

# Into, Out of or Inventing Africa?

by  
**D.Pal Ahluwalia\***

I have given my life to try to alleviate the sufferings of Africa, there is something that all white men must learn and know as I have, that these individuals are sub-race. They have neither the intellectual, mental or emotional abilities to equate or to share equally with white men in any of the functions of our civilization. I have given them my life to try and give them the advantages which our civilization must offer, but I have become aware that we must retain this status - white the superior and they the inferior, for whenever a white man seeks to live among them as their equal, they will either destroy him or devour him and they will destroy all of his work.

And so, for any existing relationship or for any benefit to this people, let white men from anywhere in the world who would come to help Africa remember that you must continually maintain this status - you the Master and they the inferiors, like children you would help or teach. Never fraternize with them as equals, or they will devour you. They will destroy you. The subaltern cannot speak. (*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*)

No race has a monopoly on beauty, or intelligence, or strength, and there will be a place for all at the rendez-vous of victory. (*Aime Cesaire*).

The popular representations of Africa are found in travel brochures which emphasize the white beaches, palm trees, game parks and hotels of international quality. On our televisions, programmes such as Alby Mangles's "Safari" reproduce much the same vision of Africa, the last region where great concentrations of wildlife remain albeit under cloud from the twin pressures of poaching and the food requirements of "barbaric" peoples. In the contemporary period, one could perhaps excuse such representations as being exemplary of the popular media. For examples, consider a recent

\* Lecturer, Political Science Department, Adelaide University

column in *The Australian Magazine* where ignorance was seen to be synonymous with Africa:

...Ignorance is dark continent. For some, this continent is at least the size of Africa<sup>1</sup>

What is disturbing is that this representation of Africa is not merely a fabrication of the popular media but rather the result of several centuries of European discourses on Africa. The opening quote by Albert Schweitzer captures the representation of the African which has dominated European thinking of Africa. It is not only the African that has been subjected to such representations but also the geographical entry which assumed the mythical properties of being the "Dark Continent". The study of Africa arouses many passions and prejudices which are the subject of this paper. This paper seeks to examine the hegemonic role that African studies have played in the invention of Africanism<sup>2</sup>

## Orientalism

Edward Said's pioneering work *Orientalism*<sup>3</sup> is an important background to our discussion of Africanism. In order to establish the contours of Africanism, it is necessary first to turn to Said's methodology. Said's *Orientalism* is a study of how Western academia has represented the Orient over the last two centuries. In his analysis, Said establishes that the discipline of modern Oriental studies is indebted to the traditional representations about the nature of the Orient (especially the Middle East) which were forged in the Occident (historically, Western Europe). For Said, Orientalism means three things, all of which are interdependent: an academic discipline, a style of thought and a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. Orientalism is best viewed in Foucauldian terms as a discourse. Inspired by Michel Foucault, Said constructs Orientalism as a manifestation of power/knowledge. As Said argues:

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a

<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Magazine*, February 13-14, 1993, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to V.Y. Mudimbe for his pioneering work on Africanism, *The Invention of Africa: Philosophy, Gnosis and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, where he develops a critique of Africanist discourse in the spirit of Edward Said's work.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.<sup>4</sup>

Examining Orientalism as a discourse, Said argues that Western academia is responsible for the creation of the "Other", the Orientals, who are significantly different from those in the Occident. Hence, through this process, they are able to "Orientalize" the region. This construction, however, has a distinctly political dimension in that Western knowledge inevitably entails political significance. This was nowhere better exemplified than in the rise of Oriental studies and the emergence of Western imperialism. He states:

I doubt that it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the latter nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by the gross political fact - and yet that is what I am saying in this study of Orientalism. For it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as human subject in his own circumstances...<sup>5</sup>

There is, then, a power imbalance that exists not only in the most obvious characteristics of imperialism - "brute political, economic, and military rationales"<sup>6</sup> but also in terms of culture. It is in the cultural sphere that the dominant hegemonic project of Orientalist studies, used to propagate the imperial project, can be discerned. Said's methodology is embedded therefore in what he terms *textualism*. This allows him to envisage the Orient as a textual creation. Textuality entails concern with authority and positioning. In Orientalist discourse, this produces the West as a locality of power and center distinctly demarcated from the "other" as the object of knowledge and inevitable subordination. Said's project is

