba*," [uncle/nephew] the Mijikenda term for *mjomba* in Kiswahili, shows that the "cut-point between these two communities sometimes has been difficult to identify" (ibid.).<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, again, we see that Mkangi identifies the nineteenth century, under the 'Zanzibar Arab Sultanate' and its Mwambao Protectorate as the origins of the modern coast's "racial social hierarchy." He acknowledges that this was further complicated by British racism during formal colonial rule, but identifies these two streams of inequality and their interaction as primary factors in understanding the present. This allows him to state what should be obvious, and yet is overlooked in almost all other studies of coastal societies: "...it is still the "Mgiriana"<sup>13</sup> who works as a domestic servant in Swahili houses" (p. 112).

Thus, his acknowledgement of nineteenth century slavery as the origins of modern racism and social hierarchy at the coast allows Mkangi, unlike Willis or Mazrui and Shariff, to see racial hierarchy in the present. My own research at the coast revealed such hierarchy to be very prevalent at the coast, making its avoidance in the academy a real problem. We have already briefly mentioned the hierarchical relationship between Takaungu stone town, for example, and its Mijikenda thatch suburbs. We could also point to the racial hierarchies, stemming straight out of nineteenth century slavery, still active in the economic fields of marine resource exploitation. The range from spear fishing, which remains the lowest level socially and economically, the most dangerous, even illegal of the fishing trades, and is primarily a Mijikenda vocation, to the distribution of responsibilities and privileges within dhows/jahazi fishing vessels, which continue to reserve the most prestigious and lucrative roles for Muslim Swahili and Arabs. This leads us to what is perhaps

Mkangi's most important articulation of these issues:

"During the rule of the Zanzibar sultanate, the Waswahili/Muslims were a notch above the Mijikenda in status and privileges. It was then an "in-thing" in becoming an "Arab" once one was a Muslim. This transformation even forced the Bantu-speaking Waswahili to substitute "uungwana" (being "civil" or "gentle") with "ustaarabu"." (ibid.)

Mkangi also explored the democratic components of indigenous Mijikenda culture and epistemology; challenged prohibitions on illegal brewing, palm wine tapping, and distilling as integral parts of the both the informal economy and local culture; traveled and offered opinion pieces on Zimbabwe – all in addition to his steady literary contributions for which he is better known by most Kenyans (1999a, 1999b, 2001). These interventions, and others, beyond his exploration of Mijikenda/Swahili/Arab relations, remain to be fully explored by scholars. I have tried to suggest the potential epistemological fruits of doing so in this brief essay.

In conclusion, to properly understand the politics of the present at the coast of Kenya, and probably the wider Swahili world, we must acknowledge the legacies of race and their grounding in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because of British colonial displacement, indigenous people like the Mijikenda, especially after their resistance in the second decade of the twentieth century, have remained largely outside of the academy, its representation and its production of knowledge. There are far more Western scholars than African, and far more Swahili scholars than Mijikenda, Pokomo, Taita or Segeju. As such, the under-represented, even subaltern voices of epistemological insurgents like Mkangi remain rare in the academy and challenge the rest of us regarding the way we construct our own genealogies of knowledge. If we do not do so self-consciously, we run the risk of inadvertently supporting the power status quo in the region we represent.

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#### Notes:

Portions of this argument appear in greater detail in Jesse Benjamin, 2002, East Africa and the World: The Relationship of Knowledge and Power in the Construction of History, Race and Identity, Ph.D. Dissertation, SUNY Binghamton.

1. van Zwanenberg (1975) definitively defined the period of high colonialism in Kenya as 1919-1939, in his classic political-economic analysis of British colonialism. See also Wolff (1974) and Kitching (1980).

2. The three studies in the previous footnote are good examples of this limitation, where van Zwanenberg only devotes the final three pages of his study to 'ideological' [superstructural] issues within which would be encompassed race and racism, while Kitching only did slightly better. Contrast this for example with the writings of Nyerere and Nkrumah as much as several decades earlier, which are clearly very conscious of race, drawing as they were from direct experiential knowledge and political engagement. We witness a remarkable bifurcation of knowledge, especially around the issues of race and colonialism, along racial and epistemological lines between Western and African/pan-African traditions.

3. An important subtext throughout this work is Willis' attempt to critique Cooper (pp. 2, 56n49, 123, 185), though most of this is unconvincing. Perhaps this is a reflection in part of Willis' seeming discomfort with class analysis (pp. 2, 4). At the same time, much of his argument stands only on information largely derived from Cooper (pp. 84, 121-122, 126, 188).

