Bringing African Studies Back to Africa: Beyond the 'African-Africanist' Divides

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"Perhaps the surest way of getting Africa back into African Studies is to get African Studies back to Africa" – Oyekan Owomoyela[2]

"The networks of connection with Africa are the foundation of African Studies" – Jane Guyer[3]

By Way of Introduction

A spectre has been haunting African Studies for quite some time now - the spectre of decolonization. If we appropriate Fanon's (1963) conceptualization of decolonization as a violent process, then the process of decolonizing the study of Africa in general and African Studies in particular has indeed been violent, at least in the realm of intellectual rivalries. This has been particularly evident at the turn of the 21st century. On the eve of the dawn of this century, as the literatures cited in this paper highlights, we indeed witnessed mounting bitter contestations over the production, dissemination and entitlement of knowledge on and about Africa.

It is important to note that these contestations were not only global and inter/multidisciplinary in scope, but also racialized. They cut across cultural, racial and national divides. Thus, in a way, the contestants closed the 20th century with a high note of affirmation to the fulfilment of the famous Du Boisian prophetic declaration that the last century would be characterized by the problem of the color-line i.e. that of "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Du Bois 1903: 54). Expectedly, these contestations spilled over to the dawn of the 21st century and kept widening the gulf and antagonisms between scholars of Africa, both within and without Africa.

A sample of notable contestations, gentle reader[4], include those fuelled by Moore (1993) defence of a *Changing Perspectives on a Changing Africa: The Work of Anthropology*; Curtin's (1995) critique of *Ghettoizing African History*; Mamdani's

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[2] Owomoyela (1994: 96)
[3] Guyer (1996: 19)
[4] All these debates are now freely and readily available in the internet and the reader is highly encouraged to consult them to get a feel of what has really been going on in African Studies

(1998a) debate on *Teaching Africa at the Post-Apartheid University of Cape Town: A Critical View of the 'Introduction to Africa' Core Course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty's Foundation Semester, 1998;* Gates (1999) travelogue about the *Wonders of the African World*; Mbembe's (2002)[5] *African Modes of Self-Writing*; and, last but not least, Kitching's (2000) apologia, *Why I gave up African Studies.*

As we approach the close of the first decade of the 21st century, contestations and crises besetting African Studies remain a challenge. It follows, then, that this paper looks at their intellectual and institutional implications to the study of Africa, Africans and, inevitably, Africanists such as those who, following in the footsteps of Kitching (2000), are on the Afropessimistic verge of giving up African Studies because they find it depressing. It particularly looks at the possibility of charting viable ways out of the 'Africanist-African' divides and their conceptual impasse for the sake of what is supposed to be the primary beneficiary of African Studies, namely, Africa.

This paper, then, is all about identity. Hence the first section of the paper interrogates the identity of a practice that has come to be known as African Studies and its allied practices. The second section critiques the identity of a group of scholars, commonly known as the Africanists, and their counterpart(s) engaged in this practice. The third section looks at the identity of what is, supposedly, the main preoccupation of this practice, that is, a place commonly referred to as Africa. And, finally, the fourth section charts out the feasibility of transcending identity crises associated with the overuse, misuse and abuse of the etymon from which we (or is it they?) got the term Africa.

What is African Studies to Me?

When Countee Cullen (1925) left us a *Heritage* by penning his poetic question "What is Africa to Me?" he was - knowingly or unknowingly - posing a challenge to anyone who has a stake on Africa to personally appraise what informs that stake. In other words, it is an enduring call to anyone who is interested in Africa to honestly unmask his/her intellectual and material motives behind this interest, not only at a collective/global level, but also at a personal/local level. This Cullenian challenge needs to be extended to the very field (or is it a discipline?) that claims Africa as its

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[5] Originally published earlier in 2000 by CODESRIA and then published in other journals.

main area (or is it its object/subject?) of study. As such, this is an imperative for anyone who is interested in what we specifically call African Studies and its allied disciplines/fields which are involved, in one way or another, in what - following Zeleza (2006a, 2007) and the authors edited in his two volumes - could be broadly termed the Study of Africa. This is particularly important in the context of the recurring bitter inter/multidisciplinary quarrels over the production and consumption of knowledge on and about Africa.

Thus, in a way of anecdotal scholarship which some rigorous scholars find intellectually abhorring, I attempt to unmask the meaning (or is it meanings?) of African Studies. I first encountered African Studies as a 'departmental' field of study in 2003 when I was finishing my undergraduate studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. To me, then, it offered three main incentives. First, as a student who was coming from the turmoil of what Bertelsen (1998) referred to as *The Real Transformation: The Marketization of Higher Education* that shook higher learning institutions in South Africa at the turn of the 21st century, African Studies offered optional courses that could enable me to, at last, graduate after meandering in the maze of disciplinary[6] potpourri for more than the conventional expected time required to complete a Bachelor degree. [7]

Second, African Studies gave me an opportunity to escape from what I then, and still, perceive as the tyranny of disciplinary boundaries that I experienced in my undergraduate discipline of psychology with the notable exception of a course on critical psychology which, to a significant extent, defied disciplinary boundaries.[8]

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[6] In this paper the term 'disciplinary' is strictly used to refer to the way academic disciplines enforce their supposedly distinguishing methodological and theoretical requirements i.e. disciplinary boundaries/requirements e.g. the need for a psychology student to privilege psychological methods of enquiry and sources over sociological or anthropological ones when writing on 'African identity' even in the case where the latter disciplines have more to offer on the subject at hand than the former.

[7] It should be noted, especially for those who are not familiar with these politics of higher education transformation, that by the time I started my first degree in 1999, UCT had shifted from offering degrees on the basis of disciplinary majors to offering degrees based on programs. I therefore ended taking degree program in Psychological Studies. However, by the time I was graduating, UCT had reverted to traditional system of offering degrees on the basis of Majors and Minors.

[8] It was interesting to note, as a colleague alerted me, that a certain professor of psychology from one of UCT's 'rival' universities viewed this course as not being psychology per se due to its auto-critiques of psychology. However, in many cases, critical psychology also tends to privilege its own version of psychology and the multidisciplinary critical canon that suits its interest. The history of contestations within/about these disciplines that are involved in the Study of Africa makes one wonder how far we can go in defending the academic virtues of a discipline regardless of its intellectual vices.

Third, I got a chance to be directly informed, albeit partly, about key interesting issues on and about Africa which I was not aware of or had not engaged with since I completed my 'Africanized' primary and secondary education in Tanzania.

With hindsight knowledge, it is interesting to note that these three *raison d'etre* and their ramifications were situated in a broader context of contestations over the whole enterprise of knowledge production and consumption. However, the fact remains that little did I know then about the challenges that the system of knowledge production and its practitioners were facing. More significantly, though embarrassing, is the fact that not much did I come to know about these challenges and their ensuing contestations reviewed in this paper even after graduating with a postgraduate Honors degree in African Studies. Ironically, a taught Masters degree in the same Area Study and from another university in another continent did not change much of this.

