

Feature Article 【專題論文】

## Humanism as History in Contemporary Africa 當代非洲的歷史中的人文精神

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**關鍵詞：**非洲民族主義、人文精神、殖民性、後殖民主義、啟蒙、跨文化性

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## Abstract

The socio-political imagination of contemporary Africa is usually beckoned upon a deconstruction of historiography – usually colonial history. If colonialism flourished through a misrecognition of the native as a historical subject, and by extension, a denial of humanity, the native would have to reassert his humanity through a re-cognition of his own history. At which point, African history would become a history of humanism. The first part of this essay localizes the debate within the historical context for which the debate gained relevance. The context is the Enlightenment and colonial history. I shall link these historicities to the emergent social political imagination in contemporary Africa. The attempt to rehabilitate the truncated African subjectivity would also become a rehabilitation of history by attacking the intellectual roots of colonial historicity.

## 摘要

當代非洲的社會政治想像經常受到歷史書寫——通常是殖民歷史——解構的召喚。如果殖民主義曾因被在地人錯誤認知為一個歷史主題，並且經由延伸，因對人性的否定，而興盛，在地人將必須透過重新認識其本身的歷史，以重新肯定其人性。在該點上，非洲歷史有可能成為人文精神的歷史。本文的第一部分將討論局限於該討論已為其取得關聯的歷史背景之中。背景是啟蒙與殖民歷史。我將這些歷史的真實性與當代非洲所出現的社會政治想像互相連接。修復被截斷了的非洲主體意識的努力也將成為一種，經由抨擊殖民歷史真實性的知性根本，對歷史的修復。

The title of this paper "Humanism as history in Contemporary Africa" engenders a dialectical complicity. The complicity emerges from a potential conceptual ambivalence when one considers for example that "History as humanism in Contemporary Africa" has a pretention to generate a precocious similarity. I thought about the thematic difference with a consideration on a possible convergence or even a correspondence of meaning. An imprudent reading might suggest a conflation between "history as humanism" and "humanism as history". There is a distinction. To say, "a bachelor is an unmarried man" is not quite the same to say that an "unmarried man is a bachelor". There is an internal discontinuity. Excluding the basic point of discontinuity in this analogy, we might arrive at the conclusion that the difference between "history as humanism" and "humanism as history" is both wide in intentionality and analytical referent.

"History as humanism" suggests a valorization of different historical representations into a homogenous historicity. But historical representations often wade and thrive in diffusion and divergence. History as humanism suffocates these multiple significations *if* and *when* history is read *only* as a closed, ideological, and dogmatic system of values. When one speaks of "humanism as history", the term "humanism" inheres a locus of ideological baggage. Yet, when our theory of humanism is located within history, it becomes a reflexive representation of our contemporaneity. Humanism as history in this context functions as a response to a shared but specific historical experience such as colonialism, apartheid, etc. Humanism as history is an attempt to reconstitute the African subjectivity, (seemingly truncated by these experiences of colonialism, Afro-Atlantic experiences, imperialism, et cetera) through a rehabilitation of African history.

## I Think Therefore I Am

Contemporary African studies are generally linked to the question of identity or what I have termed *a subjective conversion of historical experiences*.<sup>1</sup> The pioneers of what has become known as "African philosophy", "African history" or "African intellectual history" were posing a challenge to the discourse of coloniality and especially the Western Enlightenment as an epistemic blueprint for domination of black people. Beginning with Placides Tempels whose work *Bantu Philosophy* (1945) became a pacesetter for contemporary Africanist studies, the specious attacks on the Enlightenment (and its spokespersons) was because while the Enlightenment acquired a new source of humanism (through universal rationality as embedded in human nature), this new humanism as founded on rationality was not extended to non-Western cultures and peoples.

