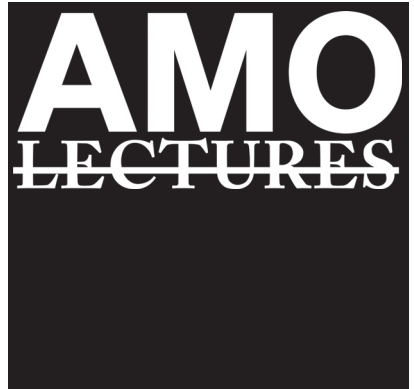


Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

In Memory of Anton Wilhelm Amo

Genealogies of Decolonization and Tasks of Decoloniality in the 21st Century



Nº 9

ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~

The ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~ are edited by

Olaf Zenker

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Preface
Anton Wilhelm Amo Under Erasure?
~~Lecturing~~ on an Im/Possible Otherwise

OLAF ZENKER

Anton Wilhelm Amo is considered to be the first and for a long time the only Afro-German academic scholar and philosopher. According to the biographer Ottmar Ette (2020: 14–17), Amo was born around 1700 in what is now Ghana and was enslaved as a child. Via Amsterdam, he ended up as a “human gift” from the Dutch West India Company at the court of the Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, where he was baptised “Anton Wilhelm” in 1708¹ using the first name of the Duke and his son, respectively (Mabe 2020: 15). When arriving in Wolfenbüttel he was already called “Amo”, which some hold to be a patrilineally transmitted African name (Menn/Smith 2020: 4), whereas others regard it as a then-popular Latin-derived name imposed on enslaved Africans at the Dutch fort in today’s Ghana (Mabe 2020: 13–14). The very name “Amo” thus embodies and symbolises the spanning and traversing of a hierarchically structured, overdetermined, yet polysemic Afro-European space, simultaneously identifying an original thinker of the early Enlightenment and signifying a larger post/colonial predicament.

While being on record for serving as an African court servant – a “*Kammermohr*” (Firla 2002) – Amo also received his first formal education in the context of the court in Wolfenbüttel, including literacy in Latin, even though the details of his schooling remain in the dark (Ette 2020: 28–29; Menn/Smith 2020: 18–19). Documentary evidence shows him enrolling in 1727 at the University of Halle at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Law Faculty, where he completed a first disputation in 1729 (Menn/Smith 2020: 19). This legal disputation *De iure Maurorum*

1 According to Stephen Menn and Justin Smith (2020:15 fn 38) who consulted the original chapel register, some works (e.g. Firla 2002: 56, Ette 2020: 14) falsely date Amo’s baptism to 1707.

in Europa (“On the Rights of Moors in Europe”) is considered lost, if it ever was written down. However, a contemporaneous summary indicates that it engaged with ancient Roman sources about the enfeoffment of kings of “Moors” under the Roman Emperor, thus deriving legal implications for the rights of free and enslaved Africans under Roman Law practiced in Germany in the 18th century (Menn/Smith 2020: 1–2, 10–12). Evidently Amo was well versed in canon law as well as in various secular legal forms, natural law and legal history, enabling him to examine the legal position of people of African descent in these contexts. However, little is known about this disputation, which – as Jacob Emmanuel Mabe (2020: 18) points out – anticipated important Pan-Africanist and postcolonial debates around the rights of humans under conditions of structural inequality and oppression.

In 1730, Amo moved to the University of Wittenberg where, within weeks, he was admitted as *Magister* allowing him to teach while further pursuing his own studies.² Continuing his work in philosophy, Amo also expanded into numerous related disciplinary fields. Notably, he studied medicine with influential physicians shaping the future direction of his scholarship that became increasingly situated at the intersections of philosophy, medicine and anthropology (Ette 2020: 59). In 1734, he received his doctorate in philosophy for defending his major philosophical work *De humanae mentis apatheia* (“On the Impassivity of the Human Mind”). With this inaugural dissertation, Amo made an original, radically dualist medico-philosophical contribution to the debate on the relationship between body and soul: By *mens humana* – the human soul – he refers exclusively to the spiritual soul of the Aristotelian tradition, which is distinct from the sensitive and vegetative soul and even more strictly separated from the body. In fact, he sees the latter two parts of the soul as functions of the body itself. Rather than using “apatheia” in the stoic tradition emphasising abstention from the emotional overvaluation of non-moral goods, Amo conceptualises this Greek term differently, namely as an “impassivity” of the human mind: sensation and the power of sensing are seen as belonging to the body rather than the human mind, as the latter cannot be acted on by sensed objects. For this reason, Amo also denies the soul the ability to feel because of its immateriality (Menn/Smith 2020: 3–4, 101–111).

In 1736 Amo was admitted to the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Halle as a lecturer. While teaching in Halle, he completed a final and much more extensive work in 1738, *Tractatus de arte sobrie et accurate philosophandi* (“Tre-

2 For discussions contextualizing Amo’s move from Halle to Wittenberg in the broader political and intellectual debates between pietism and early enlightenment philosophy at the time, see Ette 2020: 31–109, Mabe 2020: 31–42 and Menn/Smith 2020: 51–60.

atise on the Art of Soberly and Accurately Philosophising”). In this magnum opus, Amo unfolds his own teaching after providing an overview of the traditional fields of knowledge. He conceives of philosophy as the continuous quest for wisdom beyond intellectual dishonesty, dogmatism and prejudice as well as the perfection of human beings in all areas, from natural existence to eternal happiness. In addition, Amo criticises those contemporaries who see philosophy only as an act of theoretical understanding without any connection to its practical side and pragmatics. For Amo, philosophy is essentially working on the virtue of wisdom – and this proves its worth in action. In this respect, philosophy cannot be reduced to pursuing purely theoretical knowledge. It also has an inescapable practical relevance (see Mabe 2020: 43–67).³

In 1739, Amo left Halle for the University of Jena, where he started teaching a broad spectrum of subjects, including physiognomy, chiromancy, geomancy, astrology and cryptography (Ette 2020: 119). Little is known about the following years. Racist hostility in a mocking poem cast shadows over Amos' situation around 1747. During this time, he is said to have left Germany for West Africa. Until at least 1753 he lived in Axim in what is now Ghana, where the Swiss traveller Henri-David Gallandat reported meeting him as a locally respected philosopher, astrologer and soothsayer (Menn/Smith 2020: 2). Later, Amo moved, or possibly was moved, to the Dutch-controlled Fort San Sebastian in Shama, where his tombstone can be found noting the year of death as 1784 (Brentjes 1976: 66–69).

With the departure of Amo from Jena, his texts were relegated to the margins of European intellectual history, even if never entirely lost. As Stephen Menn and Justin Smith (2020: 2, 39–51) chart in much detail, scattered references to Amo can be found since the 18th century including, for instance, a discussion of his life and work by the philosopher and physical anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1787). This, in turn, was taken up by the French cleric and abolitionist Henri Grégoire (1808) who approvingly engaged with Amo's intellectual achievements in his *De la littérature des Nègres* (“On the Literature of the Negroes”). Other abolitionists of this era equally drew on Amo as an exemplar counterproving prevailing racist stereotypes, as propagated for instance by David Hume (1994/1772: 86), that Africans had allegedly never made any noteworthy intellectual accomplishment.