4. The other factor in this equation was the willingness of the state, through its own cost-benefit calculus, to use violence [police, bulldozers, arrests] to enforce this rupturing of the coastal social contract by the [neo-]colonial legal code of freehold land ownership. Landowners previously wishing to alienate squatters from land they inherited title to would have known that they would not succeed without the consent of the state, and until the late 1980s this did not appear to be forthcoming. Among other reasons, we can list the perceived political fallout of squatter evictions, having as they did such powerful historical memories in the young nation ["Mau Mau," The People's Land Freedom Army], and the fragility of the Moi regime in the aftermath of the failed coup in 1981.

5. This name is a reference to Turkish, thus foreign and "Arab" (sic) lineage, from Istanbul. I never determined for certain whether or not this was an invented or actual lineage, the Stambuli family tracing to a region of the north coast in which brief Turkish alliances were in fact made in the nineteenth century. The point being that, whether real or invented, or probably some combination of both, the claim itself was what mattered and allowed this family to rise above its cousins and neighbors to *own* other members of the community and eventually inherit the wealth of landed property and privilege in the colonial period. This injustice, as it was felt to be by most Shariani residents, and especially the violation of the "agreement" that squatters and owners had maintained for six decades, resulted in physical violence against Stambuli in 1989, when an attempt was made on his life one evening as he entered the

Shariani Mosque. Armed bodyguards subsequently accompanied him whenever he was in public. Thus, historical tensions and their implications for identity not only continue in the present but often lead to suffering and/or various forms of violence.

6. An historically important small town on the Northern Kenya coast, about thirty miles north of Mombasa. When the Mombasa Mazrui (and allies) were defeated by the Zanzibar Busaidi (and allies), they found refuge in the deeply sheltered inland channels of a small and treacherous tidal inlet buffered on all sides by steep hills or cliffs, yet directly next to Kilifi Creek and thus both the oceanic and continental trades. The Kauma were historically aligned with the Mazrui, and “gave” them the land for their new nineteenth century refuge, yet later found themselves as a result of slavery and colonial era racial social formations living in the periphery of Mazrui Takaungu, as was the case throughout most of the coast. As one would imagine, most Kauma today do not acknowledge Mazrui or Swahili superiority, and stubbornly remember the history of Takaungu’s origins.

7. Where else can one find a discussion of chemical skin lightening creams and hair relaxers in the context of racial and colonial coastal history?

8. The problem is that, in the nineteenth century, not everyone was able to be considered a member of Swahili civilization, and it was precisely slaves and interior-descended peoples that were excluded from this supposed unity. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the social hierarchy is best studied by focusing on the borders of Swahili society, on the groups denied membership and inclusion, and on the groups claiming inclusions but not always accepted. Such tenuous locations allow for greater degrees of

discrimination and exploitation on a systemic level, and should be investigated.

9. The spike was centered in Zanzibar, and on the mainland coast, especially in, around and between Mombasa and Malindi, but also felt throughout much of the Swahili world.

10. The wider social context of nineteenth century social relations in East Africa are only acknowledged by Mazrui and Shariff to deflect attention away from racial analysis, rather than situating the coast as *actively* participating in global racial and labor hierarchies.

11. As Du Bois has shown in the US case, the ‘wages of whiteness’ spread far beyond slave-owning and even property-owning white folks, such that claims to whiteness served as a sort of Trojan horse of entry into bourgeois society and respectability even for the lowest of whites. While Du Bois also generalized such formulations into international and global contexts of colonialism and imperialism, most contemporary scholars limit their work to either domestic Western [U.S.] issues of white history (Smith 1984, Bulkin 1984, Roediger 1991, Harris 1993, Sacks 1995, Lipsitz 1998), or non-Western, colonial and imperial discussions of whiteness and privilege at points of social intersection (Cooper and Stoler 1989, 1997, Stoler 1991, 1995).

12. It is significant that one of the only other discussions of this central point about Mjomba/Mudzomba appears in the work of Robert Mambo (1984, 1987a, 1987b), himself one of [if not] the only other coastal social science scholars to contribute to academic scholarship in recent decades.