The denial of *humanity* to non-Western cultures is because these cultures do not exhibit a character of rationality easily recognized within the ambience of European paradigm of knowledge. In pressing home this argument, theories were constructed and histories would be invented to justify the exclusion of these non-rational cultures as part of civilization. For example, in his celebrated Work *Primitive Mentality* (1975), Lévy-Bruhl had argued that there are two types of mental operations that depicted two kinds of societies: (1) Western Society: rationalistic philosophy and positive science. These people can articulate ideas, concepts and notions of causality. (2) Prelogical – non-Western societies – who are characterized as primitive mentality. Among the prelogical societies, the key features of Western rationality such as concepts, ideas, and notions of causality are absent – precisely why they are non-rational. These primitive societies are "indifferent to secondary causes" and wholly depend on magic and superstition for "elementary demands of the mind in its cognitive capacity and basic cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010); *Politics of History in Contemporary Africa* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010).

operation."<sup>2</sup> But this thinking is not original to Levy Bruhl. He was merely an unconscious bearer of the Enlightenment heritage. For all his revolution in philosophy of history, Hegel was not apologetic when he excluded Africa from the rational world:

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained [...] shut up; [...] the land of childhood, which lying beyond the days of self-consciousness history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night [...] The negro as already observed exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality [...] if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character [...]<sup>3</sup>

David Hume, the precursor of the Scottish Enlightenment and an avowed empiricist had argued against innate ideas in favor of direct sense experiences. According to Hume, rationality is inferior to passion and belief for "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." Yet, in a dual contradictory motion, Hume's judgment of the Negro was not based on any sense experience as opposed to innate judgment:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the Whites, such as the ancient Germans, the

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2 Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, translated by Peter Rivi re (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 26-27.

3 Chukwudi E. Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), p. 35.

present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour,  
form of government [...]<sup>4</sup>

Immanuel Kant seems to bear the greatest burden of the criticism of Enlightenment racism. Although he never left his village of Königsberg, he seemed heavily influenced by Hume with regards to his thought about Africans. And perhaps, one would think that if he had stepped out of Königsberg, he would not be committed to such mythical vanity of which he ascribes to Africans as he had written in his essay, *Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764):

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world [...] So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour. [...] The blacks are very vain but in the Negro's way, and so talkative that they must be driven apart from each other with thrashings [...]<sup>5</sup>

Writing from Paris, Baron de Montesquieu, the beloved son of the Enlightenment that championed liberty did not seem to extend these virtues to the Negroes:

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4 See David Hume, footnote to "Of National Character" (1748), in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol. III (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), p. 228.

5 See Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, translated by John. T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 110-111.

You may obtain anything of the Negroes by offering them strong drink, and may easily prevail with them to sell, not only their children, but their wives and mistresses, for a cask of brandy [...] It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, especially a good soul in such a black ugly body [...] The Negroes prefer a glass necklace to that of gold which polite nations so highly value. Can there be a greater proof of their wanting common sense? It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christians. Weak minds exaggerate too much the wrong done to the Africans.<sup>6</sup>

For most part, what these Enlightenment thinkers have in common was that they were spokespersons of their age and were recognized as such. They were also opinion makers and influential in matters of public opinion. Another thing they mostly held in common was their emphasis on skin color as constitutive of the major reason why Negroes are such different stock of people, viz.: Hume: "[...] *There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion [...]*" Kant: "*So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color [...]*" Montesquieu: "*It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, especially a good soul in such a black ugly body.*" A yet to be determined question is: What was their obsession with color of skin as determinant of who qualifies to become a human being?

But the history of the enlightenment is not a homogenous history. And if the Enlightenment was an attempt to redeem humanity from the absurdity of closed historicity with *the light of natural reason*, to what extent could one speak of the Enlightenment as the instigator of a racialized essence of human imaginary? Did the Enlightenment invent racism or was racism an unfortunate consequence of

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<sup>6</sup> Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007; Originally published 1914), vol. I, book 15, "Equality": chapter 5 "Of slavery of the Negroes", p. 238.

the overall Enlightenment project? What links the Enlightenment to this projected consequence of domination and enslavement of "non whites" (non rational peoples)?