Within the African and African American traditions of the 20th century, Amo emerged as an occasional reference, as in a passing mention by W.E.B. Du Bois (1939). Kwame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian political leader and Pan-Africanist thinker,

3 For recent engagements with Amo's philosophy see: Ette 2020; Mabe 2020; Menn/Smith 2020 and Knauß et al. 2021.

in his influential 1964 book *Consciencism* engaged with Amo's ideas in the attempt to conscript the latter as an early representative of Nkrumah's own fusion of Marxist-Leninism and traditional African thought (see Menn/Smith 2020: 45–48). Within African(a) philosophy, some scholars, such as Kwame Gyekye, have denied Amo the label “African philosophy” (Gyekye 1987: 34), since he responded intellectually to contemporary European philosophers rather than African conceptual schemes, whereas others, such as Paulin Hountondji, have characterised him as an “African philosopher in Germany in the Eighteenth Century“ (Hountondji 1996: 111–130).

In Germany and especially at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg created in 1817 through the merger of the Universities of Wittenberg (founded in 1502) and of Halle (founded in 1694), Amo was rediscovered in 1916. Wolfram Suchier, a librarian in Halle at the time, brought Amo's memory to public attention again with an article in the *Akademische Rundschau* (Suchier 1916). He referred to Amo as a student and a “private lecturer” in Halle, Wittenberg and Jena and described him in racialising terms as a “*Mohr*” (“Moor”). Amo was presented as an outstanding person with an exceptional biography and thus brought out of oblivion.

According to Menn and Smith (2020: 48), the greatest single contribution to Amo scholarship – not only at Martin Luther University, but for the 20th century in general – was made by the East German scholar Burchard Brentjes. A university lecturer on the archaeology of the Near East in Halle since the 1960s, Brentjes was politically involved in organisations boosting solidarity between Eastern Bloc countries, the Arab world and decolonising states in Africa and beyond. A close friend of Nkrumah, Brentjes published a comprehensive collection in 1968 of facsimile reproductions, sources and studies on Anton Wilhelm Amo (Amo, A.W./Brentjes 1968). The latter is introduced as “Antonius Gvilielmus Amo from Axim in Ghana” and as a student, doctor of philosophy and *Magister legens* at the Universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena. A few years later, Brentjes (1975) characterises Amo as the “first African philosopher in European universities” as well as “the black philosopher in Halle”, as the subtitle of his small monograph indicates (Brentjes 1976; see also Brentjes 1977). In 1975, a bronze plaque dedicated to the memory of Anton Wilhelm Amo was also placed at the main campus of Martin Luther University (next to the street “Universitätsring”), identifying him as the first African student and lecturer in philosophy at the Universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena 1727–1747.⁴ In 1994, the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg started awarding the Anton Wilhelm Amo Prize annually for outstanding theses.

Renewing this local tradition of Amo scholarship and remembrance, the ANTON WILHELM AMO LECTURES have been organised annually since 2013 at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg by the Research Cluster “Society and Culture in Motion”. They feature internationally acclaimed scholars presenting their ongoing research on themes connected to or emanating from the work of Amo. Dedicating a named lecture at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in honour of Anton Wilhelm Amo seems highly apposite, given that this was, after all, his *alma mater*: Amo studied and attended lectures here, worked here as a scholar and lectured extensively both in Halle and Wittenberg. What better way than to use the format of a public “Lecture” to take seriously Amo as a scholar and to “re-member” his academic legacy that, by and large, has been neglected? This gesture is in harmony with the recent impetus of scholarship paying increasing attention to the actual content of Amo’s work rather than primarily engaging his remarkable life as a form, treated mostly “as a datum to comment on the 18th-century discussion of the equality of the races, the origin of the human species, and slavery” (Heckmann 1990: 155). In this spirit, the ANTON WILHELM AMO LECTURES deliberately offer a space for engagements with Amo’s *oeuvre* – his specific ideas and interventions that have been under erasure in Euro-modern intellectual history for far too long.

At the same time, this can only be one aspect of the work that the AMO LECTURES can and should set out to accomplish. Menn and Smith’s well-intended proposal – to better leave the historical moment of Amo’s racist 18th-century life-world and form of life behind and “to pay attention to what Amo in fact has to say, to who he was and to the social world he inhabited” (Menn/Smith 2020: 3) – might ultimately be proposing false alternatives. While there is the danger of sliding into a tendentious tokenism, reducing Amo to an identitarian exemplar of a peculiarly racialised politics of academic work (rather than taking seriously the academic work of politics Amo set out to accomplish), there is another danger to miss out on the broader ethico-onto-epistemological conditions that historically shaped and perspectivised Amo’s work beyond the surface of its content (see also Hillgärtner/Kaczmarek 2021: 197). Put bluntly: in light of contemporary demands from within postcolonial and decolonial theories to delink from “modernity/coloniality” as a Western ethico-onto-epistemological formation writ large and universa-

4 See Hamann/Schubert 2022 for a critical appraisal of Amo research and memorialisation during GDR times, mobilising the notion of “(post)socialist coloniality” to highlight the ambivalent colonial logics in the diplomatic relations between the GDR and the Republic of Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah and thereafter.

lised under colonial expansion (Quijano 2007/1989; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), the question arises as to what an extent *the epistemic format of the "Lecture"*, as a potential *pars pro toto* of that overall Western formation, operates merely within or truly beyond its limiting confines. In other words: in what ways does "lecturing" as a modality allow imagining and enunciating an alternative existence that transcends the limitations scripted into the historical conditions of possibility, both for Amo's academic career and his contemporaneous and subsequent marginalisation and relative oblivion? Can a "Lecture" evoke, and bring into existence, the political potentialities of an otherwise – understood as a *chiffre* for both apprehending submerged forms of life that have persisted against all odds and for sensing that which may have been prefigured but not yet fully formed (McTighe/Raschig 2019)? Can "lecturing" deliver on "the will to be otherwise" (Povinelli 2012), possibly through reflexively teaching a lesson of the *leçon* ("lecture")?

In order to keep open for reflection and discussion, within the forum of this series, the uncanny simultaneity of an absent-present potential for "lecturing" on an im/possible otherwise on, with, through and beyond Amo's work, the AMO ~~LECTURES~~ take inspiration from Jacques Derrida's concept of "under erasure". Drawing on Martin Heidegger, Derrida (1997/1976) introduced the visual technique of crossing out a word while keeping it legible and in place – thereby putting it *sous rature* ("under erasure") – in order to signal its inadequate yet necessary nature. In similar vein, the ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~ use the academic format of a "Lecture" named in honour of Amo while crossing out the term and thus putting it "under erasure" in order to highlight its ambiguous existence as both the means for critical reflection and – metonymically standing in for the Western epistemic formation itself – the potential object of such critique. This way, the AMO ~~LECTURES~~ offer a space for reflection on, and a calling into being of, an otherwise that, it is hoped, is as pregnant with present and future possibilities as it is scarred with the impossibilities of the past.