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

designed not to reify the past but rather to focus on the establishment of the Orient as a textual construct.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear, I hope that my concern with authority does not entail analysis of what lies hidden in the Orientalist, text, but analysis rather of the text's surface, its exteriority to what it describes. I do not think that this idea can be overemphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West...The principle product of this exteriority is of course representation...<sup>8</sup>

Orientalism, then, is a Eurocentric discourse which constructs the "Orient" by the accumulated knowledge of generations of scholars and writers who are secure in the power of their "superior" wisdom. The charge that Said makes about Orientalist discourses applies just as well to area studies. Area studies, in general, have tended to treat non-Western societies as "alien" entities. From this perspective, area studies have revolved around a central juxtaposition of "us" and "them", when knowledge about "them" is accumulated by and reported to "us". This juxtaposition, central to Said's work, is instructive when we examine African Studies and the manner in which it has chosen to identify, describe, characterise and represent a continent that has been marginalised particularly in the last century.

### Africanism and the Politics of Knowledge

---

<sup>7</sup> I do not want to argue that Africa as such does not exist, although in many ways Africa was a European construction following the Berlin conference of 1884-5. Rather, I purport that Africa is established textually for the European. My project is similar to Adeno Assis's. He argues:

The point is that the images of each of these subjects, which are prepared for the consumption of European Americans, are the invention of Europeans and European Americans. In its consumability each subject is incorporated into the value system of the "appropriator", where the appropriated subject is defined as the objective other in the cognitive and social map of the appropriator.

Adeno Addis, "Hell Man, They Did Invent Us: The Mass Media, Law, and African Americans", *Buffalo Law Review*, Vol.41 No. 2 Spring 1993, p. 523.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.20-21.

The end of the cold war continues to raise hopes for a new global order, and a new sense of history despite Francis Fukuyama's<sup>9</sup> much publicized thesis announcing that communism is now dead, and that this event marks the end of history. For Africa, the search for a new sense of history remains vital as it finds itself hostage to the latest phase of western dominance as was exemplified in an influential 1989 World Bank document which argued that, "underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance"<sup>10</sup> Hence, the advent of the imposition of conditionality to effect liberal democratic government.<sup>11</sup> This imposition is the latest manifestation of the discourse of Africanism and it is to its historical development that I now wish to turn.

Jean Copans periodisation of African studies is as convenient a place as any to examine the hegemony of Africanism. Copans argues that African studies can be delineated in a chronological classification of roughly three periods. These are:

1. From origins to the Second World War;
2. Advent of Sociology and de-colonization (1945-60); and
3. Unification of the human sciences and the Marxist problematic (1960 onwards).<sup>12</sup>

This periodisation of African studies corresponds rather well with the evolution of the discourse of Africanism which has not been dormant but rather has been adaptive to changing circumstances. Nevertheless, its etiology has a relatively homogeneous ancestry. Much like Orientalism, Africanism needs to be viewed from the 18th century onwards from which

---

<sup>9</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, *Sub-Saharan African: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington: World Bank, 1989, p.60.

<sup>11</sup> For an example of how conditionality has been imposed in the Kenyan context, see, D. Pal Ahluwalia, "Democratic Transition in African Politics: The Case of Kenya", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, November, 1993, forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Copans "African Studies: A Periodization", in Peter Gutkind and Peter Waterman, eds., *African Social Studies: A Radical Reader*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977.

time European conceptions of the "other" reached their zenith. For African studies, this was the period of the ethnologist.

The ethnologist, as Copans points out, was only relatively autonomous<sup>13</sup>. More often than not, the ethnologist was also the traveler, explorer, missionary, soldier and administrator. Mary Louise Pratt, in her excellent study of Western travel writing *Imperial Eyes*, demystifies the role of the travel writer. She illustrates that the experiences of these travelers was never autonomous and that the supposed independence and authority of the travel writer was really a textual construction which never dealt with the rather complex realities of socio-economic contact<sup>14</sup>. The travel stories Pratt examines, much like the literary work which Edward Said discusses in his *Culture and Imperialism*, are bound up with the history of empire. As Said argues:

...narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world... the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them<sup>15</sup>.