Needless to say, the reasons for this intellectual obliviousness of current debates on African Studies were both personal and institutional. The former is based on an undisputable assertion that it is a personal responsibility of a student/scholar, especially at a postgraduate level, to pursue knowledge individually and collectively wherever it may be found rather than wait to be spoon-fed or opt to offer lame excuses bordering intellectual laziness. However, for the purpose of this section of the paper, the latter is more significant because it says something about what African Studies was, or is, in the context of the institutional training I received.

Institutionally, African Studies was a given despite the fact that it was advertised in the academic brochures and internet as an attempt to attract students. It was a given in the sense that there was no serious introduction or debate on what African Studies is or what it is not; there was no serious exposition of its contested history and meaning. Therefore my first real encounter of an attempt at a definition of African Studies was when I stumbled on the following disturbing verb/action-orientated definition from a book which, though often referred - in the blurb and publishing circles - to as a very important contribution to the field of African Studies by an African scholar, did not

feature at all among the prescribed or recommended readings in any of the courses that I took[9]:

> As a discursive formation, African Studies, is of course, immersed in the context and configurations of the western epistemological order. The state of flux, some would say crisis in African Studies in North America and apparently in Britain…reflects changing cultural politics as a result of the shifting ethnic and gender composition of classrooms, transformations in the global positions of these countries, and the crisis of liberal values, which manifests itself in the academy in the savage wars over curriculum and canon, 'multi-culturalism' and 'political correctness', and in the wider society in battles over the moral and fiscal boundaries of the welfare state, and the politics of identity and entitlement (Zeleza 1997: iii)

Now this quasi definition of African Studies was written way back before I even started my university education. But it says a lot about what I was to encounter in the African Studies programs I undertook. The field was indeed in a state of flux, however, this was not explicitly stated so in the classrooms or in other public academic arenas. For instance, no one openly discussed or wrote about the historical, institutional and intellectual explanations of why the classes on African Studies at UCT were dominated by exchange students from Northern Universities, particularly from USA and the implication this had – or still has – on the sustainability of the field at UCT.[10] On a slightly different vein, I never had any theoretical explanations of why, out of more than a dozen students who were doing a Masters program in African Studies at the University of Edinburgh, only a handful were men although the field had been dominated by men for quite some time as the composition and hierarchy of the members of academic staff indicated.

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[9] However, it is important to note that its first chapter on 'The Trial of Academic Tourist' which sarcastically caricatures the role of 'Africanists' in tokenizing and undermining 'African' scholarship was handed out to the PhD class at the University of Edinburgh, an opportunity that my Masters class did not have despite the then well known fact that most of us would never do a PhD, let alone do it there. It is also important to note that its chapter seven on 'Gender in African Historiography' was reprinted in Imam, Mama and Sow (1999) and the reprint was a recommended reading in my Honors class at UCT. In any case, it is surprising that this seminal book, which got the 1998 Special Commendation of the Noma Award, was then entirely absent in the renowned library of the Center of African Studies at UCT although its author was/is a relatively frequent participants in events organized by the Center and the library has other collection from CODESRIA, the publisher of the book.

[10] It is interesting to note that now the Center is moving towards the direction of African Diasporic Studies (See http://www.africanknowledges.uct.ac.za/), which is a very good development in its own right, especially with respect to what is regarded as the twin "need to globalize Africa and Africanize globalization"(Zeleza 2006b: 7) or the need to globalize African Studies in line with what Martin and West (1999) refers to as the transcontinental paradigm in the Study of Africa. However, it is logically for one to wonder if this global African diasporic move at UCT is not also a quest for relevance and survival of a department that had hardly attracted a sufficient number of continental African students.

In all these cases it was as if there was an institutional complicity in attempting not to scare away the then dwindling group of aspiring students - the few left potential Afroptimists – who were anxiously looking forward to a career in African Studies without necessarily knowing what lies beneath; as if there was an urgent need to cushion newcomers from being discouraged by the bitter and often vituperative quarrels and battles over African Studies which has beset the field since the times of the famous/infamous confrontation at the 12th Annual African Studies Association (ASA) Meeting in Montreal in 1969 , a historical encounter that I have only come to know about now in the course of writing this paper. If this intellectual protectionism is indeed the case, then it should not be surprising that unless a student really stretches his/her personal zeal for the pursuit of knowledge beyond institutional provision, s/he could complete and Master/Mistress a course on the introduction to key readings on Africa, problematizing the study of Africa or debating African Studies without thoroughly knowing anything about the key ontological and epistemological issues that have shaped, reshaped and are continuously reshaping African Studies.

Thus, despite holding a prestigious postgraduate degree certificate of African Studies, s/he may indeed not know the history (or is it *herstory*?) of his/her field and the material and intellectual currents that informs, transforms and even deforms it. If our emerging scholars are prone to be uninformed or even misinformed about these debates that are globally accessible, one would indeed wonder if they would readily be informed about those debates that happen at local levels in Africa. This is worse if and when their professors are also oblivious to these realities. In this regard it may be interesting to note that one African scholar, disappointed by some tendencies within African Studies to authorize 'inauthentic'/inaccurate representation of things African, went as far as urging that "there ought to be a law prohibiting Universities abroad from granting Doctorate on subjects about which they are un-informed as the candidates they examine are mis-informed" (Quoted in Taiwo 1995: 92).

To add academic salt to the intellectual injury of being misinformed or uninformed about Africa, students of African Studies may end being very well informed about theories and methodologies that are of little relevance to Africa. In this regard it is instructive to pay attention to the confession of one Africanist 'made in America' and 'brought to Africa'. Confronted with what he refers to as the challenge of the mission

veranda, this Africanist was honest enough to admit that his "new career in academia continues to have so little to do with Africa, despite" his "best efforts to make it be so" (Waters 1995: 31). He observed that that the glaring weakness in African Studies was the lack of empirical data combined with an over-abundance of social theory.

Most of the theories and their models, as we are supposed to know by now, were conceived in other continents in the context of their situations. Then, they were imported to the African situations. In line with the argument that not everything out of Africa is bad for Africa, this importation was and is not bad in itself, that is, as long as the imports suit the African situations. However, he observed that "when researchers with pre-conceived ideas search for such situations hard enough, even in Africa they can find them despite the fact that the basic assumptions of the models i.e. land scarcity and pursuit of individual advantages, are absent in much of sparsely populated rural areas. The results may be published, but to the field worker, the implied policy prescriptions…are typically not within the realm of possibilities" (Waters 1995: 32).