Loren Goldner (1997) has argued that before the period of the Enlightenment, the idea of racism was not an institutionalized phenomenon vivid in the public imaginary. Even in the antiquities, the difference between people was not based on racial stock as opposed to the class distinction between citizen and barbarians or slave and freemen. Since race was not a criterion for such human classification, what this meant was that anyone could be a slave or master depending on the person's social and political position.<sup>7</sup> But even then, this was not an absolute category as Ovid reminds us: "in his exile [...] the polished citizen is a barbarian to his neighbors."<sup>8</sup> Or even in the Jewish communities of the same period, the difference was between Gentiles and Jews, a difference that Christianity tried to reconcile: "*There can neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female—for you are all one in Christ Jesus*";<sup>9</sup> "*It is by believing with the heart that you are justified [...] it makes not distinction between Jew and Greek: the same Lord is the Lord of all, and his generosity is offered to all who appeal to him, for all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"<sup>10</sup> And among the early Church fathers were African black Bishops such as Augustine, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, etc. Taking a further leap to medieval England, around late sixteen to early seventeenth centuries, Shakespeare's work, *Othello* is instructive as a historical address to understanding the social cultural mindset of the British society prior to slave trade. Othello, the hero was a black prince, where blackness as a social category was neither a definition by default nor did it possess a negative racialized essence in the consciousness of Shakespeare's immediate audience.

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7 See Loren Goldner, "Race and the Enlightenment: From Anti-Semitism to White Supremacy, 1492-1676," *Race Traitor* 7 (Winter/Spring 1997), pp. 32-49.

8 The Oxford Dictionary (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

9 Galatians 3:28, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985).

10 Romans 10:12, *ibid.*

Even more interesting is that in medieval Europe; the idea of a "black person" did not carry any racialized connotation. A dark skinned European from southern Italy, or even around the Mediterranean was called black. Yet, not a few decades would pass before a new understanding of race emerges to generate and express new social practice and relations. These categories all changed from 1670's afterwards. Prior to the 1670, people were categorized simply on basis of religion, social and political culture (Gentile, Jews, heathen, pagans, barbarians, citizen).<sup>11</sup>

If as many critics of the Enlightenment have attacked the Enlightenment as racist in its very foundation, in my view, the Enlightenment was not intent on racism. The unintended consequence however, was that this new vision of humanity rooted in nature would ironically become an epistemological grid for a race-based ideology that would become exploited by capitalist adventurers when they came to Africa. Significant in this new trend and shift from socio-cultural to biological categorization of persons cannot be isolated from the emerging events in the new world and subsequent need for slave labor.<sup>12</sup> A theory is needed to justify the domination of the *other* and this theory will be based on blood consciousness. This *other* had to be "dehumanized" in other to become an object of possession. This was social Darwinism as expressed through the logic of coloniality.

This historical background enables one to understand that the Enlightenment was not a singular homogenous historicity. It was an epoch of competing histories within an eon of regeneration. The period contained those who advocated for human progress by virtue of universal law of reason and those who opposed it. Certainly, one of the reasons we may have to criticize the enlightenment is that this "universality of reason" was not extended to the

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11 For such detailed analysis on socio-cultural and historical origin of racism, see, especially, Loren Goldner, "Race and the Enlightenment: From Anti-Semitism to White Supremacy, 1492-1676," *Race Traitor* 7 (Winter/Spring 1997), pp. 32-49.

12 Ibid.

Africans as we saw through these spokespersons of the Enlightenment, whose writing on the subject, in the light of today, surely bordered on racism. Another criticism is the "shortcoming" of reason as the foundation of universal humanity upon which colonial logic found its essence. Despite these limitations, I suppose we still need to appreciate that these apostles of the Enlightenment were among the few dissenting voices that belonged to the progressive history of human kind. Our criticisms should and ought not overshadow the progressive achievements they have made. The period before the Enlightenment beckons a horrid imagination of those dark ages of human history that became *enlightened* through an intellectual revolution, a new vision of humankind, precisely why it was called the age of the Enlightenment. I do not imagine that for all its shortcomings that any of these critics would have preferred to live in this dark period.

The problematization of our discourse should locate the historical context in question. At the period of the Enlightenment were those who opposed it on the basis that it ruptures a well-ordered society, where *well-ordered* was only a mask for institutionalized domination and oppression through the prism of religious or monarchical traditions. Although both the progressives and capitalist adventurists supported colonization as a necessary evil, they did so for very different reasons. The former was on the basis of the recognition of the need to advance universal humanism, to bring light to the barbarians, civilize and make them become part of humanity. The capitalist adventurists on the other hand, supported the same project for a different reason of socio-economic and political domination.