Pratt's narration begins with the dominance of the eighteenth century natural history which was essentially a universalizing project based upon European knowledge that established a new form of Eurocentered planetary consciousness. She argues that this was a:

...version marked by an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history. This new planetary consciousness, I will suggest, is a basic element constructing

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London Routledge, 1992. The book is essentially a critique of the 18th and 19th century European travelers in Africa and South America. Pratt points out that the current boom in travel writing is indicative of the latest phase of Western rationalizations of imperialism.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993, p.xiii.

modern Eurocentrism, that hegemonic reflex that troubles westerners even as it continues to be second nature to them.<sup>16</sup>

These natural historians inspired by Linnaeus, spread out around the globe in order to classify and categorize in universal terms for the European any known species.<sup>17</sup> For Pratt, this systematizing of nature represented a new form of planetary consciousness which until that time had been dominated by two totalizing projects, circumnavigation and the mapping of the world's coastlines. This new form shifted the European attention away from control of routes to the interior and linked up with a new phase of European economic and political expansionism which sought to possess land and extract resources. She suggests that:

...natural history asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, disassociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals. In these respects, it figures a certain kind of global hegemony, notably one based on possession of land and resources rather than control over routes. At the same time, in and of itself, the system of nature as a descriptive paradigm was an utterly benign and abstract appropriation of the planet. Claiming no transformative potential whatsoever, it differed sharply from overtly imperial articulations of conquest, conversion, territorial appropriation, and enslavement<sup>18</sup>.

Pratt's project is to demonstrate the relational meaning of natural history. Hence, these scientific writers are portrayed as being linked inextricably with the colonial system. They were dependent, in most instances, upon local settlers and, in some cases, they held a form of official status accorded to them simply for being European. Their physical safety was dependent upon the physical occupation and pacification of the

<sup>16</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, op.cit., p.15.

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent account of Linnaeus's racism and the manner in which his work was deployed, see Philip D Curtin, *The Image Of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964, pp.28-57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39. Pratt makes an important distinction between male and female European writers. For an exposition of the differences, see her discussion of Anna Maria Falconbridge's work. Pratt demonstrates that her book was really attempt at liberation from her husband. pp.102-107.

indigenous people and they were vital for the ideological contribution which natural history made to the textual construction for the European reader which led ultimately to greater expansionist confidence. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Pratt's account of Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* which she points out was sponsored by the Association for promoting the Discovery of the interior Parts of Africa, an organisation formulated by an "alliance of aristocrats and wealthy businessmen"<sup>19</sup>. Pratt's position is not reductive where every travel writer is seen as synonymous with European imperialism. Rather, it is a complex construction which seeks to understand how political, economic and cultural histories interact to allow the very functioning of the travel writer. This is best viewed in what she calls "contact zones" which is the:

...space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict<sup>20</sup>.

Travel writing, viewed from the perspective of the contact zone, ensures that Pratt does not lose sight of the dependence of the European on local knowledge and local labour which make the expedition possible, something that is endemic to this genre of writing. This is similar to Edward Said's interplay between culture and imperialism where the indigenous people are subsumed by the pervasiveness of the European culture as embodied in the novel. Said also reminds us of the centrality of resistance in response to Western dominance<sup>21</sup>. Given the relative autonomy of the travel writer the ethnologist, clearly was involved in the expedition, in the opening up of 'the dark continent'.

As Africa was opened up, constructed and linked to European discourses, changes as a result of the industrial revolution and the advent of European expansionism meant that any aspersions to the innocence of the ethnographer were displaced by new theoretical referents influenced by the enlightenment. Rapid changes in Europe altered Western self-image which heightened its sense of superiority. As Curtin points out:

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, op.cit.pp.xi-xii.

...the new rate of European change altered the Western concept of history: if history is the study of change, then societies thought to be static had no history worth speaking of<sup>22</sup>

The dominance of this form of representation was encapsulated by the philosophical discourses of that time. Critical rationalism underpinned Enlightenment thought and enshrined within it notions of progress. The means to attain such progress was based upon secular rational "man" technology and science. The nineteenth century ushered in significant advances in the natural sciences and the scientific method was not only emulated but also viewed as the only legitimate form of knowledge in the human sciences. Consider, for example, Hegel's representation of Africa. In his 1830-31 Jena lectures, he stated:

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas - the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence - as, for example, God, or Law - in which the interest of man's violation is involved and in which he realizes his own being...The Negro...exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality - all that we call feeling - if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character...