Interestingly, Waters (1995) also observed that to a great degree the demands of the American academic life were not consistent with complicated nature of field work in Africa. For example, a typically graduate-level fieldwork, which is done on a single year grants, implies that only a single agriculture cycle in Africa can be observed – a situation that is worsened when there is an absence of past written records or field work in the same area. Needless to say, what we are left to consume in such a situation, as he aptly notes, is only a description of one particular year and an outpouring of theoretical conclusions based on such studies. Moreover, in his glaring calculations on the academic rhythm lifecycle of an American Africanist he came up with a convincing conclusion that out of the first 12-15 years of a promising career in African Studies, no more than 1 – 2 years will be spent in Africa.

It is in these contexts of 'pseudo-African Studies', then, one ought to empathetically situate the following lamentation which has been echoed and re-echoed by many an African scholar[11]:

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[11] Observe, for instance, the following bitter rallying cry against Mbembe's attempt to, supposedly, get African scholarship 'out of the ghetto': It "is not clear how borrowing new themes, such as sexuality-popular in some cultural studies quarters of the Northern academy – or how filling African publications

> In recent times Africa has been a favourite quarry of American social scientists and humanities scholars. It has served Africanist scholars, mostly white, as a springboard for their eminently successful careers, as objects of study, and as cartographic points to which some of them could lay claims as theirs, trespass to which is often the equivalent of capital offence in African Studies. Many of us have often been lectured, harangued, sometimes nearly insulted, because we dared to suggest that a subject on which a particular Africanist is "expert", or one that happens to excite her or him has little relevance to the scholarly concerns of African scholars or lives of Africans!" (Taiwo 1995: 39)

All these observations, coupled with Waters (1995) observation that the recruitment of new Africanists tend to privilege students with good grades at the expense of those he refers to as seasoned but mildly cynical fellow with African experience, explains, in part, why African Studies is prone to theoretical eclecticism based on realities that have little to do with Africa. If this is the heritage of African Studies and its allied disciplines then there is a need for younger generation of scholars of Africa to appropriate the following caution to the then younger generation of Africanists:

> What I am suggesting then is that young Africanists must evaluate carefully the disciplines in which they have been trained. They cannot afford to accept without questioning and examining the assumptions and biases of their disciplines. Thus, the younger Africanists of African descent in order to get at the African social reality and reappraise their African cultural heritage, must penetrate the homemade models of the social sciences. Finally, they must give priority to certain areas of concern and select carefully their problems for investigation (Bond 1971: 97)

So, after all this 'storytelling' about African Studies, one may still ask, 'What is African Studies to you?' To me, African Studies is a controversial multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field which, despite various critiques about what appears as its indiscipline and indifference, persistently claims or appropriate Africa as its area of study and utilizes whatever theories and methodologies that it finds useful for its multifaceted purposes. Apparently, one of its principles purposes is the "production of knowledges on and about Africa" (Zeleza 2006b: 8). Like any other academic field,

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with such writings, will change matters. Personally, I have nothing against sexuality or talking about bodies; but I am more interested in these questions as they relate to the fundamental question of social existence in our society, how our populations are being reproduced, how their bodies are being fed and nourished, clothed and sheltered, healed and saved… some of the best scholarship in Africa… has often been inspired by a burning desire to change the world, to address the pressing issues of the times. Maybe that is why African scholars, surrounded by material poverty and political tyranny, by underdevelopment, to use a once popular term, are more preoccupied with questions of development and democracy than about gazing at their sexuality that seems to titilate the intellectual imaginations of some of our 'colleagues' in 'postmodern' societies." (Zeleza 2003: 393-394)

African Studies has a material and intellectual history – a history, sad to say, marred by its complicity in serving interests other than those that are primarily African and anti-colonial/imperial hence the ongoing arduous task of decolonizing and deimperializing it. Since the history of Africa has not ended, African Studies will indeed have a long future whether it will manage to maintain it self-proclaimed distinct identity as a discipline in its own right or become absorbed in the broader multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary Study of Africa.

Probably the best way of unpacking my loaded definition of African Studies is to revisit some of the contentions over the nature/constitution and development/history of African Studies. Kindly indulge my habitual intellectual appetite for lengthy quotes as we begin with the following contention that emanated from what came to be known as the 'the curriculum debate at UCT':

> Historically, African Studies developed outside Africa, not within it. It was a study of Africa, but not by Africans. The context of this development was colonialism, the Cold War and apartheid. This period shaped the organization of social science studies in the Western Academy. The key division was between the disciplines and area studies. The disciplines studied the White experience as a universal, human, experience; area studies studied experience of people of colour as an ethnic experience. African Studies focused mainly on Bantu administration, customary law, Bantu languages and anthropology. This orientation was as true of African Studies at the University of Cape Town as it was of other area study centres. Introductory courses in African Studies usually followed a three-fold division. Part One would cover Africa before the White presence, then would follow African under White rule, and finally, there would be a section on Africa after the departure of the White man. The moral of the story, implicit or explicit, would be that things fell apart once the White Man departed (Mamdani 1998b: 63-64)

"That this was once the case is uncontested", declared one of the then leading critic of Mamdani, "but it was not the Centre for African Studies [CAS] that Mamdani found on his arrival in Cape Town in 1996" (Hall 1998b: 87). This 'but', as experts of Discourse Analysis and champions of Deconstruction would be quick to point out, is of profound significance. It invalidates this history of African Studies according Mamdani as far as post-Apartheid South Africa is concerned. Most significantly, using the case of CAS, it even nullifies it as far the tumultuous decade of the 1980s, which precipitated the end of official Apartheid in 1994, is concerned. The defense is packed with some convincing evidence and it also deserves to be quote in length:

To the contrary, since the beginning of the 1980s, the Centre had developed an interdisciplinary curriculum, both in an undergraduate "introduction to Africa" and in post-graduate Diploma and Honours courses, that linked a wide range of disciplines (literature, history, sociology, political studies, anthropology, history of art, languages) and framed them within contemporary affairs. The Centre hosted a wide range of events, including film, dance, seminars and debates, and built up a good research library. In the face of attempts by the apartheid state to stifle all opposition (particularly after the declaration of successive emergencies after 1986), the Centre organized seminars and conferences that critiqued the state and presented the policies of banned organizations. All this is on the record: The Centre's publications, the long Africa seminars series, reports, documents and curricula (Hall 1998b: 87)

I happened to stumble on one such collection – edited by Hall (1984) himself – and a cursory look at the sample of the articles collected therein substantiates some of his assertions. Their titles are telling. So are the biographies of some of their authors.[12] For instance, in the domain of psychology it contains Couve's (1984) *The psychologist and Black Consciousness in South Africa: the work of N.C. Manganyi* and Foster's (1984) *The Contact hypothesis in South Africa: a socio-psychological approach*. In sociology and political science, it contains Nicol's (1984) *The Transvaal Garment Workers' Union's assault on low wages in Cape Town clothing industry, 1930-1931* and James's (1984) *Life trajectories of a working class: South Africa 1961-1981).* Anthropology was represented by Dubow's (1984) '*Understanding the native mind: Anthropology, cultural adaptation, and the elaboration of a segregationist discourse in South Africa, c. 1920-36*. The collection also included articles that looked at countries outside South Africa e.g. linguistics in Zimbabwe, literature in 'francophone' West Africa, and international relations between South Africa and Latin America.