These traditionalists or capitalist adventurists supported slavery as an act of God or a divine privilege. In their view, colonialism was a necessary evil in order to save the savages from the wrath of God and bring light and salvation to this cursed race of Africa. Taking cue from selective passages in the book of Genesis, Christian missionaries (with the exception of Quakers) would hold official doctrines, which refer to Africans as the cursed descendants of Ham. Blacks were a cursed people due to the folly of Ham. This was the official view of the Roman

Catholic Church until 1873 when Pope Pius IX had pity on the wretched people of Arica and attached a plenary indulgence to expiate the curse of Ham as he prayed: "wretched Ethiopians in Central Africa that almighty God may at length remove the curse of Ham from their hearts."<sup>13</sup> But it was not a view restricted to Catholics as we learn from the likes of Rev. Richard Furman of South Carolina who argued "the right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example [...] neither the spirit nor the letter of Scriptures demands the abolition of slavery."<sup>14</sup> This was how a peculiar interpretation of Christianity became an institutionalized agency colonialism; to bring light and salvation to the heathen. Becoming complicit as a complement to the doctrine of the Enlightenment, many capitalist adventurists would don on the garb of Christianity to expedite the colonial processes. In a famous quote, Desmond Tutu captures the parody: "When the missionary came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. The said 'let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land." (This quotation is in the public domain, there is no specific source)

To recapitulate, contemporary Africanist studies largely departed as a response to the logic of coloniality thus far choreographed through the Enlightenment project. As already discussed, the Enlightenment generally projected a new idea of humanity framed within universal rationality. To *be* is to be *rational* as captured in the Cartesian Cogito, "I think therefore I am (a man)." But such thinking is not extended to Africans who are generally perceived as *non-rational* beings. Accordingly, the African can attain redemption by being drawn into a generally recognized mode of humanity through a special kind of education *i.e.*, colonialism. Colonialism equals both education and civilization. The very act of "civilizing" also becomes an act of "humanizing". To "civilize" is to "humanize"

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13 See John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching Concerning the Moral Legitimacy of the Institution of Slavery* (Rose: [for] the Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights, 1975), p. 20.

14 M. J. Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 35

through colonial logic. This was the origin of the phrase the "white man's burden" which was a metaphor for white paternalism. The white man is the guardian and protector of all races and therefore has a moral and religious duty to "civilize" other races to become *human*. But this project of *humanization* will have to begin with a denial of history. As Hegel and other Enlightenment thinkers have argued, Africa has no historical memory. Denying Africa a historical memory yields to three consequences:

(a) Denial of history gives the impression that the African is a "child of the moment" as we learn from the likes of Smuts who on the inspiration of the likes of Hegel had ascribed to the Africans as an atavistic child of nature, a child of the moment who is always happy and neither worried about the past nor the future. For Smuts, the Negro is not only different from Europeans; the Negro is a special type of human being:

This type has some wonderful characteristics. It has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and outlook. A child-like human can not be a bad human, for are we not in spiritual matters bidden to be like unto little children? Perhaps as a direct result of this temperament the African is the only happy human I have come across. No other race is so easily satisfied, so good-tempered, so care-free [...] The African easily forgets past troubles, and does not anticipate future troubles [...] There is no inward incentive to improvement, there is no persistent effort in construction, and there is complete absorption in the present [...] These children of nature have not the inner toughness and persistence of the European, nor those social and moral incentives to progress which have built up European civilization in a comparatively short period. [...] It is clear that a race so unique, and so different in its mentality and its

cultures from those of Europe, requires a policy very unlike that which would suit Europeans.<sup>15</sup>

For Smuts, this "happy" child of nature needs an adult (i.e. the white man) to "grow up" and become human. This child of nature needs to be civilized and humanized through colonialism to become an adult.

(b) Denial of history is also linked to a denial of culture and tradition. This point is intuitively linked to the issue raised above, i.e., *child of the moment*. Where tradition functions as an ethno-subjective capital of a people, culture acts as an integrative modifier of those virtues through which a group of persons become constituted into a human community. To deny one of having a culture or tradition is to strip one of the sum total of one's ethno-subjective experience that constitutes his or her humanity. It is a denial of any ability to express oneself; a denial of total wellbeing of an individual.