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Abstract

Anton Wilhelm Amo's life story was entangled with enslavement, racism and colonialism and his scholarly interventions challenged mainstream epistemology and philosophy. This article, written in memory of Amo, delves into genealogies of decolonization and the emerging tasks of decoloniality. Building on the foundation laid by Amo and taking advantage of the resurgent and insurgent decolonization of the 21st century, which has resulted in a reopening of basic epistemological and existential questions, this article revisits some of the key aspects of contemporary politics of knowledge as it highlights inextricable linkages between existential and epistemic questions. It proceeds to examine technologies of how knowledge is colonized through introduction of the concepts of the cognitive empire and coloniality of knowledge, which have had long-standing impact on African consciousness and scholarship. Empirically, the article assesses the trajectories of the African nationalist decolonial epistemological initiatives that intensified from the 1960s, unmasking epicolonial dynamics and challenges. The article concludes with a mapping out of some key tasks of decoloniality of the 21st century.

Keywords: Anton Wilhelm Amo, African nationalism, African Studies, Africana existential philosophy, Black radical tradition, decolonization, decoloniality, cognitive empire, Marxism, neoliberalism, postcolonialism

Introduction

“How could the black, who by definition was not human and hence without a point of view, produce a portrait of his or her point of view?” (Gordon 2000: 23). This is an important existential-cum-epistemological concern that frames the resurgent and insurgent epistemological decolonization struggles of the 21st century. The resurgent and insurgent epistemological decolonization of the 21st century, has not only resulted in reopening of basic epistemological and existential questions but has also provoked the necessity to revisit the meaning(s) of decolonization and the genealogies and trajectories of epistemological decolonization.

The issue of continuities in discontinuities in struggles for epistemological decolonization has become topical in a context in which such new vocabularies as coloniality and decoloniality have emerged that highlight how colonial-like realities have become planetary rather than over.

Claiming Anton Wilhelm Amo as one of the earliest Black/African intellectual trailblazers in questioning Eurocentric epistemologies and inserting the question of Black humanity into the debates of the time, this article turns to the reopened existential and epistemological issues that are troubling contemporary politics of knowledge. It does this at four levels. At the first level of analysis it introduces some of the key epistemological questions that reverberate within contemporary politics of knowledge and highlights the inextricable entwinement of existential and epistemic issues. At the second level, the article delves into the ongoing debates on how knowledge is colonized through introduction of the cognitive empire and coloniality of knowledge, with the aim of highlighting its impact on African consciousness and African intellectual and academic productions.

At the third level it grapples with the genealogies and trajectories of the African nationalist decolonial epistemological initiatives, with the aim of establishing continuities in discontinuities. At the fourth level, it map-out the key tasks of decoloniality of the 21st century. The life story and intellectual interventions of Anton Wilhelm Amo form an ideal entry point to the analysis of genealogies and trajectories of epistemological decolonization as well as making sense of its current articulation as decoloniality.

Anton Wilhelm Amo as an Entry Point

Lewis R. Gordon (2008: 35) introduced Anton Wilhelm Amo as “The first recorded Africana thinker to take up those questions [questions of Black humanity] in the modern world.” While it is not necessary to repeat Amo’s complex biography, it is important to highlight that his scholarly works, beginning with his doctoral thesis on the rights of Black people in Europe and extending to his complex philosophical critiques of mind-body dualism, can be read as pioneering epistemic work, which brought African thought into eighteenth century European philosophical discourses and debates (Meyns 2019; Amo et al 2021). This is where his scholarly interventions link with the resurgent and insurgent epistemological decolonization of the 21st century, which has resulted in the reopening of the basic epistemological questions (see table below).

Even though Amo was deeply influenced by the European Enlightenment, he also grappled with its contradictions and those of Christian faith vis-à-vis enslavement of Black people and their denial of rights. Amo's concerns with issues of rights of Black people in Europe is even read by others as a precursor to the Black Lives Matter movements of today (Amo et al 2022). Like many decolonial thinkers of today, Amo was also concerned with theory of knowledge in the process challenging philosophers such as Rene Descartes and highlighting issues of intersubjectivity and the role of feelings in knowledge production (Menn and Smith 2020). The question of self-definition (self-naming) also pre-occupied Amo as he sought to embrace his African origin and identity through using such names as "Amo Guinea Afer" or "Amo Guinea Africanus" (Amo et al 2021). It is from this reading of Amo's life story and scholarly interventions that this article seeks to remember him by delving into genealogies and trajectories of epistemological decolonization as well as engagement with tasks of decoloniality in the 21st century.

Intersections of Existential and Epistemic Questions in Decolonial Thinking

"What does it mean to be a human being" is the key existential question particularly for those people "whose humanity has been called into question or challenged in the modern era" (Gordon 2008: 13). As "the first recorded Africana thinker," what distinguished Amo's scholarly interventions was how he picked up the fundamental existential and epistemic question within a hostile world, where rationality was used/abused for racial and imperial designs. The question of Black/African humanity was denied, denigrated or highly contested. This is why Amo's life story and intellectual productions embodied the inextricable entwinement of epistemic and existential concerns of Black/African people in a modern world that was conceived and configured in accordance with race. The inextricably intertwined existential and epistemological questions are expansive:

- How did our habitat (the planet earth) become a contested space for discovery, invasion, colonization, mapping, naming and owning by a minority of white colonialists?
- How did "nature" become a "natural resource" and what have been the consequences for lives of various selves in the universe?

- How was a shift made from knowledge and education for life (to live-by) to knowledge and education as expertise owned by a few and used to dominate, rule, repress and oppress others?
- How was a shift made from “actual ontology” to “historical ontology”?
- How were Indigenous and Black people invented?
- How does it feel to be reduced to a sub-human category and then viewed as a problem to be solved?
- How does it feel to be considered non-beings without history and excluded from development?
- How does it feel to be rendered as a non-being incapable of knowing themselves?

Amo had to live and study inside the belly of the beast in which he became a hyper-visible racial figure carrying the burden of questioned humanity. One can only imagine how it was for him to build gravitas of a philosopher and scholar within such a racially charged moment in human history where being Black was associated with being without knowledge. It is not surprising that Amo’s intellectual and academic interventions turned to issues of Black existence in Europe, identity, rights, law and theory of knowledge. It perhaps indicates how he strove to project his own point of view within a context where being designated as “black” automatically disqualified one from having a point of view (Gordon 2000: 23).