With such weight of evidence, it is tempting to quickly dismiss Mamdani (1998a, 1998b) and vindicate Hall (1998a, 1998b). That is not my concern here and, as we shall see later when we revisit this debate, the issue at hand is too messy – both ontologically and epistemologically - to warrant such a quick partisan conclusion. Of interest to me here is how this Mamdani-Hall debate underscores the fact that African

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[12] Some of these authors, such Foster published controversial reports that raised the eyebrows of the then official Apartheid regime; some, like Dubow, were compelled to become exiles. These cited texts indeed framed within the then contemporary affairs. For example, Couve's paper looked at the question of African identity and its role in the conception of the self among South Africans – a theme that pervaded Apartheid South Africa in the wake of the Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement.

Studies is a contested intellectual and material domain. As we shall see in the section on 'Who Knows or Needs Africa?' this domain is informed by the global historical schism between competing versions of Africa. At the moment it only suffices to say that on the one hand there is the Africa of the Mamdanis – the whole of Africa in all its geographical, historical and political ramifications. On the other hand there is the Africa of the Halls, which though claiming to be nothing more than the Africa of the Mamdanis, its critics view it as subscribing to another Africa – a truncated Africa couched in the language of exceptionalism, of 'pockets' of difference within Africa. For me, all this implies that we can hardly chart a viable route out of the Africanist-African divides if we remain divided between these two Africas.

To underscore the global nature of this schism, let us look at another contention, which, due to obvious reasons, has not been accorded the serious attention that it deserves. This is the contention over the history of African Studies according to Guyer (1996) and her colleagues as presented in what was commended, by the then president of ASA in her presidential address, as "an excellent review and assessment of the field of African Studies" (Berger 1997: 13). In introducing *African Studies in the United States: A Perspective*, Guyer (1996) clearly points out that an overview of African Studies composed in the then present moment necessarily represents the perspective of the author. One of the reasons she gives for this is because the study of Africa has become widespread and varied. And as a result, it may look quite different from different vantage points.

Thus, from Guyer's (1996) vantage point, in the beginning the study of Africa was founded and sustained by foundations and government. These institutions, we are told, were concerned with the failure of the disciplines in American Universities to promote international studies. Unlike the biblical beginning, it is not difficult to locate this beginning. It was late 1940s, in the context of post-World War II and the then emerging Cold War. This ushered an era in African Studies that was characterized by a basic research agenda. At this juncture it important to note that it also coincided with the birth of the Bretton Woods instutions that were to play a big role in defining the research agenda in and on Africa. Now back to Guyer. This basic research, as its participants and funders saw it, was "about culture and society, state building, and modernization" (Guyer 1996: 5).

The first era, we are told, was joined and changed, but was not displaced, by another era that was also devoted, albeit in a much greater degree, to the pressing and immediate problems of development. We are now supposed to be in new era, which she attempted to chart out as an era in which "the future of African Studies in American universities will result from the interplay of three very powerful forces: the situation in Africa, the reconfiguration of social investment throughout U.S. society, and the policies that universities adopt to resituate themselves for a new era of higher education" (Guyer 1996: 10). It goes without saying that the key academic/intellectual participants in the evolution of these Guyern eras of African Studies were and are Euro-American Africanists.

Despite Guyer's (1996) disclaimer that her report on African Studies was necessarily a personal view and that ideally it was supposed to be a collective enterprise, Zeleza (2004), ever in love with historical excavation, was quick to broadly point out how Guyer's perspective developed historically as a shared perspective. In fact, as we shall see in the section on 'Am I, too, an Africanist?', Guyer's overuse of the collective "we" in her overview easily expose her to these kinds of critiques on hegemonic collectivities. Picking a cue from Martin and West (1999a, 1999b), Zeleza (2004) traces how African Studies was developed in the US academy prior to the 1950 by African-American scholars before it was usurped by Euro-American scholars. Drawing from the evidence from the latter scholars, he shows how this historical usurp was forged in the collective imagination of these scholars. For instance, he quotes as typical example a former president of ASA, Philip Curtin, as saying, in his 1970 presidential address, "that at the end of the second world war North America had no real community of scholars specializing in Africa" (Quoted in Zeleza 2004: 185).

The historical excavation does not end there. Zeleza (2004) also revisit the allegedly deliberate efforts by some Euro-American Africanists to subvert the work of African Americans. One such glaring case is that of a person who is now regarded as the father (is there a mother too?) of African Studies, Melville J. Herskovits. The doyen reportedly helped denied funding for William E. B. Du Bois' Encyclopedia African project – a mission that remained on hold for quite some significant time until another

generation of African American scholars came up to fulfill it. In the name of objectivity, it is also reported that Heskovits regularly advised his African American graduate students not to study in Africa while encouraging Euro-American students to do so. To Zeleza, all these moves were tantamount to wresting paternity of the field of African Studies from Du Bois to Herskovits and from Howard University to Northwestern University. They "represented a much larger battle, the incorporation of Africa into the orbit of American foreign policy and cold war calculations, and a paradigmatic shift from posing large civilization and cultural questions to policy-oriented developmentalist research, from popular engagement to professional encounters with Africa" (Zeleza 2004: 185-186).

It should be noted that these are the times that formed the backdrop to Skinner's (1971) *African Studies, 1955-1975: An Afro-American Perspective* that aimed, among other things, to claim/reclaim their history of African Studies. It is indeed important for anyone who is really serious about moving beyond the African-Africanist divides to revisit this history according to one of the scholars who juggled, with relative success and may I say relative easiness, many of the divides within and between African, African-American and Euro-American scholarship on Africa. This legacy of African Studies as a house divided despite the fact that it has many mansions is too hard for some of us who have had 'a glimpse at African American Studies made in the US with respect to African Studies' can deny.[13] It is a legacy which informs Guyer's personal, albeit, collective perspective on African Studies – a perspective that tends to privilege the Africanist perspective.