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again, For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit...What we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history<sup>23</sup>

Hegel was not alone in such representations. He was drawing upon

<sup>22</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *Precolonial African History*, Washington: American Historical Association, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> G.F.W. Hegel *The Philosophy of History*, New York 1944, pp 93-94, as quoted in Thomas Hodgkin, "Where the Path Began", in Christopher Fyfe, (ed) *African Studies since 1945*, London: Longmans, 1976.

knowledge from the Enlightenment and out of a tradition that sought to explain the origin of the races. Moreau de Maupertuis argued that the origin of the races could be traced back to Adam and Eve, who of course had to be white, but that the original egg and sperm contained within it all the racial varieties that were to appear later. In this characterization, when the African appeared, there was little else that white people could do but to drive them to Africa which was not a desirable place for the European. Other prominent views of the origins of the races suggested that African form and colour were the result of acquired traits which were exaggerated through generations of life in the tropics<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant's position was equally racist. He argued that "negro" features and skin colour were not simply acquired characteristics but that they were latent, "in the original stock and appeared when it was subject to heat and humidity"<sup>25</sup>.

Critically, when this methodology was linked to the evolutionary theory of Darwin, history itself became evolutionary, seen on a unilinear continuum<sup>26</sup> Hence, Europeans thought that they had civilisation whilst other peoples were "barbarians". It was taken as granted that race and

<sup>24</sup> This view was held by people such as Blumenbach and John Hunter. See Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, op.cit., pp.40-41.

<sup>25</sup> Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, op.cit., p. 41. Curtin also points out how both voltaire and Rousseau suggested that Negroes were naturally inferior to Europeans in their mental ability. In the case of David Hume, race and culture were causally connected. For an excellent exposition of Kant's position, see A.O.Lovejoy, "Kant and Evolution", in B. Glass, et, al, *Forerunners of Darwin, 1745-1859*, Baltimore, 1959.

<sup>26</sup> The nineteenth century brought about three major break-through, Darwinism, Marxism and Freudianism, that had profound impact upon European thought and were all products of the post-Enlightenment knowledge revolution. For an excellent discussion on Max and Freud's racism see, Mustapha Ben. T. Marrouch, "when Others Speak, Or Peripherality's Interlocutors", *Dalhousie Review*, pp. 54-82. Marrouchio points out how childhood innocence which served as the 'prototype of primitive communism is one of Max's main contributions to the theory of progress, which he conceptualizes as a movement from prehistory to history and from infantile or low level communism to adult communism". Similarly, he argues that a "less influential cultural role was played by some of Freud's early disciples who went out to 'primitive' societies to pursue the homology between primitivism and infantility"

culture were interconnected and that humanity progresses through stages. Hence, colonial ideology as a civilizing mission came to be the justification for imperialism which sought to take these societies from an inferior to a superior stage. It was in this light that Marx came to assert that, "the country that is more developed shows to the less developed the image of its own future"<sup>27</sup>

The colonies became the sites where Darwinian theory could be tested empirically. After 1850, a large number of European scientists went about to prove that Europeans were anatomically different and, as a consequence, race became a central determining factor in explaining historical change<sup>28</sup>. Anthropologists, imbued with this spirit of scientism, embarked upon a project which sought to document the great diversity and various racial categories. This form of racist "science" gained prominence and, by 1900, was virtually accepted throughout the West. Critically, the deployment of such racist discourse was intermixed at precisely the time when Europe was conquering and colonising Africa. As Curtin points out:

The colonizers who had the best opportunity to investigate the African past, assumed as a by product of their racial attitudes, that Africa could have no history worth investigating. European historians writing about Africa usually confined their study to the activity of their own people. Thus what passed for African history was really only the history of Europeans in Africa<sup>29</sup>

Although from the first decade of this century scientific racism came to be debunked, anthropologists persisted with the project by searching for "primitive" people who had been untouched by "civilization" physical anthropologists continued to be concerned with the description of the races. Given the phenomenal impact that anthropology had on African studies, Curtin excuses the persistence of such racial bias on the basis that, "it is not easy for the specialist, conscious of the probable racial bias of these works, to

<sup>27</sup> K.Marx as quoted in R.A. Higgott, *Political Development Theory*, London: Croom Helm, 1983, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Several studies demonstrated the importance of race in this context. Examples of those who took this position included: Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon in the United States. Carl Gustav Carus in Germany, Robert Knox in Britain and Comted de Gobineau in France .