Paradoxically, the epistemic questions and existential concerns which troubled Amo have continued into the 21st century to the extent that the resurgent and insurgent epistemological struggles of the 21st century have inevitably intersected with the Black Lives Matter movements. Nathalie Etoke captures very well how the inextricably intertwined existential and epistemological issues haunt the present and how it reproduces what she termed “melancholia Africana:”

In a world where thought closes itself in language that strives to erase the sensitivity of existence, how can we make sense of Sub-Saharan or Afrodiasporic life experience rooted in suffering born of social, economic, cultural, and historical structures dominated by unequal power relations? How can we examine the encounter with the Other? How can we understand a path toward freedom forged through pain inflicted on the body, pain that permeated the soul? How can we describe a subjectivity in which self-destruction and reconstruction arise from traumatic experience? People who were excluded from the universal family must face these questions. [...]. My process breaks with the habits that would have me speak of myself and mine as if I spoke of another, step out of myself for the sake of objectivity, regurgitate the Other’s way of thinking in the Other’s rhetoric that I have learnedly digested (Etoke 2019: xix-xxi).

The table below reflects the intersection of existential and epistemic questions in the contemporary politics of knowledge.

Key Issues in Contemporary Politics of Knowledge

<i>Basic Questions</i>	<i>Dominant Knowledge Claims</i>	<i>Decolonial Knowledge Claims</i>
Does knowledge frame reality/Where does knowledge come from?	Matter/idea/ontology/ mind-body conundrum	Epistemology frames ontology
Does identity matter in knowledge?	Disembodied knowledge I think; therefore, I am	Egopolitics of knowledge and locus of enunciation/ social and epistemic locations
Does knowledge have a geography?	Universality/unsituated knowledge/God-complex/ God-eye-view	Geopolitics of knowledge/I think from where I am
Does knowledge have a biography (experience in knowledge)	Disembodied/objective knowledge/Objectivity	Body-politics/biopolitics of knowledge and embodied knowledges
Does ideology matter in knowledge?	Neutral knowledge and non-political	Knowledge/power dynamics/cognitive interests

Source: Drawn by the author

Besides Amo there were such other Black scholars as William E. B. Du Bois (1899) who also grappled with the existential questions of what it means to be defined as a problem in the modern world as well as the question of the role played by Africa and Africans in human history (Du Bois 1947). It is emerging poignantly in contemporary studies that the modern world itself was “born in Blackness” as Africa and Africans played a fundamental and foundational role in the making of modernity (French 2021). The very rise of Europe, the articulation of Enlightenment ideals, and the unfolding of modernity; grew out of encounters with Africa and Africans, which intensified from the fifteenth century onwards (French 2021). One can also notice that the existential questions of “who am I? What are we? What are we in this white world?” were picked up by Aime Cesaire who named them correctly as “the tormenting questions” (Cesaire in Thiam 2014: 2).

What emerged from this intersection of existential and epistemic question is what Cedric J. Robinson (2000) termed the “Black radical tradition” and Lewis R. Gordon (2000; 2008) termed “Africana existential thought.” Therefore, the deep genealogy and archaeology of epistemic decolonization is in African precolonial history and culture as well as in the resistance and revolts against racism, enslavement, colonialism, racial capitalism, and heteronormative patriarchy. The key emergent questions included multiple refusals of notions and practices of denial of humanity, theft of history, epistemicides, cultureicides, and linguicides (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). However, the decolonial refusals continue to confront a resilient cognitive empire and its drive to invade and dilute African decolonial epistemic initiatives and struggles for epistemic freedom.

The Cognitive Empire and Its Long-Term Consequences

The cognitive empire operates through invasion of its targets’ mental universe in order to work on their minds and consciousness. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2009a) compares this invasion of the mental universe of the colonized to the exercise of removing the hard discs of a people’s past knowledge and memory, and downloading the software of European knowledge and memory into their minds. He also described it as taking the form of the detonation of a cultural bomb at the center of a universe of a people, resulting in the survivors losing confidence in themselves, their names, their knowledge, their cultures, and their history (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986: 15). The resilience of the cognitive empire is captured by Veli Mitova (2020: 191), who stated that, “We live in an epistemically colonial world; that’s no secret.” Why is this so, after Africa underwent decolonization in the 20th century, becomes a pertinent question. The exploration of the essence of the cognitive empire and its complex operative logics and technologies allows us to respond adequately to the question of why “coloniality of knowledge” is all over rather than over, long after the end of the physical empire.

The cognitive empire is chameleonic and mutative in character like the current troublesome corona virus. It hides in modern systems, institutions and psyche of its victims. Various names have been given to the cognitive empire. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986: 16) termed it the “metaphysical empire.” Robert Gildea (2019) depicted it as the “empire of the mind.” Ashis Nandy (1983) described it as “the intimate enemy.” The Latin American decolonial theorists prefer to use the broader concept of “coloniality,” which speaks to colonization of power, knowledge, and being human itself (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2000; Grosfoguel 2013; Maldo-

nado Torres 2007). Marie Battiste (2013) and Tatah Mentan (2015) defined it as “cognitive imperialism.” Kwame Nkrumah (1965) coined the term “neo-colonialism” to depict the continuation of colonialism, particularly in the economy of African states after the dismantlement of the physical empire, and this has long-term lingering epistemic and psychological implications. Edward Said (1993) wrote about it in terms of “cultural imperialism.” These various depictions demonstrate not only how the cognitive empire troubled the minds of many thinkers, but also the importance of understanding the havoc that continues to be inflicted on the minds and consciousness of the (ex)-colonized peoples across the world as well, as on those of the (ex)-colonizers who continued to be subjected to the “white gaze” of the world (Pailey 2019).

The cognitive empire is not decoupled from the physical and commercial empires. It is inextricably intertwined with them. In fact, the cognitive empire is the base on which the physical and commercial empires are founded (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Santos 2018). Within the cognitive empire, what W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) termed the “colour line” is inextricably combined with what Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) articulated as the “epistemic line.” This enables what Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) named as “coloniality of being,” that is, the colonization of being human itself through social classification of human population and racial hierarchization. This has direct consequences for knowledge because “coloniality of being” meant that some human beings were either denied humanity or degraded to a sub-human category, where they were said to have no reason and rationality. Hence Maldonado-Torres (2005: 150) argued that: “The denial of humanity to the peoples of African descent in the Caribbean and elsewhere has posed unique challenges to the affirmation of reason and intellectual activity in the region and beyond.” The Hegelian-Conradian-Hugh-Trevoropian idea of Africa as a “dark continent” inhabited by sub-humans who had no history and no knowledge emerged within this context of the coloniality of being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

One of the key leitmotifs of the cognitive empire is the “colonial turn” in knowledge production, signified by the attack on indigenous knowledge systems and their appropriation to sustain what James Blaut (1993) termed the colonizer’s model of the world. The colonial turn was underpinned by what V. Y. Mudimbe (1988) termed the “colonial library,” that is, a body of knowledge and texts carrying particular representations, which were produced by European travellers, explorers, and colonial ideologues, and colonial imaginists. This “colonial library” influenced and continues to impact African and Africanist knowledge generations and dissemination.