Thus, Zeleza's (2004) historicized conclusive charge below, I contend, is too revealing to be trivially bypassed and, I seriously contend, a rigorous intellectual

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[13] It is only now I am coming to understand why it was very difficult for me to fit my 'African Studies' with 'Afro-American Studies' when I was completing my Honors Degree in African Studies as an exchange student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass) in 2004. At that time I could hardly make sense of the following statement from the website of UMass' W.E.B Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies: "Because our program is small, we wish to admit only students whose interest is focused on Afro-American Studies as a field, and who seek to become scholars and teachers of Afro-American Studies. If you are really interested … in African Studies… you should probably look for a program that is better suited to your plan of study" (http://www.umass.edu/afroam/). Now I am also starting to understand why, despite a presence of many students of African descent, there was no strong preoccupation with what is happening at the African continent itself in a graduate summer seminar program on the African Diaspora that I attended at Florida International University in 2004.

debate (or may I say dialogue?) among scholars of Africa across the various divides on its historical validity, its intellectual significance, and its material implication is long overdue and, thus, cannot be overemphasized

> By the early 1950s, then, there were at least two competing Africas in the American academy and socially imaginary; the Africa of the African American scholar-activists and the Africa of the academic Africanists; the Africa of popular struggle and liberation and the Africa of policy formulation and implementation. In one Africa was a civilizational presence; in the other a basket case of absences, a continent awaiting development and modernization. The Africanists' Africa triumphed in the academy, not for its superior intellectual insights, but because it resonated with the predilections of the general public and the prescriptions of the foreign policy establishment. So the history of African Studies had to be re-written, the newly institutionalized African Studies project sanctified. From then on, in the official histories of African Studies, including the most recent by Jane Guyer, *African Studies in the United States (1996)*, it became fashionable to ignore the fact that African Studies was pioneered in the HBCUs [historically black colleges and universities] and not in HWUs (historically white universities), by African American scholar-activists not European American academics and policy wonks (Zeleza 2004: 185).

A rigorous intellectual deliberation on this contention is particularly overdue because it has been restated over and over again, especially from the quarters of African American scholars such as Skinner (1971) and Martin and West (1999b), but the community of scholars, especially Euro-American Africanists, has tended to evade the issue. Since the community of scholars involved in the Study of Africa at large has not yet come out with a solid collective deliberation on the matter, these competing histories continues to be reproduced at the detriment of a sound historiography of African Studies. I say so in definitive terms because in such a case, not even someone in a postmodern garb can solidly deny that it is clear that one of the versions of the history of African Studies is definitely false for they are indeed mutual exclusive. Perhaps this 'power of the false' is sustained by the fact that letting go the false is tantamount to letting go our particular versions of Africa that primarily serves our intellectual and material interests - the very interests that may be working against the best interests of Africa and her/his people.

Am I, too, an Africanist?
I was caught by surprise when I was told that I was to subscribe to what it means to be an Africanist when choosing essay topics for a Master program. It was then, and only

then, when I really started to seriously think about the meaning of this term Africanist, a term I hardly, if not, met or associated myself with when I was doing African Studies in South Africa. I consulted my bible of African studies again. There I found the following inclusive definition of the Africanist enterprise which would leave me epistemologically disturbed:

> By Africanist I mean the entire intellectual enterprise of producing knowledge based on a western epistemological order in which both educated Africans and non-Africans are engaged (Zeleza 1997: v)

For me, this definition, like Mbeki's (1998) famous inclusive definition of *I am an African*[14], is too inclusive to the extent that it dissolves the uniqueness or difference of what it purports to define in a pool of sameness. In other words, the definition is too encompassing to the extent that everyone who is educated and is involved, in one way or another, in the production of knowledge on and about Africa qualifies as an Africanist. I find this epistemologically disturbing because it is an undeniable historical and intellectual fact that no educated person, be it a self-proclaimed Afrocentric or champion of African indigenous knowledge, has managed to completely strip himself/herself of the intellectual garb of western modernity and its concomitant epistemology. This is particularly true because Africa, as Olaniyan (2005) reminds us, has been an intimate part of the history of this modernity and has paid most of its bills.

Thus, no one, I dare say, has reached a point where s/he is operating entirely outside the western cartography of knowledge which is still tainted by the modernist legacies of Orientalism and Hegelism. In other words, with varying degrees, we are all still bound by the western way of knowing Africa which tends to view Africa as the antithesis of the West, namely, Euro-America. Although we have gone a long way in our attempts to deconstruct this order of knowing Africa as Euro-America's ultimate Other, this fact is still as true now as it was when a leading deconstructor penned the following honest affirmation nearly twenty years ago:

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[14] To get a proper comparative context read this quote: "Being a part of all these people [Khoi, San, Boer, Malay, European migrant, etc.] and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim: I am an African…Today it feels good to be an African. It feels good that I can stand here as a South African…I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa (Mbeki, 1998, p. 32-35).

> The fact of the matter is that, until now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly "Afrocentric" descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order (Mudimbe 1988: x)

It is important to note that the ways scholars of Africa engage or have attempted to disengage with this western epistemological order has informed the contentions on what it means to be an Africanist. In general terms, on the one hand there are those who view themselves as scholars who are primarily involved in the reordering, disordering or even dismantling of this epistemological order. On the other hand, there are those scholars who are viewed, by the former group, as primarily engaged in maintaining, defending and even rehabilitating it. This is so despite the fact that in many instances the latter group also tends to view itself as being engaged in reshaping and critiquing this order. Although these two groups are by no means uniform in many regards, for analytical purposes it is not difficult to locate their base or identity as far as the uniformity regarding what Taiwo (1995) refers as the appropriation of Africa is concerned. For the sake of analytical clarity, I will henceforth refer to the former group as the African oriented group and the latter as the Africanist oriented group.

The African oriented group is mainly comprised of three subgroups: African scholars who have strong African nationalistic sentiments and are strongly affiliated to Pan-African networks within and without the continent; African-American scholars who subscribe to the Pan-African ideals and have strong ties with the global Black Diaspora; Euro-American scholars who, with relative discomfort, identify themselves with the causes of the aforementioned African scholars and/or African-American scholars.

In the case of the Africanist oriented group, one can also discern three subgroups, albeit in a reversed form: Euro-American scholars who are the main custodian of the western Africanist enterprise; African-American scholars who, with relative agitation, have curved a relatively accommodating space within the Africanist establishment in Euro-America; African Scholars who, with relative uneasiness, have found a relatively accepting niche in the global Africanist arena.

A cursory illustration from the encounter between the authors of the epigraphs of this paper gives a glimpse of these divides between African oriented and Africanist oriented scholars. When Guyer (1996), who seems to vacillate between being an African oriented Euro-American scholar and an Africanist oriented Euro-American scholar, was finalizing her report on *African Studies in the United States: A Perspective*, a controversial critique came out. It was written by Owomoyela (1994), a scholar who appears to juggle the thin line between being an African oriented and Africanist oriented African scholar. The article was based on what the author regarded as the "sensible assumption" that African Africanist are pro-African and what he considered as a "widespread notion" within African Studies that "for most part, even non-African Africanists hold a patronal attitude towards the continent, its peoples and culture and their future, routinely combining the role of champions with that of students" (Owomoyela 1994: 77). On the basis of these assumptions, the author went on to argue that " very often, Africanist practice, while purporting to be responsive to the best interests of Africa and Africans, in fact has the effect of perpetuating notions of an Africa that never was" (Owomoyela 1994: 77).