13. The largest of the nine Mijikenda subgroups.

## Theorizing African Identities and Multiple Modernities:<sup>1</sup> Questions Revisited

Lindah Mhando

Drawing on analyses of the social, spatial, ethnic and spiritual organization of crisis in Darfur and the Gulf, this paper traces some of the ways in which questions of personhood and the other racial-embodiment categories are reflected in the production of knowledge (epistemology of hermeneutics). In this work, I argue that the question of identity and personhood<sup>2</sup> is unthinkable without understanding the situation of

“colonial difference.” Making the situation more complex is the interconnection of the configuration of global labor as well as the polarization between racialized labor and other forms of coercion. Furthermore, this recognition of colonial difference should come from “subaltern”/ “post colonial”<sup>3</sup> perspectives that demand a different conceptualization of knowledge and knowing. By subaltern here, I also insist on

inclusion of women/feminism consciousness.<sup>4</sup> I hope to provide a space whereby we can articulate not only the conceptual arguments, but also articulate how different theoretical frameworks may overlap in terms of political pedagogy and a necessary premise of discussion about social justice and policy analysis -- in not only the geopolitical landscapes but also the role of actors and their agency. I will extrapolate from this discussion of the women/feminist category to initiate a conversation on the current accounts of women's performativity as leaders, educators, organizers, movers and shakers of the whole community.

### **Intervention on Subalternity and Colonial Differences**

I draw on Antonio Gramsci, who challenged the early interpretations of subaltern that emphasized economic pressure and kinship/territoriality as forms of mass mobilization, to instead proposed 'subalternity' i.e. on one hand, a structure of power established around class relations in the modern (industrial, western, ethno-racial) world which were crucial for the establishment of class relations structured around labor, the increasing slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa and the exploitation of the Americas. On the other hand, hierarchical relations and consequently a subalternization of knowledge occurred at a different level: one *religion*, (see the discussion by Wilson Jeremiah "The Wings of Ethiopia"; Duvoils 1971; Mac Cormack 1991; Mignolo 2000), and second by the *articulation of world history in the past 500 years*. The aftermath of world history can only be articulated by insistence on local history; by revealing the hegemonic project (globalization) through global markets, in which its sole purpose is managing the planet. What remained the same is the history, the conventional wisdom warns us, and "*the more things change, the more they stay the same.*" Behind the wall of the market as the ultimate goal of an economic project that has become an end in itself, there is the Christian mission of the early modern renaissance, the civilizing mission of secularized modernity, and the development and modernization project after WWII. The neo-liberalism project with its emphasis on the market and consumption is not just a question of economy, but a new form of racial formation as

well (in which we see genocide, disfranchisement, subordination, outright violence, and xenophobia justified by religious groups and the intelligentsias). What becomes apparent is the racial cleavage that continues to invoke different kinds of tunes in different communities, but remains an imagery that is unavoidable.

A case in point is the most humiliating experiences of laboring populations of Sudan, when they are called '*abid al arab*' (slaves of Arabs). Sudanese themselves use this term to refer to the descendents of slaves in Sudan, a stigmatized group. The term too connotes religious as well as racial inferiority. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in *Moving the Center*, like Ousmane Sembene, Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Chinua Achebe, views the reality of Africa from arrogance and abuse of power to failure of leadership to address socio-historical realities within the confines of personhood. Similarly Chicano writer, Gloria Anzaldua articulated a powerful alternative aesthetic and political "hermeneutic" by placing herself at the cross-road of three traditions, creating a locus where different ways of knowing and individual expression and identity mingle and differ (Anzaldua, 1987).

Borrowing these concepts for pedagogical convenience, I would say that the need for looking at modernity and Coloniality together brings to light the fact that the main concern in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was "nation-state" building rather than colonialism.

### **Units of Analysis**

Within the centrality of personhood, let's briefly summarize the state of the African continent. The question of who is "African" and what it means to be African should, I propose, be theorized in terms of modernity/coloniality. Coloniality of power therefore is the common thread that links modernity/coloniality in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. with its current version at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. For Quijano, the idea of "race," or "purity of blood" as it was expressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., became the basic principle for classifying and ranking people all over the planet, redefining their identities and justifying slavery and free labor (Mignolo 1993). In a nutshell, Quijano constitutes the Coloniality of power as including the production of knowledge

and classifying apparatus. Ethnocentrism becomes intelligence, a metaphor to describe the Coloniality of power from the perspective of subalternity. Such analysis embraces the complexities of subaltern experiences from the neo-colonial time. My understanding of this framework suggests that the postcolonial movement occurs on two levels: beyond specific points in history, and at the same time beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory.

For my own intellectual trajectory, I found that colonial differences have been and are an overarching metaphor which has been articulated through different hands in the history of capitalism. The changing forces have been and are largely enhanced by imperial conflict both within and outside the geo-spaces. In the colonial epoch, science was no less a field of controversy than religion in attempts to comprehend the concept of race and its meaning. Spurred on by the classification scheme of living organisms by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae*, many scholars in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c. dedicated themselves to the identification and ranking of humankind.