The “colonial turn” inscribes the “colonizing structure” of knowledge on the present, provoking contemporary struggles for epistemic freedom. It has direct implications for the very formation and consciousness of African intellectuals across generations. The technique of colonizing the minds had direct consequences for African intellectuals as the first generation of them emerged directly from the “belly of the beast” (colonialism/coloniality) with very problematic consciousness of themselves, Africa, and knowledge in general. At the same time, it was from the ranks and file of the early African educated elite that oppositional thinking against colonialism emerged. Therefore, one notices a pattern of resistance and emulation mediated by what Ali A. Mazrui (1979) termed “cultural schizophrenia;” Frantz Fanon (1968) called “alienation” and “pitfalls of consciousness,” and Syed Hussein Alatas (1974) depicted as the “captive mind.” It was within this context that such African and Black intellectuals and academics as Edward Wilmot Blyden and others initiated epistemic struggles challenging the cognitive empire and working hard to reverse coloniality of knowledge.

Perhaps it was these realities that led Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006a: 110) to posit that, “As a professional formation, African intellectuals of course have complex histories,” and that “the formation and imaginary of African intellectuals have been deeply affected by the changing dynamics of that encounter,” meaning the colonial encounter and the colonial library. The outcome of all this is that in their knowledge generation, African intellectuals had/have to navigate and negotiate tough choices, which have to do with what Ramon Grosfoguel (2007: 213) articulated as the confusion over “epistemic location” and “social location,” resulting from epistemic colonization. The first one is that of radical emulation (radical assimilation) of what colonial education had imposed (Nesbitt 2003). This problematic positionality is enabled by the seductive nature of colonialism and coloniality, particularly its rhetoric of salvation, civilization, social evolution, progress, modernization, development, and emancipation. The negative consequence of this positionality is well-captured by Grosfoguel (2007: 2013): “Precisely, the success of the modern/colonial world-system consist in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions.”

One finds some African intellectuals and academics trying to belong to two worlds to the extent of occupying an akimbo intellectual position symbolized by liminality (trying to exist in-between generating knowledge in accordance with the traditions bequeathed on Africa by colonialism, and striving to strike a delicate balance between that which colonialism imposed as standards while questioning those very standards) (Nesbitt 2003: 28). Radical difference/alterity as an extreme

opposite of radical emulation/radical assimilation as part of seeking epistemic freedom is also noticeable among African intellectuals and academics (Mbembe 2001). At the present conjuncture, signing up to the ongoing decolonial work involving the painstaking processes of unlearning what colonialism imposed and relearning to reconstitute knowledge with an independent mind is on course (Ndlovu-Gatseni 2021). This is partly because colonialism produced African intellectuals and academics that were bilingual, “immersed in both African and European ontological and epistemological orders,” and which “had a trinity of dreams—for purity, parity, and personhood” (Zezeza 2006a: 111).

Considering this background, African Studies emerged in Africa not just as a discipline but a broader part of the search for identity, history, culture, language, liberation, and unity on the one hand, and as resistance and a challenge to the cognitive empire on the other hand. In other words, anti-colonial and decolonial politics and activism were and are constitutive of African Studies from the perspective of pan-African and continental/African paradigms. In the African Diaspora, Black Studies, as noted by Turgrul Keskin (2014: 189), “emerged as a uniquely activist field of study, and has historically demanded a direct relationship and link between the community and academia.” This conception of African Studies is different from that of the “European colonial” paradigm, where African Studies became part of not only resolving what was rendered as the “native question,” that is, how to devise methods and systems to enable a minority of white conquerors to rule over a majority of conquered people without provoking expensive and challenging revolts but also of understanding Africa for purposes of hegemonic geopolitical interests of the empires. In the pan-Africanist as well as continental/African paradigm, African Studies became a vehicle of resistance and part of initiatives aimed at “re-membering Africa” (rehumanization) after centuries of “dismemberment” (dehumanization) (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2009b: 45).

If this background and these points are lost in discussions about African Studies, then the African nationalist decolonial epistemological initiatives, which commenced from the 1960s would be misunderstood by Africanists in particular who are studying Africa from North America, Europe and other places. If Africanists, like Christopher Clapham (2020: 138), could misunderstand this context, then, inevitably, they would be confused by the expansiveness and complexity of the work of decolonizing African Studies to the extent of getting lost with regards to what he termed “a diverse and confusing range of claims that it becomes difficult to disentangle what decolonizing African Studies actually means, and what is expected to achieve.” The point which scholars involved in African Studies always shied away from is that to some, if not most, Africanists, African Studies is their

field of research and Africa is their site of extraction of data and information, but to most African scholars, it is more than these two cognitive interests. There are existential interests directly linked to the continuing primacy and haunting question posed by the African-American Harlem Renaissance poet, Countee Cullen, in 1925: “What is Africa to Me?” (Smitherman 1991; Irele 2005; Phillips 2015). This question reverberates at the center of the decolonial turn in African Studies, and there are no easy answers as it is not a simple epistemic question. For example, W. E. B. Du Bois (1940: 116–117) responded to this question by pointing to the fact that his direct ancestors were born in Africa a thousand years ago and that the “mark of their heritage is upon me in colour and hair.”

Du Bois invokes relationality of the African Diaspora and the African continent in terms of what Africa meant to him. So, what Africa means invokes identitarian, cultural, sentimental, ideological, and other existential concerns—far beyond cognitive interests. To get a further glimpse into the complicated and expansiveness of decolonization, one can refer to a recent broad definition given by Robin D. G. Kelley (2020: 8) from the vantage point of the African Diaspora, where he pointed to the struggles to abolish “all forms of oppression and violence” including racial capitalism, “decolonizing the land, embracing a vision of freedom not based on ownership or possession or anthropocentrism but stewardship and caretaking as expressed in indigenous thought” as well as “ending what might be the oldest war of all—the war on women’s bodies. The war that takes the form of control over reproduction, mobility, sexual violence; the reduction of women to property.”

At the same time, one finds such scholars as Olufemi Taiwo (2022) who are consistent in defence of the Enlightenment project and modernity, challenging how the concept of decolonization has been deployed as a catch-all and all-encompassing idea. Taiwo prefers that the concept of decolonization be limited to its original meaning “that is, of making a colony into a self-governing entity with its political and economic fortunes under its own direction (though not necessarily control),” which he terms “decolonization1” (p. 3).

While Taiwo has a point, his call for total abandonment of the concept, ignores the realities of continuities in discontinuities of colonialism in contemporary times. Of course, decolonization like all other concepts might not be adequate in explaining the myriad and multifaceted challenges of today, but it remains a relevant grammar of liberation confronting production and reproduction of colonialities. More effort has to be directed at sharpening its meaning beyond what it meant in the twentieth century. In the words of Geo Maher (2022), there is need for “second sight” on colonialism as a global system of power that has survived dismantlement of the physical empire. In avoiding engagement with the rich archive on “decolo-

niality,” Taiwo is missing the innovative definitions of decolonization of the 21st century and its tasks.