<sup>29</sup> Curtin, Pre-colonial African History, op.cit., p.7.

make adjustments accordingly"<sup>30</sup> However, if one views the centrality of the racist discourse that pervades European conceptions of the other, it is not merely a by-product of or the difficult faced by the specialist as Curtin suggests but rather it is characteristic of the textual construction of Africa. Hence, it is not too surprising that someone like Christopher Wrigley, writing about Uganda in 1988, had this to say:

Uganda is of course an arbitrarily delimited, culturally heterogeneous, *historically shallow collection of people* with none of the attributes of a nation state<sup>31</sup> (my emphasis).

An equally disturbing representation is that of Carl Sagan's in his discussion of Dogon cosmology. Sagan is unable to comprehend how a pre-scientific society is able to have such advanced knowledge about astronomy. His hypothesis hinges upon speculation that this knowledge could only have been passed on by an outsider such as " a diplomat, an explorer, an adventurer or an early anthropologist."<sup>32</sup> Mudimbe illustrates how Sagan's hypothesis belongs to nineteenth century reasoning about "primitives" despite the fact that it was written in the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

The connections between empire and anthropology are indicative of the claims that anthropology was essentially a science that studied and interpreted the other.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is understandable that Gough has argued that "Anthropology is the child of imperialism"<sup>35</sup> Gough's attack has been

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Wrigley, "Four Steps Towards Disaster" in Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, (eds) *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development*, London: James Currey, 1988, p.28.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Sagan *Broca's Brain; Reflections on the Romance of Science*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1983, p.87 as quoted in V.Y. Mudimbe, op.cit., p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> For a full discussion of Sagan, see Mudimbe, op.cit., pp. 13-15.

<sup>34</sup> It is not my purpose here to engage in current debates about the role of anthropology and the sustained attacks on and from within the discipline. An excellent account of these issues can be found in Edward Said's, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical inquiry*, 15, Winter, 1989, pp.205-225.

<sup>35</sup> Gough as quoted in Jean Copans, op.cit.p.21.

reinforced since by what is generally referred to as the "crisis of representation" in anthropology. As Asad claimed, that discipline was, "carried out by Europeans for a European audience of non-European societies dominated by European power"<sup>36</sup>.

The institutionalisation of anthropology as a discipline had strong linkages to the emergence of both African anthropology as well as African studies, particularly within the Anglophone context. What is significant about ethnology and the notion of applied anthropology which emerged in Britain was the close linkages between theory and practice. For example, in 1926, Lord Lugard founded the International African Institute which was to provide relevant knowledge suitable for application to the colonies<sup>37</sup>.

It is hoped that the purposes for which many native societies - which have a great influence on the native mind - exist will be studied in full, considering that they can become valuable factors in a system of native administration adapted to these tribes<sup>38</sup>.

John Burton has raised questions about the linkage between empire and colonial anthropology in his recent study of the International African Institute, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute and Makerere Institute of Social

<sup>36</sup> T. Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, London: Ithaca Press, 1973, p. 15. a number of writers have pointed out the linkages between empire and anthropology. See, for example, D.Lewis, "Anthropology and Colonialism", *Current Anthropology*, 14, 1973, pp. 5381-91 and the chapters by A. Ahmed, P. Forster, and J. Farris in T. Asad, (ed), op.cit.. a recent attack has been mounted by T. Minha-ha who argues:

...next to the mind doctors- the psychiatrist, the psychoanalyst, and the psychologist - is the anthropologist, who pretends to the precision of the zoologist or a botanist. As a purveyor of 'truth', he has moved from the absolute to the relative and now assumes the role of purveyor of 'certain truth', pursuing a 'perspectivistic knowledge' while keeping an eye profoundly glued on 'scientific objectivity' as methodological goal.

T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: University Press, 1989, p.55.

<sup>37</sup> Copans points out that a similar role was played by the Office for Scientific and Technical Research Overseas (OSTRAM) which came into effect in 1943. Copans, op.cit., p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Lugard as quoted in Copans, op.cit., p.28.