(c) Denial of history places restriction on my availability as a human subject; a subject able to articulate past and present experiences to mediate conceptual frameworks for a life worth living. Denial of history is not only a notional denial of existence of the "other" it suppresses any possible potentiality to become human. Denial of history signifies the "freezing" of the native subject. Being *frozen* means that the native has no consequence. The native is merely an object of possession to be used, abused and discarded at the discretion of his humanizer (the colonialist).

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15 J. C. Smuts (Field Marshal), *Africa and Some World Problems, Including the Rhodes Memorial Lectures Delivered in Michaelmas Term, 1929* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), pp. 75-77.

## Humanism as History

The afore-mentioned consequences are issues of most vivid concern and emotive in the contemporary history of Africa. African academics would embark on a project of rehabilitating the African subjectivity from the trauma and absurdity of colonial history. Responses would emerge in different formats. First was physical resistance against domination, exploitation and abuse of which many literatures have already accounted for. This resistance would include armed struggle, sabotage of facilities, boycotts, strikes, etc. Second was intellectual resistance to the logic of coloniality. This intellectual resistance would take different characters and I would highlight a few. The first feature of the intellectual resistance was that soon enough, African nationalist leaders began to realize the expediency of grafting resistance movements within the contours of ideological praxis. Marxism is often a poached favorite discourse through which most of our early nationalist leaders found a theoretical platform for colonial resistance with a new sense of nationalism. We saw Marxist influence in the rhetoric of Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Seko Ture, Samora Machel, etc. The rhetoric would exude the infusion of ideologies as a foil for a legitimate political narrative that will displace colonial logic. The very tortuous abstraction of histories to feed into the emergent "ideological pots" is consciously implicated in the desire to form a national consciousness. In this context, these ideologies would function as an adhesive national narrative of the new nation states. This ideological infusion into the national memory exhibits a double maneuver:

(a) Where the colonial nation-states were products of colonialist ideology, independence necessarily spells a discontinuity between the actual or successful functionality of the new nation state with the ideological blueprint for which purpose these African states were invented at the Berlin conference in 1885 (such as the need for raw materials, to curb European rivalries, boost economies of the European states, etc). Accordingly, these African elites would embark upon

ideological formations, which they think would become constitutive of the new nation states. It is believed that these ideologies would transform the new nation-states from being merely a territory of European invention at the service of European interests, to become a genuine African nation-states that is configured to the national will of the people, and with it, granting political legitimacy to the new governments. As discussed above, Marxism was adopted as the favorite ideological baggage. But it failed. This failure cannot be isolated from the fact that Marxism as a foundation of the emerging African nation-state is merely an old wine in a new skin. Like the theory of colonialism, Marxism is merely an alien format, anachronistic to African socio-cultural and historical context.

(b) Beyond the infusion of ideology to form a national character is that these ideologies would become a source of political domination and mummification of these elites into cult personalities. Assuming the status of cult personality, their character will become infused into the national imaginary as national sovereigns. They would automatically become mystified as signifiers of national sovereignty.

The second feature of the intellectual resistance was the attempt to invent African history as evident in the works of Cheikh Anta Diop, (*African Origins of Civilization*), Martin Bernal (*Black Athena*) Onyewuenyi (*African Origins of Greek philosophy*) amongst others who made remarkable and studious attempt to prove to their European contemporaries, "*hey look, you said we have no history, look, here is evidence and proof of our history, so we are just human like you.*" Cheikh Anta Diop is very instructive and I cite him at length:

Ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be accounted among the assets of the Black world [...] that Black world is the very initiator of the "western" civilization flaunted before our eyes today [...] When we say that the ancestors of the Blacks, who today live mainly in Black Africa, were the first to invent mathematics, astronomy, the calendar, sciences in general, arts, religion, agriculture,