Trajectories of African Nationalist Decolonial Epistemological Initiatives

The shift from empire to modern nation-states in the modern world system also known as decolonization opened up possibilities not only for African nationalists to try and re-make the world but also for African intellectuals and academics to engage in decolonization and Africanization of knowledge. It was within this context that Christopher J. Lee (2019) introduced the concept of “making a world after empire” and Adom Getachew (2019) coined the concept of “worldmaking after empire.” Lee underscored the Bandung Conference of 1955 as a defining moment with enduring political afterlives, whose signature was a decolonial refusal by peoples of Africa and Asia to be servants of the modern world system, forcefully and vehemently asserting themselves as citizens and makers of the world. Getachew (2019: 2) argued that:

[D]ecolonization was a project of reordering the world that sought to create a domination-free and egalitarian international order. Against the standard view of decolonization as a moment of nation-building in which the anticolonial demand for self-determination culminated in the rejection of alien rule and the formation of nation-states, I recast anticolonial nationalism as worldmaking. The central actors [...] reinvented self-determination reaching beyond its association with the nation to insist that the achievement of this ideal required juridical, political, and economic institutions in the international realm that would secure non-domination.

In line with this argument, Getachew (2019: 3) identified three projects constitutive of decolonization, namely (1) the institutionalization of a right to self-determination at the United Nations; (2) the formation of regional federations; and (3) the demand for a New International Economic Order—used by anticolonialists in seeking “to overcome the legal and material manifestations of unequal integration and inaugurate a postimperialist world.” However, Nandita Sharma (2020: 15) highlights the fact that “a Postcolonial New World Order” that emerged during the shift from empire to modern-nation-states resulted in substitution of “demands for decolonization with demands for national sovereignty,” concluding that “the rule of nation-states is part of a global regime of power.” All these excellent analyses of the shift from empire to modern nation-states do not highlight the epistemic issues that emerged.

That the post-1945 African nationalist decolonial epistemic initiatives materialized at the same time with the rise of two superpowers (empires)—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America—signify the contradictions of the moment, its constraints, and possibilities. These developments had a direct impact on knowledge in general and African Studies in particular. Zeleza (2009: 110) captures this ironic situation:

In March 1957, two important events took place in the political and intellectual histories of Africa. One happened on the continent itself: the declaration of independence of Ghana; the other, in the United States; the formation of the African Studies Association (ASA). [...] The decolonization of Ghana opened the floodgates of African independence; the formation of the ASA fortified Africanist scholarship in the world's most powerful nation. Despite their obvious connections, the two events represented divergent historical trajectories culminating in the consecration of *black* political autonomy and *white* intellectual authority.

What is even more ironic is that while the 1950s and 1960s within Africa were a moment of possibilities, including changing intellectual tradition from colonial-Eurocentrism to African-nationalist-decolonial approaches pushed forward by such figures as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, in the United States, that was the moment of the redefinition of Africa into “Area Studies” as a domain of Africanists who were mainly sponsored to pursue superpower geostrategic interests. This became a moment of the rise of what Isaac A. Kamola (2019: 2) termed “the Cold War University” underpinned by a “Military-Industrial-Academic Complex.” The Cold War coloniality had direct impact on epistemologies and intellectuals, which some African academics and intellectuals embracing Leftist thinking and others turning to liberal thinking. It was within this context that such universities as Ahmadu Bello in Nigeria, Dar es salaam in Tanzania, and Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique became leading lights in Leftist thinking and scholarship. Marxism became both an ideology and an epistemology.

This means the “nationalist” turn unfolded within a discursive terrain of what one would call Cold War coloniality. The common factor, though, was a strong post-1945 belief in what Kamola (2019: 36) termed the “national imaginary” of the world symbolized structurally and institutionally by a shift within the modern world system from “empire” to the “modern nation-state.” Within this context, the “nationalist” turn, as part of the long decolonial turn, was born troubled by global imperial designs symbolized by the straitjacket of “Area Studies” within which Africa continues to be treated as an object of external study.

Despite this imbrication of African Studies in global imperial designs, the “nationalist turn” constituted a major attempt to Africanize and decolonize knowledge

in Africa. It also converged tendentially with the “Marxist turn.” At the center of the African nationalist imaginary was a search for political, economic, cultural, epistemic, and ideological renewal after centuries of colonial subordination and dehumanization. In a positive appraisal of the “nationalist turn,” the African historian, Zeleza (2006a: 111), presented it this way:

The search for a new African narrative liberated from the epistemic colonization of Europe entailed a nationalist struggle to remake history, not within terms of their own choosing or summoned from a pristine past, but out of the very, and continuing, violent encounter with Europe. It was a struggle to subvert and transcend the imperial coding of Africa as a Hegelian “black darkness,” to renew and refurbish the image of Africa, for Africa itself and for the world at large, by an intelligentsia that was immersed in both African and European ontological and epistemological orders.

Zeleza (2006a: 112) coined the term “nationalist humanism” predicated on overturning “Europe’s cognitive apparatus of itself and its African ‘Other’ by affirming the historicity and humanity of Africa and Africans.” However, numerous critical questions have been posed regarding the adequacy of African nationalism as a liberatory force capable of overturning the colonizer’s model of the world, and countering colonial/imperial Eurocentric thought on Africa. How free was African nationalism from the invisible immanent logics of colonialism? How formidable was the native petit-bourgeois in charge of the African nationalist movements to spearhead a revolution rather than a reform of colonialism? These are tormenting questions that troubled Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Thomas Sankara, Kwame Nkrumah, and many others directly involved in the anti-colonial and decolonial struggles who were fearful of how neo-colonialism would re-inscribe all the logics of colonialism in the economy, psyche, and knowledge domains.

However, Zeleza posits that criticisms of nationalism did not distinguish between progressive versions and narrow (reactionary) forms. To Zeleza (2006a: 113), the progressive nationalist projects were centered on four sets of issues: decolonization and development; nation-building and democratization; cultural renewal and diversity; and Africa’s regional and global presence. But those who were critical of some of the limits of African nationalism tended not to abandon it but also embrace Marxism completely. In the process, they combine the “nationalist turn” and the “Marxist turn” in their search for a robust liberatory ideology (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu 2022). This “Marxist turn” enabled the emergence of what Cedric Robinson (2000) articulated as “Black Marxism,” which is a combination of Black radical tradition and Marxism.

Within the African continent, the “Marxist turn” materialized as a political economy approach and gave rise to the dependency school. The most representa-

tive work out of this tradition is that of Walter Rodney (1972), which examined “How Europe underdeveloped Africa.” Rodney’s ideas resonated with those of Julius Nyerere contained in the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967. However, Zeleza (2006a: 113) is insistent on the power of “nationalist humanism” to the extent of arguing that:

Nationalist humanism has withstood new theoretical waves that have arisen from time to time and lashed against its sturdy foundations. More often than not, new ideas and ideologies – from Marxism to dependency to feminism to the ‘posts’ – have been incorporated into its strapping, spacious complex.

What became known as the “golden age” of African nationalism gifted Africa with the respected Ibadan Nationalist School of History represented by historians such as Kenneth Dike and Jacob Ade Ajayi in Nigeria, the Dakar School represented by Cheikh Anta Diop (Afrocentrism and pan-Africanism) in Senegal, and the head of state Leopold Sedar Senghor (negritude and African socialism) (though there were serious ideological tensions between the two figures). The “Marxist turn” reverberated strongly within the Dar-es-salaam (Dar) School in Tanzania (Falola and Aderinto 2010; Kimambo 2008a). The key grammars of change were deracialization, Africanization, indigenization, and catching up with Europe in development. Due to the convergences of the “nationalist turn” and the “Marxist turn,” socialism, including “African socialism,” became another dominant grammar of change (Senghor 1998).