Race was thought as a biological concept, yet its precise definition was the subject of debate, which, as noted, continues to rage today. Despite efforts ranging from Dr. Samuel Morton's studies of cranial capacity,<sup>5</sup> clearly the attempt to establish a biological basis of race has not been dropped into the "dustbin" of history, but is being resurrected in various scientific areas. All such attempts seek to restore the concept of race from fundamental social, political, or economic determination; they suggest instead that the vault of race lies within the terrain of innate characteristics, of which color and other physical attributes provide the most obvious and in some respect the most superficial indicators.

Consideration of the term "black" for example illustrates the density of racial meanings which can be found among different societies and historically within a general society. In contemporary British politics, the term "black" is used to refer to all non-whites. In political and cultural movements, Asian and well as Afro-Caribbean youth<sup>6</sup> are adopting the term as an expression of self identity.

In the case of the Rwanda genocide, the Litsirian crises in Guinea, the Cote d'Ivoire and now Darfur, lessons to be learned include careful observation of the colonial racist mentality, which still exists. Questions of identities mirror the very bridges bequeathed by colonial powers during the scramble for Africa. Consequently, people who shared similar cultural and linguistic values were set against each other by the colonial masters, and later by their own local politicians in villages, not only with new material needs and wants, but the question of rule and exploitation, to rule and exploit them.

The situation in Darfur and the Gulf epitomizes the interweaving of two historical conjunctures: one socio-economical trends, and the other racial/ethnic embodiment within relations of power in global hierarchies. The crisis in Sudan confronts us to rethink personhood in a different light. For example, in the long term, what is the role of state and non-state intervention especially if recovering assets and earning potential are considered important in maintaining pre- and post-crisis livelihoods? Khartoum for example experienced state withdrawal and marginalization particularly during the period of rule by the National Islamic Front. The holistic approach of internal civil war and economic dislocation has intensified. Today the current military dictatorship and the blood hate in these geo-spaces form an organized link to validate ethno-racial conceptions, hallmarked by corruption, "tribal" war, social injustices, and xenophobia which have taken a horrible toll on ordinary Sudanese. Frantz Fanon warned us against petty nationalism (Fanon 1963).<sup>7</sup> More recent lessons to be learned should include: who determines that genocide has occurred and who will intervene? How do we view the world and its inhabitants, and how do we think about humanity in general? I am insisting that the issue of perspective or worldview should be rethought beyond the "view" or "gaze" to embody a performativity, a system of knowledge predicated on life-affirming belief systems, a way of ordering the world which reflects our relationship to it, and a sense of '*ubuntu*'.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, however, the colonized is subjected to manipulation that his/her subjectivity experiences non-consciously as ideologies of racism, as well as sexism.

Women as colonized subjects are subjugated to the oppression that can be seen as gendered racism. For example, under slavery “black” women were exploited not only for labor but also as sex objects for white men. And after slavery they were excluded in all social and political arenas on the basis of these same identifications.

### Women/Gender/Feminist Contributions

For the most part, prevailing definitions of gender in African studies have exclusively come from social sciences disciplines, or the art productions of modern European civilization. Let’s revert to Weber in the instance of the civilizing mission:

“Only in the West does science exist at a stage of development which we recognize today as valid... In short, knowledge and observation of great refinement have existed everywhere, above all, in India, China, Babylon, and Egypt, but in Babylon and elsewhere astronomy hence makes its development all the more astounding, the Indian geometry had no rational proof... The Indian natural sciences lacked the method of experiment.” (Weber 1992 [1904])

Obviously, Weber was blind to the colonial difference and the subalternization of knowledge built into it.

My focus here is to insist on other forms of knowledge whereby our understanding of the resurgence of slavery, militarization and institutional resources cannot be articulated without looking into the legacies world histories bleed into, but also into the absorbent and displacing hegemonic forms of knowledge of the subalterns. I am not claiming to invent any new perspective here, but rather to offer an insight and reflection on the knowledge of subalterns which can be drawn from multiple sites such as drawing from local realities, the organized matrix of the social economy (the role of women in sustaining livelihoods), and historical agency.

Of importance here is the articulation of critiques of the erasures of *agency* and the voices of African women. In particular, an expression of the struggles across historical landscapes to understand gender spaces -- local, natural and global -- and at the same time understanding the multiple medians of class, race, gender, age and

sexuality that contextualize and inform individuals. Race is encoded through all the key tropes of enslavement, not only through power, but sexuality as well.