Research<sup>39</sup> Burton concern is to demonstrate that anthropology did not advance the colonial project and that research carried out in these institutes instead challenged colonial policy. However, Burton fails to recognize that these institutions were not autonomous. As Copans points out, what was significant was the institutional form that research in Anglophone Africa was taking, namely, the establishment of "institutes and universities which were autonomous though not independent"<sup>40</sup>. More importantly, what Burton fails to deal with are the problems that emerge when one relates the establishment of such institutions to the discourse of Africanism. The textual creation of African ensured that, methodologically, colonial anthropology was entrapped by the manner in which it represented its subject as the "other".

The persistence of such representations is nowhere better exemplified than in the construction of the colonial myth of the *Mau Mau* in Kenya. The official history of the *Mau Mau* as recorded by F.D. Corfield draws heavily upon the work of Dr. John Carothers', *The psychology of Mau Mau*<sup>41</sup>, a report that was commissioned by the colonial government. Carothers' work inspired by the "science of craniology" argued that because Africans lived in a different cultural environment from Europeans, they suffered different forms of mental illness. Thus, the *Mau Mau* was really a psychosis and needed to be treated accordingly. This mode of thinking was not unique to Kenya and the *Mau Mau*. In Algeria, Professor Porot and the Algerian School of Psychiatry were engaged in a similar project. Porot argued that:

...the native of North Africa, whose superior and cortical activities are only slightly developed, is a primitive creature whose life, essentially vegetative and instinctive, is above all regulated by his diencephalon<sup>42</sup>.

Although there is considerable debate about the historiography of the *Mau Mau*, what is significant is the representation of the African that is accorded

<sup>39</sup> John Burton, "Representing Africa: Colonial Anthropology Revisited", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, XXVI, 3-4, 1992, pp. 181 - 120.

<sup>40</sup> Copans, op.cit., p.23.

<sup>41</sup> J.C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Nairobi, 1954. also see in, *The African Mind in Health Disease*, Geneva" World Health Organisation, 1953.

<sup>42</sup> Porot as quoted in Mustapha Ben T. Marrouchi, op.cit.pp.57-58.

by this discourse and the need by the colonial administration to draw upon "expertise" to deal with the *Mau Mau*<sup>43</sup>. In a recent study, Berman and Lonsdale have demonstrated the important role that Louis Leakey, the celebrated archaeologist and palaeoanthropologist, played in the shaping of official policy with respect to the *Mau Mau*. they argue:

We believe that Louis Leakey's involvement with *Mau Mau*, which went far beyond that of the ostensibly detached academic analyst, in an important and revealing example of the social and political role of the man of knowledge and the politics of knowledge<sup>44</sup>.

Hence it is not too surprising that Said recently stated that, perhaps, "anthropology as we have known it can only continue on one side of the imperial divide, there to remain as a partner in domination and hegemony"<sup>45</sup>.

Returning to Copans' periodisation of African studies what becomes evident is that it is difficult to adhere to his schema as there is considerable overlap and unity in the way the discipline has represented and dominated Africa. The second phase emerged in 1945-60 as African nations began to contemplate an end to colonial rule. The major focus of the discipline at this time was on the relationship between economic growth, democratization and social development. In African studies, this translated into the approach of the modernization school. A radical tradition also emerged in the 1950s, although little attention was paid to it at that time. It suggested that a fresh analysis of traditional societies was necessary. The best example and chief artisan of this break was Georges Balandier. The inability of liberal

<sup>43</sup> On the *Mau Mau* debate, some of the most recent writings include Dane Kennedy, "Constructing the Colonial Myth of *Mau Mau*" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol.25, No.2, 1992, pp. 241 -260. David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, London: James Currey, 1987; and Luise White, "Separating the Men From the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23, 1, 1990, pp. 1-25.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce J. Berman and John M. Lonsdale, "Louis Leakey's *Mau Mau*: A Study in the Poitics of Knowledge" *History and Anthropology*, Vol 15, No. 2, p.145.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Said, *Representing the Colonized*, op.cit., p. 225.

pluralist models to explain fully the nature of political systems and the manner in which societies functioned in the Third world, and later in the advance industrial western countries, led Africanists to explore concepts and hypothesis from alternative intellectual traditions.