As expected, this critique hurt intellectual feelings of the 'friends like these'. It reopened fresh intellectual wounds inflicted - frequently by the African oriented group - upon 'these friends' who had invested so much intellectual energy in founding and defending the Africanist enterprise. Thus, in the conclusion of her defense (or is it apologia?) of why the Africanist enterprise appeared to have failed to address Africa's problem in the so-called lost decade, Guyer lumped Owomoyela with two other doyens of the African oriented group while appealing to the authority of one of the venerated founders of the Africanist oriented group:

> As a result, by the mid–to–late 1980s there developed a rising tide of frustration with us all on the part of Africa-based scholars, such as Mahmoud Mamdani and Thandika Mkandawire, who saw our work as increasingly unrelated to African concerns, either intellectual or developmental. Even this very week there is a new publication arguing that we "use" Africa for career advancement rather than serve Africa's interests (Owomoyela 1994); "With friends like these…," his article is entitled. As I noted, this was not desired by anyone. In fact the founder of the canon in African history, Jan Vansina, has weighed in just as heavily about rushed and superficial research by comparison with the

early years of basic research orientation. But it is eminently understandable viewed from the inside (Guyer 1996: 8)

Implicit in this statement, is the hidden definition of who is an Africanist which excludes "Africa-based scholars". A close reading of the way Guyer uses the words "us all", "we' and "anyone" shows that in this case these words are not as inclusive as they appear to be. This group comprises those who are in the "inside' as far as the Africanist enterprise is concerned - the likes of the Vansinas and the Guyers if one wishes to essentiliaze it. No wonder Berger (1997) used her ASA presidential address to remind fellow Africanists that the term Africanists is a contested term.

Thus, with all these confusions surrounding the meaning of an Africanist it won't surprise anyone to see why I am wondering if I am also an Africanist or not. As we shall see in the section on 'Are there Ways out of Africa's Etymological Divides?' maybe it is about time now that we do away with some terms that have outlived whatever purpose they had in the first place – terms that serve to divide us in our difference more than unite us in our diversity as far as the Study of Africa for the betterment of Africa in its own terms concerned.[15]

Who Knows or NeedsAfrica?

In the heydays of political decolonization, the pan-African movement inaugurated a controversial slogan, *Africa for Africans*, which was echoed all over the then nationalistic Africa.[16] For some strange reasons, which may have something to do with African Studies, the call would disappear in the global imagination. Thus, in the wake of independence and the ensuing Africanization of the then Euro-Americanized African institutions, this slogan started to lose its appeal especially to some African leaders who wanted to curb racialism that was inherited from the colonial structures.[17]

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[15] Here it is instructive to note that during official Apartheid in South Africa the term Africanist also used to refer to those who subscribed to militant African nationalism vis-à-vis Apartheid.

[16] My rationale for phrasing this sentence this way is based on Shivji's (2003) convincing analysis of the fall of nationalism in Africa and the need to keep insurrecting it or/and be a part of its insurrection.

[17] Allowing for errors arising out of generalization, one can safely conclude that most colonial structures in Africa was based on a hierarchy that included three racial categories: the first group, which was mainly 'European', enjoyed all the rights of a citizen while the second group, which was mainly 'Asian', was treated as second-class citizens. Finally, 'Africans', who comprised the third group, were more of subjects than citizens.

This move toward a deracialized Africa was particularly important given that most of these countries realized they will always need the expertise of the 'non-African' constituents, including those who have opted - out of historical necessity and other constraints - to reside in the continent for good. Thus, the road was paved for the substitution of the discourse of Africa for Africans with the discourse of Africa for all who wish Africa well. And indeed there were many who, at least in theory, wished Africa well. In other words, many a people apart from indigenous Africans needed Africa and Africa needed them. This realization even made one strong advocate of Pan-Africanism to envision the following kind of a United Africa way back before Mbeki (1998) globalized African identity:

> A united Africa does not mean a uniform Africa…. Africa will belong to Africans. I believe that this word 'Africans' can include all those who have made their home in the continent, black, brown, or white…. This means forgetting colour, or race, and remembering humanity (Nyerere 1966: 117)

We have now gone a long way since those heydays when the winds of euphoric change were blowing over a promising Africa. However, as the previous section of this paper has shown, Africa remains a contested domain both intellectually and materially. It is obvious that Africa as a concept or as an object of study does not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone. For instance, Legum (1999) painstakingly attempts to differentiate between the Africa that is seen through the Western eyes and the one that is seen through the African eyes. To him, the former is an underdeveloped "continent which has slid into economic ruin, corruption, despotic rule, coups, and civil wars" (Legum 1999: 2). He finds it difficult to define the latter because when one read about Africa as described by African poets and intellectuals, s/he is not reading "about the condition of one continent, but rather the conditions of many societies at different levels of political, social, and economic development" (Legum 1999: 2).

Since the West has played a major role in the invention of Africa as the antithesis of the West, as Mudimbe (1988) and others have forcefully asserted, it is difficult to deny the historical validity of the first definition. However, for the same reasons that makes it difficult for Legum (1999) to define the latter, one can hardly get a unified definition of the former. For instance, even the major Western financial institutions

that claim to assess Africa have exhibited a significant variation on what constitutes Africa as the following observation highlights:

> For the World Bank their 'Africa' is an abbreviation for sub-Saharan Africa, and until recently excluded South Africa and Namibia, as well as North Africa, which is often appended to low and middle income Europe and the Middle East. UNCTAD and the ECA, on the other hand, usually cover the continent as a whole. So Generalization about Africa depend on which 'Africa' is covered (Zeleza 1997: 292)

This generalization about Africa is one of the pitfalls that are assailing many, if not all, of those who employ Africa as their object of study. Kitching's (2003) response to Pearce's (2003) argument against Kitching's generalization of Africa illustrates the difficulty in navigating the thin line between being both a universalist and a particularist with respect to Africa. He juxtaposes two passages from Pearce in a way that shows how she fails to live up to that biblical injunction of first removing a plank from your own eyes so that you can see clearly enough to be able to remove a speck from another person's eyes :

> Pearce: "Africans are increasingly seeing themselves in racial terms, encouraged by essentialist generalizations about 'African societies,' the 'African elite,' 'African culture.' In turn, African societies are increasingly seen in racial terms as well. Scholars must use all their efforts to put an end to this (and that means starting by avoiding generalizations about Africa). Such concepts are dangerous and damaging both to scholarship and to the self-respect of the African people."