Abena Busia suggests to readers that the limitations of feminism are “*based on a divide and rule philosophy!*”, and refers to ‘*womanhood*’ as “a balance of pain and joy, anger and sadness with more wisdom as a result.” Chikwenye Okonjo has championed “African Womanism,” whereas Buchi Emecheta refers to herself as “a feminist with a small ‘f,’” condemning the gender relations western feminists often perpetuate. Many Kolowole’s womanism and African Consciousness, as well as Aminata Sow, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, and Mariana Ba, among others, have all “denied being feminists at various times,” calling for the consideration of racial, economic, and cultural divisions among women.

Writer Filomena Chioma Steady advocates a “humanistic feminism that encompasses women and children.” Adamantly debunking western categories, in the same token Oyewumi argues the organizing principle of Yoruba cosmology is not the binaries of female/male like in western societies. Kolowole denounced the one-dimensional portrayals of women, lacking in complexity, of the characters portrayed by Achebe’s world in “*Things Fall Apart*.” She argues women participated in struggle against European domination.

D’ Almeida, author of “Francophone African women,” argues African women and their experiences are idealized, transforming then into “mythical and symbolic figures.”<sup>9</sup> Patriarchy has been understood as one trademark of Western cultures, but we can see the same principles in the human code that proceeded and outlived capitalism -- the last I checked, the conception of women as the most oppressed being on the continent still prevails.<sup>10</sup> Attention must be paid to the urgency of women as the primary forces behind agricultural production, and also assuming greater work burdens in households while taking the lead in protests against global change. Even where men remain in the household, many families have come to rely on income provided by women and women are nonetheless the “*de facto*”



heads. In Mexico, 40 percent of wage earnings are now generated by women within the category of household income. Women in Zambia are thought to head between 30 and 60 percent of households. In Sudan, up to 50 percent of migrant and refugee families are headed by women. As the AIDS epidemic gathered force, it orphaned millions of children, 1.7 million in 1997 alone. It has crippled worker households, which try to function with fewer living or working adults, and appreciably slowed economic growth, which was modest or negligible to begin with.<sup>11</sup>

Let me turn to one of the adages of African traditions, i.e. oral traditions. I am always amused to hear this Swahili adage “*tafuta karama yako sasa, uking’oja kesho utakuta mwan si wako*, which translates as: “set your honor now, tomorrow might not be yours.” The social cultural meaning of this commonly used adage is again to confirm the lessons that history taught us all along as evidence of the not too distant past, the scars of slavery among our own people. Gender is becoming “racialized” in new ways. Racist models for organizing the majority of the world’s workers are now being redeployed to organize large groups of female workers as subordinate “ethnic workers.” Gender relations are becoming more racist, and racism is broadening to include more working people. The hallmarks of these scars are still staggering among us, tribe against tribe, male against female, young against old, economically deprived against the wealthiest, one religion against the other, one caste against the other. I want to recount what Bob Marley warned us not too long ago:

“...until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior, is finally, and permanently discredited and abandoned, until there are no longer any first class and second class citizens, until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes....<sup>12</sup>

To conclude one might ask, what implications can be drawn for policy? Policy analysis can create a space to theorize a set standard to which we can learn from our shortcomings and paradoxes, and glean positive lessons across the hemisphere. For instance, neo-liberalism monopolizes the imagery of empowerment and creates visions of the future

where radical democracy and socialism appear to be unthinkable. However, the resurfacing of anti-systemic movements for deeper transformations in the social contract bring us glimpses of hope. Further, they expose the actual roots of global unrest in the transnational realities of inequality, disfranchisement and lack of sheer freedom. It seems to me that in the current atmosphere it is relevant for youth not to have simple nostalgia for a highly mystified, golden revolutionary past. Instead, we can combine both Du Boisian and Saro Wiwan ideologies of empowerment, and re-center agency in our theories of change. In the final analysis, accounts of racialization processes that avoid the pitfalls of racism, ethno-tribalism, nepotism, corruption and the sheer greed of the African continent remain to be written.

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1. "Multiple Modernities" can best be seen as the different expressions of an increasingly emergent global modernity rather than simply as multiple societal forms. As such modernity can rise anywhere in the world; it is not a specific tradition or societal form but a mode of processing, or translating culture; it is not a culture of its own and therefore can take root anywhere at any time. The thrust of modernity is a capacity to transform culture in a continuous process.

2. My use of the term 'Personhood' implies a historical product of modernity linking personal and collective liberation of social products of multiple forms and locations of oppression (economic, racial, sexual, and age). Peoplehood, on other hand, can mean a national identity, and as such frequently clashes with the interest of the mass of "underpaid workers" that constitute the larger population.

3. One must note the controversial relationship between the subaltern studies project and the postcolonial interventions. Many in the subaltern camp neither contrast the nationalistic project nor sufficiently problemize gender and ethnicity. Postcolonial theory on the other hand, stresses the social consequences of hybridity and at the same time challenges the very

aspects of homogeneity of the nationalistic projects. See: Spivak (1985), Chakrabarty (1992) Sarkar (1997), Sas (1989) and Chatterjee (1993).