The Ibadan and Dakar schools sought to overturn imperial/colonial historiography and demonstrate that Africa had a long history that pre-dated the advent of colonialism. Ajayi (1969) posited that colonialism was a mere episode in African history, and Diop pushed forward the case of the Egyptian civilization as an authentic African invention and creation. The combined interventions resulted in the introduction of oral tradition as a legitimate methodology ideal for recovering African history and articulating the “African factor” in human history (Falola 2001). But as noted by Francis Nyamnjoh (2019: 18), the nationalist-inspired changes of the 1960s and 1970s that were expected to consider African realities and experiences, “almost without exception significantly Africanized their personnel but not their curricula, pedagogical structures, or epistemologies in a systematic and productive manner.”

It is also important to note that there were tensions within the Ibadan School regarding the very understanding of colonialism as a mere episode, leading Peter Ekeh (1983) to dedicate his professorial inaugural lecture in 1980 to re-articulating the idea of colonialism as an epic rather than an episodic issue in African history.

On the African continent, the emphasis on colonization as a power structure, which drastically transformed Africa and survived the dismantlement of the physical empire in the 1960s, can be traced to the debates at Ibadan (Ekeh 1975). Before that, Frantz Fanon had also emphasized that colonialism was never satisfied with physical domination and was focused on the theft of history of the colonized and invasion of their mental universe (Fanon 1968).

Alternatively, the Dar School proved empirically and theoretically that Africa's poverty was a result of European activities such as the slave trade and colonialism that resulted in underdevelopment. It went further to shift historical focus from the elites to the peasants and working class, which became known as "writing history from below" (Mamdani 2016). The seminal publication by the Tanzanian scholar, Issa G. Shivji, entitled *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (1976), concretely symbolized "writing history from below," while being critical of elite nationalism, imperialism, and the state in Tanzania, from a leftist perspective. While Julius Nyerere's African socialism underplayed the question of class struggles, Shivji was putting it on the table as a major issue. It was also at Dar-es-salaam that the issue of disciplinary organization of knowledge was confronted, resulting in the establishment of a new field called "Development Studies" (Kimambo 2008b). However, Mahmood Mamdani (2016: 74), who belonged to the Dar School, highlighted that there were also tensions which he categorized in terms of "radicals" who wanted a complete transformation of curriculum, administration, and even abolition of disciplines; "moderates" who were the majority who supported change but did not agree with the abolition of disciplines; and "conservatives" who resisted change and were content with the status quo.

What emerges from this analysis is that African Studies experienced the fire of the "nationalist" and "Marxist" turns in the 1960s and 1970s. At the University of Ghana, the government leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who had embraced nationalism, Marxism, and pan-Africanism, directly intervened in epistemic debates and pushed for the establishment of the Institute of African Studies in 1961. He also proposed the transformation of the University College of the Gold Coast, which was part of the University of London, into an independent institution known as the University of Ghana and shifting epistemically from Eurocentric perspectives on Africa to Africa-centered approaches to knowledge generation (Allman 2013).

At the launch of the Institute of African Studies in 1963, Nkrumah delivered the "African Genius Speech," where he highlighted the need to research into African social expressions of society, traditional African statecraft, African codes of morals, African hospitality, and African purposeful agency and energy, beyond "a vague brotherhood based on a criterion of colour" and beyond the negritude

notions of Africans with no “reason” but “only sensitivity” (Nkrumah 1963). At the University of Nairobi in Kenya in the 1960s, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his colleagues produced a widely circulated memo, positing that the English Literature curriculum had to be reconfigured in such a way that it privileged local Kenyan and African content before turning to European content (Amoko 2010). At this same time, a very active Association of African Universities (AAU) was pushing for the Africanization of universities across the continent and positing that the higher education institutions needed by Africa were those that emerged from the African soil and climate and not transplants from somewhere else (Yesufu 1973).

Even as African economies plunged into crisis and funding for universities was drying up, African intellectuals were able to come together to form the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in 1973, a pan-African institution that has continued to produce cutting-edge Africa-focused research predicated on the political economy approaches, indicating beyond doubt the influence of the “Marxist turn” on knowledge production in Africa (Mamdani 2016). Most of the leading African scholars who have produced seminal works on Africa, such as Samir Amin, Mahmood Mamdani, Issa G. Shivji, Archie Mafeje, Thandika Mkandawire, Sam Moyo, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, Amina Mama, Fatou Sow, Dzodzi Tsikata, and many others, belong to CODESRIA. Zeleza’s *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (1997) and two edited volumes on *The Study of Africa: Volume 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters* (2006b) and *Volume 2: Global and Transnational Engagements* (2007) constitute some of the landmark interventions on African Studies. In *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*, Zeleza also considered the rich literary contributions that are often ignored in the analyses of African Studies. He eloquently captured the point that the early critiques of the “postcolonial” condition did not come from political scientists and historians but from literary scholars who wrote such works as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Armah 1968) and many others.

The overlapping “nationalist” and “Marxist” turns portended the most radical change in African Studies in the 1960s and 1970s, though the initiatives varied from institution to institution, country to country, and region to region. At the same time, there was no coherent and agreed ideology even within the nationalist discourse, only contradictory visions. Some pushed a rather culturalist-nativist agenda of revival and reconstitution of pre-colonial “authentic” and “pristine” cultures and values, and others, which included Edward Wilmot Blyden (1888), Kwame Nkrumah (1964), and Ali A. Mazrui (1986), creatively pushed for a synthesis of African, Islamic, and European traditions in what became known as “triple heritage.”

However, a combination of factors, some internal and others external, undercut and halted the decolonial turn that was unfolding since the 1960s. This happened from the mid-1970s onwards. The African economies entered a period of fast decline resulting in a lack of funding for African higher education. At the political level, Africa entered into a new phase of authoritarianism, one-party-state, and military regimes symbolized by Idi Amin Dada's coming to power in Uganda. Progressive leaders like Nkrumah, who was pushing on many fronts for real changes, including in knowledge and education, suffered a military coup in 1966. At a global scale, the Washington Consensus heralding neoliberal interventions represented by Structural Adjustment Programmes emerged and had negative effects on the social and economic domains in Africa. Taken together, these inimical processes resulted in the fall of public education and the mass movement of African intellectuals to Europe and North America. It was within this context that Ali A. Mazrui (2003) posed the question: "Who killed intellectualism in the postcolonial era?"