social organization, medicine, writing, technique, architecture; [...] we are merely expressing the plain unvarnished truth that no one today can refute by arguments worthy of the name.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, where attempts at "inventing" African history is challenged or found to be inadequate, Africanist academics have charted a new course of action that would focus on challenging and repudiating colonial history. These Africanist intellectuals, but especially, those in Diaspora such as Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Allioune Diop, Frantz Fanon, etc, would soon notice the inadequacy of Marxism and a new attempt will be made to dislodge colonialism by targeting its very foundation and internal logic which is a denial of "history" to Africans. This new method will be forged through revisionist historicism, an attempt to curb the totalizing gaze of coloniality. The most dynamic expression of this revisionist historicism were mostly found in discourses such as Négritude, pan-Africanism, Black Theology, Ujamaa, and ubuntu, amongst other discourses. At this juncture, what we do have is a reversal of discourse or in extremity, what Sartre called anti-racist racism. Somewhere else, I have criticized this trend as a false historicity for it is a history founded on analogy and apology. History by analogy is a false historicity.<sup>17</sup>

## Evaluation

My attempt so far has been to show how contemporary African studies have remained entrapped as an analytical signpost to identity discourse or otherwise, a pose of repudiation through humanization of African historiography a.k.a *humanism as history*. The offense and challenge of this method of historiography is that

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16 Cheikh (Sheikh) Anta Diop, *The African Origins of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, translated by Mercer Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1974), pp. 233-234.

17 See Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Politics of History in Contemporary Africa*.

even though it offers a platform for subjective rehabilitation, it nevertheless reduces history to string of metaphors. Yet, these interpretations primarily mirror their originators; for the African academic, the rebuttal of colonial logic that inevitably obliterated his/her identity as a concrete person. But history is beyond metaphors. Applying metaphor to history yields to metaphysical indeterminacy.

Most significantly, the virtue of humanizing African historiography need not constitute the end of history in Africa. Humanism as a history is just a metaphor. It might have served useful purposes in the contemporary socio-political imagination of Africa as it relates to question of identity, subjective rehabilitation and even nation building, it nevertheless possesses a character of ideology – it is responding to particular crises within an epoch. The authority of history lies in its *unfetteredness* (not chained to ideology) and objectivity to context from whence it gains epistemic legitimacy. Such epistemic legitimacy enables history to assume the pose of an impartial narrator while retaining a timeless status as a moral compass of human society. History does not take sides; it is truthful as in mathematical truth irrespective of whose ox is gored. Humanism as history is only a metaphor for an ideological formation of a new response to black experiences during colonialism, apartheid, slavery, etc. Humanism as history does not speak with the authority of history; it is not independent of subjective formations or innuendos that inspires the humanization of these black experiences. History as *history* springs into being by the very fact of human existence and does not need ideological permutations to become real.

*Humanism as history* is a dead-end historiography. But histories do not die even as they reach mythological maturity. They could lose their immediacy and facticity, but they still represent *presence*. And even as myths, they become operative as in *historical address*. Evolving into mythological or philosophical truths, history retains in its character an essential element in the course of these permutations – objectivity to context. It is for this reason that history gains credit

as an impartial umpire in human affairs; a referee in the genealogy of human experiences.

Humanism is a culture, a process, and something we can learn through interculturality. Our theory of humanism should be a vision, a predisposition towards an inter-subjective affinity; that we are nourished through the presence of a different other; a recognition of this "other" not as a threat but an enrichment to my humanity. Humanism is not a virtue that is exclusive to a particular culture or society. Where our vision of what constitutes a human person might bear incidental differences, our vision of a shared humanity, a good that we all ascribe to is something we can learn from each other. This is the point of relevance in which humanism becomes a cultural practice. Being cultural means that it can be learned as a virtue. It can be cultivated. We can imbibe this peculiar way of life.

Why do we do history with humanism? History unveils to us the various contexts in which humanity have struggled to arrive at contemporaneous vision of humanism. In history we learn of the failures and success of this gravitation towards an admissible understanding of man acceptable to every epoch. We try to avoid the mistakes of the past and advance a new sense of human kind that can deal with the mistakes of the past while offering a promise for the future. This is the limit of culture as an epistemological repertoire of humanism. Historicizing these different understanding of humanism in different cultures opens way for intercultural dialogue. We are also enabled to conceive a universal understanding of humanism that is dependent on interculturality. The predisposition is not only to recognize a different other as an autonomous, human being with "natural" rights, but we are also open to recognize his/her own culture.♦

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♦ Responsible editor: Chun-wei Peng (彭俊維).

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