4. For the lack of space, the feminist position I have chosen to focus on here, is to debunk the theorization of nationalism, citizenship, and colonial discourse where women are constantly erased in history, their political significance unacknowledged, dismissing the complexities and their political differences, projecting a false homogeneity which is just as oppressive as the structures of imbalance of power that nationalist projects attempt to combat. Collins, (1896), Caraway (1991), Mari (1989), Mohanty (1991), Amadilline (1987), Busia (1996), Dans (1986), Ong (1994).

5. Pro-slavery physician Samuel George Morton (1799-1851) acquired over 800 crania from all parts of the world, which formed the sample for his studies of race. Assuming that the larger the rise of the cranium translated into intelligence, Morton established a relationship between race and skull capacity. Gosset reported that, in 1849, one of his studies included the following results: The English skulls in his collection proved to be the largest, with an average cranial capacity of 96 cubic inches. The Americans and Germans were rather poor seconds both with the cranial capacity of 90 cubic inches. At the bottom of the list were the Negroes with 83 cubic inches, the Chinese with 82, and the Indian with 79. (Ibid, p. 74) On Morton's method's, see Stephen J. Gould, "The Finagle Factor," *Human Nature*, (July 1978).

6. Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain" *Race & Class* 23 (2-3) Autumn/ winter 1981.

7. See Fanon, in the *Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Revolutionary nationalism is distinguished from cultural nationalism, and national liberation from national occupation. Similarly Aime Cesaire, Cabral, Mugabane and Memmi relate the internalized self-degradations of racism to the structural impositions of colonial dominations. (See also Du Bois, Cox, Winant and Gilroy bringing out the complex and exclusionary conditions of social structures marked by race, caste and class.)

8. Ubuntu is a Zulu word which reaffirms the concept of humanity. "Because I am here, you are here," or "Utu" in Swahili.

9. For D'Almeida, one of the flows of Negritude as movement is the depiction of Mother Africa which idealizes African women without acknowledging positive contributions made by African women. She argues the 'mother Africa' image must be examined within the context of female/male power relations to capture the complexity of their relationship.

10. Africa as a diverse continent has variations of kinship, with Queens and Matriarchal powers, as well as Patriarchy. My own mother's lineage is from

Matriarchy, with a strong sense of Women as *shakers* of the community, in terms of the economic power base. See the eloquent discussion by Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husband* (1987).

11. Donald G. McNeil, Jr., "AIDS Takes a Toll in Africa, Even after Death" *New York Times*, November 16, 1998.

12. [http://teravista.pt/portosanto/4330/war\\_speech.htm](http://teravista.pt/portosanto/4330/war_speech.htm)

## How Do We Talk About Identity?: A Review Essay

Meredeth Turshen

This essay started as a review of Amy Chua's *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004). In *World on Fire*, Chua argues that under market conditions certain ethnic minorities tend to dominate the indigenous majorities around them. And under democratic conditions, indigenous majorities are empowered to confront economically dominant ethnic minorities, leading to hatred and instability.

In societies with a market-dominant ethnic minority, markets and democracy favor not just different people, or different classes, but different ethnic groups. Markets concentrate wealth, often spectacular wealth, in the hands of the market dominant ethnic minority, while democracy increases the political power of the impoverished majority. In these circumstances the pursuit of free-market democracy becomes an engine of potentially catastrophic ethnonationalism, pitting a frustrated 'indigenous' majority, easily aroused by opportunistic vote-seeking politicians, against a resented wealthy ethnic minority. (pp.6-7)

Chua maintains that "globalization consists of, and is fueled by, the unprecedented worldwide spread of markets and democracy" (p.7). With Thomas Friedman, Chua believes that America leads this global spread of markets and democracy, radically transforming the world to "bring capitalism and democratic elections to literally billions of people" (p.8). "Market capitalism is the most efficient economic system the world has ever known" and "democracy is the fairest political system the world has ever known" (p.8). She departs from Friedman in her assessment of the consequences: Chua writes

that "the global spread of markets and democracy is a principal, aggravating cause of group hatred and ethnic violence throughout the non-western world" (p.8).