One such tradition was Marxism. In African studies, this new theoretical formulation suggested that the appearance of independence needed to be explained in terms of underdevelopment, the struggles for national liberation and the class struggles in the de-colonized countries. There was a collapse of the anti-colonial unity and the political alliances before independence practically disappeared while economic exploitation became more intense. A new theoretical field, therefore, asserted itself, in Marxist terms. Thus, African studies entered a phase of radicalism. Africanists, inspired by the work of Frantz Fanon<sup>46</sup>, were increasingly declaring an overt moral or political commitment in terms of opposition to imperialism and more positively in terms of a concern for African masses.

Marxism helped shape, albeit in a crude manner, the dependency analyses that African studies turned to in the late 1960s and 1970s. Dependency's contribution was its ability to conceive of both political and economic world as systems. This illuminated blind spots in the discipline as well as in the liberal pluralist tradition. Nevertheless, Marxism, dependency as well as the modernization school continued to be limited by the problems of representing the other<sup>47</sup>.

In the current phase, African studies have been dominated by debates surrounding post-dependency. Radical scholarship in African studies is in a state of crisis, particularly with the collapse of Eastern

<sup>46</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965. Also see his, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968.

<sup>47</sup> I do not intend to regurgitate the arguments of the modernization, dependency and post-dependency in this paper. Any recent textbook on development theory deals with these debates. For a summary of these debates, see B. Bloomstrom and B. Hettne *Development Theory in Transition*, London: Zed Books, 1984. Due to a lack of space in this paper, it is not possible to fully delineate the manner in which these metanarratives have represented the African. This project is part of my current work in this area.



Europe. For the other fraction of the discipline, there has been a retreat into the modernization debates of the 1960s and they have gained considerable support from the World Bank and other international organizations to force structural adjustment of Africa designed to ensure the dominance of market force. This has been coupled with the demands to free up the political space. Africa is currently undergoing its own version of *perestroika* where every country on the continent is moving towards the liberal democratic model.

As a result of the crisis in African studies, the tendency has been to shift between broad conceptualization and narrow data gathering. The problems prevalent in anthropology are mirrored in African studies. These problems emerge as a result of ethnocentric universalism and are best reflected in the homogenizing meta-narratives of modernization, dependency and to a lesser extent in post-dependency Marxism. The central problem for these meta-narratives is the way in which they encode and represent the other and measure them by their own "superior" Western standards.

### Conclusion

Africanism is similar to Edward Said's Orientalism and needs to be viewed as a textual construction which allows Africa and the African to be represented as the other, and ensures that they continue to be marginalized. The popular representations of African, therefore, should not be too surprising. They are merely reinforcing images acquired through Western knowledge of Africa. Nevertheless, it is disturbing to witness the latest onslaught of the World Bank and the IMF with the imposition of structural adjustments and conditionalities which resonate eurocentric thinking on Africa. Hence, it should not be too surprising that these like Francis Fukuzama's are echoed in contemporary debates about good governance and that Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilization" will no doubt enter Africanist discourse<sup>48</sup>.

African studies is in a state of crisis<sup>49</sup>. The crisis emanates from the

---

<sup>48</sup> Samuel P. Hunting, the Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49. Also see the response to Huntington in by Fouad ajami, Kishore Mahbubani, Robert Bartley and Jeane Kirkpatrick in *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 1993.

<sup>49</sup> Although T. Ranger argued that African studies was in crisis in the 1970s, his concern, unlike mine, was with the appropriate use of historical sources rather than with the crisis of representation. See T.O. Ranger, "Towards a

manner in which Africa has been represented and the way the subject is dealt with as the other. The enormous influence of anthropology on African studies highlights the dilemmas faced by the discipline. What is disturbing, however, is the lack of reflexive concern. The is little attempt to question the hegemonic role Africanism has played or the right to both represent and created the other. African studies need to seize the opportunity by confronting the existence of difference. For too long, meta-narratives have universalised and homogenised Africa, despite the acknowledgment that Africa is a diverse and variegated continent.

The task for African studies lies in coming to terms with what is appropriate for the African condition. Africa has endured a eurocentric conceptualization of theory. It can only be hoped that, as African studies rise to the challenge of our times, it will enter a new phase of relevance.