> BUT (next paragraph)

> Pearce: "African scholars should be at the heart of African scholarship. Many intellectuals on the continent are stuck with rotten universities and demoralizing, low salaries. They do not have a proper place in the wider society, within or outside Africa, where their contribution is wanted or encouraged. There is an unbridgeable gap between town and gown."

> These look like generalizations about Africa to me. (Kitching 2003)

It is true, Pearce (2003), like many of us[18], falls into the same pit of universalistic generalization which she is trying to move beyond. This type of pitfall will be philosophized in the next section of this paper. Here, it suffices to say that it explains,

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[18] Whether we are postmodernist or not it may serve us well if we honestly admit that above " all, the temptation to approach Africa as a vast, undifferentiated entity is an ever present one" (Irele 2001: x)

in part, why Africa as a hegemonic universal concept can hardly work. It cannot work because to "speak of Africa as a single continent is accurate only in geographic terms" (Legum: 4). But most of us speak and write about it as if it is a single economic, social and political body even when we don't agree on the material and symbolic boundaries of Africa, which according to Zeleza (2003), are constantly shifting.

This lack of agreeing even to disagree make it difficult to scholars, such as Ojo-Ade (2003), who claims that Gates does not know Africa, and Zeleza (2003), to accept Gates' (1999) representation/misrepresentations of Africa even though Gates had put a disclaimer by entitling his first chapter *Africa, to Me* implying that he was operating on the basis of his version of Africa. It also explains why Hall (1998b) kept locking horns with Mamdani (1998a, 1998b) about the way Africa was defined by African Studies in Apartheid South Africa despite the fact Mamdani had already added a disclaimer that he acknowledges that the South African academy was opposed to Apartheid politically; that his main contention was that the academy was then deeply affected epistemologically by Apartheid to the extent that, knowingly or probably unknowingly, it was persistently failing to transcend the following history of the changing meaning of Africa as its then proposed curriculum change arguably indicated[19]:

> The meaning of Africa would change with the beginning of white control. Africa would cease to be the entire continent. North Africa would become part of the Middle East, considered civilized, even if just barely. White-controlled Africa in the south would be considered an exception, an island of civilization, studied separately. Africa, popularly known as 'darkest Africa', would refer geographically to equatorial Africa, and socially to Black Africa, or Bantu Africa, or Negro Africa, variously so-called (Mamdani 1998b: 64)

All these contentions over Africa in African Studies underscore the fact that Africa is not only an economic and intellectual investment, but is also a moral as well as an emotional investment and any attempt to expropriate it will likely lead to a bitter contestation. They prove that, contrary to the assertion that Africa is marginal in the global imagination, Africa matters. No wonder we have Africa for Africans, Africa for Euro-American Africanists, Africa for African Americans, African for Asians and

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[19] It is interesting to note that by the time I left UCT in 2003 the core courses on African Studies were more in line with Mamdani's (1998) rejected proposals than Hall (1998) and his team's 'acceptable proposals. I found it particularly interesting to hear one of the professors based at CAS admitting, albeit privately, that he had actually gone through Mamdani's proposals and found no problem with them.

so on. Perhaps it is about time now that we come up with a slightly different slogan –
Africa for Africa! But again, one would be quick to ask, *which Africa*?

Are there Ways out of Africa's Etymological Divides?

At the mercy of those who, like me, are trying to move beyond what Mudimbe (1994) refers to as a tradition that has conveyed an exotic idea of Africa for centuries, I am constrained to state that, comparatively, there is something peculiar about the etymon (or is it a signifier?) 'Africa' that seems to bypass many of us, including our champions of coining new words. This peculiarity has to do with the ubiquity of academically charged and politically loaded identifiers derived from the term Africa as compared to those derived from the terms used for other continents. A sample of the terms employed in the literatures cited in this paper say it all: 'Africas', 'Africans', 'Afrikaans', 'Africanist', 'Pan-Africanist'; 'Afrocentric'; 'Africana', 'Africanity' and the list goes on and – perhaps – on.

In contrast, how many times, if any, do we come across terms such 'Americanity', 'Europeanist' and Pan-Australianism'? Or how many times since the times of Marx's classical *Asiatic Mode of Production* do we come across terms such as 'Asianism'? No wonder a Sri Lankan (or is it Asian?) Academician, probably intellectually fascinated with the realization of this 'African peculiarity', had this to query about the line of thought of one of the most controversial texts on the concepts of Africa and African identity:

> For Mbembe who understands identity as substance constituted through a series of practices African identity cannot be named by a single word or subsumed under a single category. Nor can the popular imaginaire of contemporary Africa be fathomed through conventional meta-narratives. But if this is so, why does Mbembe even use Africa as a framework for his questioning about identity? Is it not an implicit acceptance of a certain uniqueness of the experience of certain people in Africa compared to other continents or territorial units? If one takes Asia as an analogy such questioning has not risen. A person would seldom describe himself or herself as an Asian. It is no accident that intellectuals have seldom focused their attention on the task of defining an essence of Asia and as a result essay on the lines of Achilles Mbembe on 'Asian modes of self-writing' are not to be found (Wickramasinghe 2000: 38)

Interestingly, employing a line of thinking that is in line with the above-discussed critiques of the promulgation of an African identity at the expense of African

identities, the Sri Lankan critic goes on to contrastingly interrogate this peculiar approach of perceiving Africa:

> Quite clearly intellectuals in Asian countries are aware of the impossibility of delineating an Asian collective *imaginaire*. Asia as a term originated with the early Greeks and maps depict it as the land mass stretch from Iran to Japan including the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia. Scholars have repeatedly shown, however, that Asia is not one but many cultures. When the term Asian is used by Asians in the term 'Asian values' for instance it is very selectively as its proponents limit Asia to South East Asia. Likewise the composition of the editorial board of the journal Identity, Culture, Politics seems to indicate that for all intents and purposes Asian means South Asian. There is no search for an elusive essence of Asia. In Asian countries intellectuals have instead addressed the issues of the self from a nation-state perspective or even communal perspective rather than a continental one. There are plethora of essays on the Indian self, the Sinhala identity and self etc. So what leads Mbembe to locate his thinking about identity within the framework of an elusive and imagined Africa rather than for instance in the nation-state is perhaps nothing less than the feeling that an African identity is an identity not only coming into existence but also that exists already in an incorporeal sort of way (Wickramasinghe 2000: 38)

This peculiarity is quite ontologically disturbing to someone from Africa who is not interested, let alone be competent, in speaking for all Africa and every African. It is particularly so for Africans who, upon their traverse or sojourn in the North, are constantly nagged to explain the so-called African plight regardless of their national or/and ethnic origins. Africanists, especially those who subscribe to a definition of an Africanist as someone who is supposed to be generally knowledgeable about the whole of Africa, may not understand this predicament. It may suffice to let one famous African who, during his lifetime, could hardly stand this predicament share his experience couched in eloquent comparative terms:

> I've been to Europe, Asia, North America and Latin America, and Africa is a stereotype. The Africa which now arouses some interest is that Brazzaville Africa, that Rwanda Africa, that Somalia Africa, that Liberia Africa. That is the Africa which arouses interests, and I don't blame these people. That's the Africa that they know. And so I go out. I come from Tanzania, and we don't have these blessed troubles that they have in other places, but I go out. Sometimes I get annoyed, but sometimes I don't get annoyed. Here I am, a former president of my country. There are no problems in Tanzania – we have never had these problems that they have – but I'm an African. So when they see me they ask about the problems of Rwanda. I say "I don't come from Rwanda". And they answer, "But you come from Africa." But if Blair were to come to Dar-es-Salaam, I wouldn't ask him what is happening in Bosnia. It would never

occur to me that I should ask Blair, "What is happening to you Europeans?" because of what is happening in Bosnia (Nyerere 2000: 59)

Clearly, as Irele (2001) points out, Africa is not a nation or a country in the ordinary sense of the terms nation and country. Rather, it is an operative concept which started as an ideological construction but has developed to the extent that it has assumed the significance of objective fact. This is a fact that makes some of us face questions that demands us to speak and/or write about our nations or/and ethnic groups as if we are addressing one African nation. However, even if it is true that Africa is an 'idea' as Mudimbe (1994) and others has convincingly argued or even if by chance it is just an 'enchanting abstraction' as Appiah (1997) would want us to believe, the fact is, and here I am referring to the material fact, that the Africa we now have is a real material place with real people inhabiting it not only physically but also spiritually/psychologically and these people, who are so diverse with respect to color and culture, have a more or less shared collective history and experience inscribed in the depths of their bodies and souls. What I am trying to say here is that when a discourse or someone imagine something and invent or create it, then that something becomes *something*.

It is in this sense, then, that the origins of something commonly known as Africa and "its peoples lie within the invention of the West and of Africa as distinct, monolithic entities" (Hanchard 1991: 89). This implies that the formulation of an African identity as embodied in African nationalistic discourse of Pan-Africanism and other African liberation discourses was a response (a counter-discourse) to the *Western* discursive project of *othering* some people who came to be known as Africans and something that came to be known as the continent of Africa. In fact this counter-discourse succumbed to what has been referred to as the first liability of a counter-discourse i.e. "the fact that it must begin with a premise from the primary discourse" (Echeruo, 1999, p. 7). This liability is illustrated below – note the significance of the 'but':

Primary Discourse: *You are an African from Africa…*
Counter-Discourse: Okay *I am an African from Africa* but….

This discursive/counter-discursive practice is liable to the proliferation of many etymologies that informs and feed the African-Africanist divides. And as Accountancy teaches us, it can be notoriously difficult to do away with liabilities. This, I believe, is one of the main challenges which are facing us as scholars of Africa. Nevertheless, the onus is on us to either remain using Africa to produce etymological liabilities or use it vigilantly to produce intellectual and material assets for Africa's own sake.

By Way of Conclusion

In this paper I have provided a personal overview of the escalation of intellectual contestations over Africa here at the dawn of the 21st century. From my overview, one can see that this intellectual phenomenon did not happen by chance. To a significant extent, it owes its explanation to the strategic adaptation and reinvigoration of the multifaceted historical process of decolonization. It is, by and large, a manifestation of the frustrations and crises within disciplines involved in the study of Africa and their failure to adequately address African issues/problems despite nearly half a century of scholarly engagement with post-independent Africa. Consequently, it is accompanied by intellectual rebellions against colonial/neo-colonial paradigms and imperial/racial discourses on Africa and, as such, it is a conceptual milestone in the unfinished project of decolonizing African Studies and its allied disciplines.

Even though I acknowledge the importance of contestations in reaching viable consensuses and workable alternatives, my paper has indicated that bitter intellectual divides over Africa tend to overlook and/or even undermine issues that are of utmost intellectual and material relevance to Africa and the majority of Africans. Since the distribution of power and resources is predicated on knowledge, it is appalling if these intellectual rivalries privileges academic elitisms and bourgeoisie interests at the expense of the overall welfare of Africa and its inhabitants.

For some scholars, it may be tempting to appropriate the claim that "gone are the days of imposing hegemonic definitions of Africa and Africans and a concomitant paradigm by which to study them" (Martin & West 1999a: 27). It may also be tempting to join some ethnographers in asserting that "today what happens in Africa is African despite of its cultural origin" (Moore 1993: 32). However, as this paper has

shown, the persistent contestations over African Studies and Africa indicate that there is still a long way to go in deconstructing hegemonic definitions of African Studies and Africa which makes it difficult to move beyond the African-Africanist divides.

In our so-called highly globalized world, with its emphasis on multitasking, I am told that we are supposed to be masters/mistress of many disciplines and specializations. So let me also give Marketing a try as I wrap up my paper by briefly selling to you an assortment of what I consider to be some of the best interrelated recommendations that could enable us move beyond the African-Africanist divides and bring African Studies back to Africa for the benefits of Africa in its own right:

- First, there is a need to hearken to Taiwo's (1997) call to exorcise Hegel's ghost which, I believe, has created competing versions of Africa. This is the ghost that has influenced our cherished western epistemological order's tendency to truncate Africa intellectually and materially. Africa is holistic therefore our theories and methodologies should reflect this reality in all its dimensions.

- Second, we need to swallow our inherited Eurocentric pride, which privileges the West as an epistemological center, and work toward realizing Hountondji's (1997) call of *Recentring Africa*. This is nothing more than a call to put Africa at the center of our theorizing and modeling about Africa instead of forcing Euro-American models and other models from out of Africa even if they don't fit with African realities.

- Third, we need to acknowledge that we are not yet in the postcolony in the true sense of the word therefore we need to appropriate Wiredu's (1997) project of *Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion* by also working toward the decolonization of African Studies. This simply means that we need to strip our beloved African Studies of it negative colonial legacy, including its ontological and epistemological legacy that pits Africans against Africanists.

- Fourth, due to various historical reasons and geographical constrains we need to concede that "even if we cannot return African Studies to Africa in

geographical terms, we could do so at least epistemologically and paradigmatically" (Owomoyela 1995: 96).

From these 're-recommendations', one can safely conclude that my paper is a call for scholars who are genuinely interested in the empowerment of Africa to collaborate in the revitalized project of decolonizing African Studies and the African/Africanist minds. African Studies that is epistemologically, paradigmatically and pragmatically anchored on the primary subject of its study, I strongly believe, is better placed to foster material and intellectual progress in, and for, Africa. Such would be an African Studies that is returned back to Africa. Intellectually and materially speaking, it would be a study of Africa for Africa regardless of its geographical settings.

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