Chua uses the concept of globalization instrumentally: she needs it to tie democracy to markets in order to argue that democracy has liberated indigenous majorities to attack market dominant minorities. One wonders what the ANC or the FLN would make of this argument? European colonizers were indeed numerical minorities in their colonial possessions, but to reduce wars of liberation to explosions of ethnic hatred seems inaccurate and demeaning. Then there is the problem of dating globalization: most of us understand this as a recent phenomenon starting in the 1970s or 1980s, marked by new roles for financial capital and new forms of manufacturing; we distinguish it from the movement of other ideas and institutions around the world (like Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century or Chinese emigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Globalization today encompasses the shift made by multinational corporations from companies with separate businesses in many countries to worldwide operations that divide and parcel out work to the most "efficient" locations. Further, Chua equates entrepreneurial behavior with the operations of multinational corporations—but how can Zimbabwe's white farmers be bracketed with US multinationals?

Chua's examples of market-dominant ethnic minorities range from the obvious—overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia—to the obscure—Koreans in US inner cities. Chua defines ethnicity as group identity, a definition that conflates ethnicity and nationality (a trend noticeable in reporting on the Yugoslav wars in

which we became familiar with references to “ethnic Albanians” in Kosovo, for example). When I came to Chua’s use of this definition in Africa, my review turned into this essay on how we talk about identity.

In describing ethnicity in Africa, Chua confuses centuries of European domination, the colonial manipulation of minorities and identities to maintain control, the importation of Asian labor, the immigration of traders from the Levant, and the status and identity of peoples indigenous to the continent. Chua names all of the following as market-dominant ethnic minorities: South African whites are “starkly market dominant” vis-à-vis the Black majority (p.97); ditto for whites in Namibia and Zimbabwe (pp.100, 101); the Kikuyu, 22% of the Kenyan population, are a “distinctly successful minority” (p.105); the Ibo, “the Jews of Nigeria”, dominate key economic sectors (p.108); Kenya’s roughly 70,000 Indians, “the Jews of East Africa”, who comprise less than 2% of the population, are “dramatically more affluent as a group than the vastly more numerous black Kenyans around them” (p.113); “the Lebanese are the preeminent market-dominant minority in West Africa” (p.115); Eritreans in Ethiopia “have long dominated business” (p.164); in Burundi, “the Tutsi still control approximately 70% of the country’s wealth” (p.111); in Rwanda, the Tutsi were a “starkly privileged, ‘arrogant’, economically dominant ethnic minority” (p.166); in Togo, the Ewe, in Guinea, the Susu, in Uganda, the Baganda, in Tanzania, the Chagga, in Cameroon, the Bamiléké (pp.111,112).

Chua’s confusions are illustrative of the muddled discussions of identity in subSaharan Africa. How are we to distinguish between ethnicity, nationality, minority status, and indigenism? In UN human rights declarations, these terms are not used interchangeably, and the demands of minorities are different from those of indigenous peoples. In 1997, the Africa Policy Information Center published a background paper, “Talking about ‘Tribe’: Moving from Stereotypes to Analysis”. It is a useful starting point, and the objections voiced against the use of “tribe” are still pertinent.

“Tribe has no coherent meaning”; “tribe promotes a myth of primitive African timelessness, obscuring history and change”; “tribe reflects once widespread but outdated 19<sup>th</sup> century social theory” resonating with classical and biblical education and becoming a cornerstone of European colonial rule. After reading Chua it seems clear that we need to have a similar discussion of “ethnicity”, and “ethnonationalism” today.

The Zulu in South Africa, whose name and common identity was forged by the creation of a powerful state less than two centuries ago, who are a bigger group than French Canadians, are called a tribe. So are the !Kung hunter-gatherers of Botswana and Namibia, who number in the hundreds...Tribe is used for groups who trace their heritage to great kingdoms. It is applied to Nigeria’s Igbo and other peoples who organized orderly societies composed of hundreds of local communities and highly developed trade networks without recourse to elaborate states. (APIC 1997:1)

Does the substitution of “ethnicity” for “tribe” resolve any but the problem of stereotyping primitive savagery? Is “ethnicity” used with any more specificity than “tribe”? What does the new movement of indigenism bring to this discussion? Ronald Niezen, in *The Origins of Indigenism* (UC Berkeley Press, 2003), writes that indigenous people have primary attachments to land and culture; they maintain their own languages, which normally differ from those spoken by mainstream populations. The indigenous include such categories as natives, aboriginals, and First Nations. Their demands are usually for recognition rather than autonomy. Indigenous rights invoke collective rather than individual rights. Niezen sees a continuum from indigenous/tribal people (who live in isolated, small-scale pre-industrial societies) to indigenous/not tribal people, to people stigmatized as tribal, to people considered ethnic minorities, to people considered ethnic nationalities. Ethnonationalism, in Niezen’s vocabulary, describes people who define their collective identities with clear cultural and linguistic contours and who express their goals

of autonomy from the state with conviction that borders on violence.

In the era of nation building immediately after independence, many new African nations set about repairing the ravages of colonial divide-and-rule strategies by attempting to create a sense of nationality and, in some cases, by suppressing the expression of separate ethnicities. It is worth reflecting on the political and economic developments that have brought us back to the ethnic competition that characterized the late colonial period. African dictatorships, cultivated and maintained by the western democracies (and competing eastern totalitarian regimes), have certainly played on social divisions. But it is neoliberal economics, imposed on subSaharan Africa without regard to political and social history, which has fomented social fragmentation. We need a new language to describe the retreat into bloodlines, perhaps the kind of vocabulary developed by Jock Young in *The Exclusive Society* (London: Sage, 1999), to describe the process of social exclusion that has occurred with the progress of globalization.

## **First ACAS “Bud Day Award” for Activism goes to Kassahun Checole**

On November 18, 2005, on the occasion of our annual meeting (held in Washington, DC at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association), Michael O. West, ACAS co-chair, presented the first ACAS “Bud Day Award for Activism” to Kassahun Checole, publisher and editor of Africa World Press and Red Sea Press.

Accepting the award Kassahun said, “I just want to thank you and all our comrades at ACAS for entrusting me with the first Bud Day Award for Activism on behalf of Africa and Africans. I am really and sincerely touched by it. This means to me more than any other honor that I have received to date. The award made me think about the many others who are more deserving and who continue to work on the frontlines to expand awareness and positive linkages of and about Africa.”

We celebrated Kassahun’s award and Bud’s life at a party that was generously hosted by the Review of African Political Economy and its publisher, Taylor & Francis.

### **The Bud Day Award**

Bud Day (1927-2003) was a civil engineer who worked in rural water and sanitation in India for a decade in the 1960s and for another 10 years during 1978-2001 in rural Southern Africa. He spent much of his time listening to, and honoring, women’s role in water collection. For example, in rural Tanzania in 1979, the donors could not figure out why the new standpipes (one for about 10 households) were constantly breaking down. Bud’s team found out the men were sabotaging the pumps because a much closer water supply (100 meters from the houses, instead of 1000 m) meant the women had time to exchange ideas and organize at the water source!

Bud’s life work exemplifies a concerned scholar of Africa. First, one does not separate human suffering from scholarly analysis. A South African student in the 1980s wrote a Master’s thesis for the UCLA School of Public Health, which concluded that the eradication of apartheid was fundamentally necessary for improving public health in South Africa. The esteemed UCLA committee ruled that the thesis was “too political” and rejected it. As an adjunct professor, Bud vigorously defended the student’s conclusions. Twenty years later, we all know the student was very accurate, both scientifically and politically.

Second, the struggles on the African continent cannot be separated from local struggles in the USA. Apartheid was not “over there,” but right in the backyards of South Central Los Angeles, or the equivalent in any American town. When there was an initiative to assist children in Zimbabwe, Bud was key to the response, and to saying that equal funds needed to be spent for child health care via the Drew Medical School in South Central. Fifty percent of the funds raised in Los Angeles stayed home – to address the local apartheid conditions increasing infant mortality.

Third, as one privileged by living in the North, Bud knew we must oppose US foreign policy, which impoverishes and subjects. Bud went to Southern Africa to learn, and came home to organize against US policy. As a scholar teaching in the US, he believed that his most important task was to change US policies; Africans could provide their own water supplies and latrines, their own approaches to democracy, as well as expressions of development much more sustainable than US practices.

These few stories (and Bud was a story-teller) explain the criteria for the annual ACAS Bud Day Award:

- \* someone working in the US for Africa/Africans
- \* someone involved in ongoing work
- \* work that spotlights a neglected group or problem or critical situation
- \* work that relates to US policy

### Kassahun Checole

The recipient of the first award, Kassahun Checole, is also a storyteller, for his Africa World Press has been without equal in raising African voices that would otherwise have been silenced. His press is one of few worldwide, not just in the US, that sustains African debates in the Diaspora. Kassahun does not separate work as a publisher from his involvement in Eritrean freedom and his Red Sea Press has been at the forefront of that movement.

As a concerned scholar of Africa, Kassahun makes sure his press takes on the task of providing the scholarship on Africa. All too often, only the very rich living on the continent can purchase publications about Africa, if they are available at all. Africa World Press and Red Sea Press are dedicated to including Africans in the debates, as authors and readers, that profoundly affect their lives – from retelling the ancient stories, to new poems or novels reflecting daily struggles, to analysis of biotechnology that impacts food security. The press exemplifies the famous African proverb: “Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.”