Thus, the changes brought about by the "nationalist" and "Marxist" turns were aborted as both Marxism and nationalism became accused of being responsible for some justifications of authoritarianism. Consequently, the period from the mid-1970s to the 1980s and into the 1990s was that of crisis in African higher education as well as crisis of decolonization. With the increasing delegitimation of Marxism and African nationalism, particularly following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the implosion of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Cold War, there emerged an ideological and epistemological crisis. Within this context, a scholarship informed by neo-liberalism and the post-Cold War normative values of liberal democracy and human rights emerged in Africa, as did the Anglo-American academy's "postcolonial turn." Perhaps it was this shift from nationalist/Marxist scholarship to neo-liberal scholarship and postcolonial turn that prompted Issa G. Shivji to criticize African intellectuals thusly:

The majority of African intellectuals have pretty well accommodated mainstream thought. This includes former militant nationalists and radical socialist intellectuals. The metamorphosis of the African intellectual from a revolutionary to an activist, from critical economist to postmodernist, from a social analyst to constitutional liberal, from anti-imperialist to cultural atavist, from a radical economics professor to a neo-liberal World Bank spokesperson, from an intellectual to a consultant, is blatant, unrepentant, and mercenary (2003: 11).

Issues of postmodernism, cultural turn, and neo-liberal thinking are emerging from this critique; however, a discussion of post-Cold War neo-liberal scholarship pred-

icated on liberal democracy, human rights, anti-state philosophies, pro-civil society, and transitional politics would need its own full treatment and is not the thrust of this article. Only suffice to say that to radical scholars like Shivji, who are still committed to nationalist/Marxist/pan-Africanist liberatory potentials, the neoliberal intervention and postcolonial turn were nothing but part of the imperial strategy to annul national liberation struggles of socialist visions. This critique also resonates with that of Anibal Quijano, credited with coining the term “coloniality,” which gave birth to “decoloniality.” He argued that the triumphalism of neoliberal ideology was accompanied by “an exhaustion of the problematic of an entire period [...] without the alternative problematic being equally visible” (Quijano 1988: 163). Quijano was part of the radical leftist thinkers of the 1970s and in the 1980s he shifted to the decolonial epistemic perspective as the Marxist perspective lost its flavour. While others Marxists were quickly embracing neo-liberal thinking Quijano (1988: 163) thought that discourses such as liberal democracy, human rights, and rule of markets were nothing but a “pragmatist world view.”

The aim is to merely submit “to the immediate and short-term mandate of the capitalist order, a form of succumbing to the Procrustean bed, to the common sense labelled as functionalism, which is incapable of advancing beyond a biased, ahistorical, and conformist knowledge” (Salgado et al 2021: 203). During this period, Quijano began to build a case for the concept of coloniality of power in Latin America. In Africa, the radical left was defending nationalism and Marxism and was criticized by the emerging postcolonial theorists as stuck in meta-narratives that have long failed.

Inevitably, the “postcolonial turn” had a very “troubled encounter” with African Studies produced from the African continent. Zeleza (2006a: 89) noted that the troubles and even antagonisms cascaded from both “ideological and ethical imperatives” on the one hand, and on the other, they were “rooted in apparent intellectual and epistemic incongruities.” The seminal work of Edward Said entitled *Orientalism* (1978) is invoked as marking the entry of the “postcolonial turn” concurrently with postmodernism and post-structuralism. Said himself drew from the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Antonio Gramsci, among many others. However, what later became popularly known as postcolonial theory became associated with Indian scholars based in the ivy league universities in the Global North, such as Homi Bhabha (1990) and Gayatri Spivak (1988). The key features of the thought and theory include anti-foundationalism, anti-metanarratives, anti-structuralism, anti-transcendental identities, privileging of discourse analysis, notions of mimicry, hybridity, liminality, capillarity of power, and fluidity of identities, among many others (Lomba 1998; Quayson 2000). Postcolonial

theory also sought to bridge the gap between empire and colony through highlighting entanglements, which had implications for knowledge production in general and social theory in particular.

However, the interests here are on the purchase and impact of postcolonialism on African Studies. This can only be achieved by briefly discussing a few works by the African scholars who embraced postcolonial thought and postcolonial theory. The seminal works of V. Y. Mudimbe and Achille Mbembe are often given as examples of intellectual productions informed by postcolonialism, though the writers of these works do not necessarily self-identify as such. Mudimbe's works on the "invention" (1988) and "idea" (1994) of Africa are well-received in African Studies as they contributed to a better understanding of the role of "discursive processes through which ideas and images of the colonized and colonizer were created, how the very notion of "Africa" was invented" (Zezeza 2006a: 121). However, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009a: 15) criticized Mudimbe's work as only projecting the "idea of Africa" as invented from outside, and he formulated what he termed the "African idea of Africa" invented by Africans themselves.

While Mbembe's seminal work entitled *On the Postcolony* (2001) launched him into international fame, his attempt to introduce changes to the intellectual project at CODESRIA provoked an intellectual storm, with most African scholars preferring to continue with the nationalist/Marxist tradition. It would seem Mbembe sought to shake the CODESRIA intellectual project by exposing it to the US scholarship where the "posts" (postmodernism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism) were in vogue. Mahmood Mamdani (2016: 78), a prominent member of CODESRIA, explained that Mbembe's interventions created two camps of "globalists" who supported him and "pan-Africanists" who defended the CODESRIA brand of engaged public intellectual scholarship. Mbembe had to leave CODESRIA and went on to produce two hard-hitting articles that heavily criticized what he termed Afro-radicalism, nativism, and "African modes of self-writing"—accusing these of being driven by false philosophies, narcissism of minor difference, the neurosis of victimhood, and for "ghettoising" African Studies (Mbembe 2002).

At issue in these debates were pertinent issues of knowledge—What is Africa? What are Africans, collective or individuals? Is African identity an open one that can be chosen, or is it determined by histories of enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid? What is the meaning of freedom (self-determination, national question, cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism)? What is the relationship of Africa to the world as well as its destiny? Mamdani (2016: 79) concluded that: "It was, after all, Mbembe who had attempted to steer CODESRIA away from political economy and towards a focus on discourse and representation. Whereas this top-down effort

alienated one and all, it also delayed a debate around political economy and the epistemological question in CODESRIA.”

However, even Zeleza, who not only confronted Mbembe at CODESRIA but has also been critical of the “posts,” accepts that the postcolonial turn contributed to African Studies at four levels. The first is “the nature of metropolitan-colonial connections,” shifting it from a tendency to reduce it to one direction, and now there is an acceptance that “the metropole was made by the imperial projects as much as the colonies” (Zeleza 2006a: 120). The result has been a “new imperial history” where the colonies are accounted for. The second is a new understanding of power and its incarnation beyond traditional binaries between nation and colony, imperial and national, leading to meaningful intellectual engagements. Power is today better understood as connected to discourse, political institutions, and practices (Abrahamsen 2003). The third is that postcolonial studies brought new insight into the question of social reproduction of the colonial order and even extended it to new research areas on sexualities as well as into what has come to be known as “intimate colonialism” (Zeleza 2006b: 122). Finally, there is consensus that postcolonialism contributed to a deeper analysis of resistance which is a major theme in African Studies, bringing in how power reproduces itself even within resistance formations and opening vistas into subaltern movements (Cooper 1999).

What is often ignored is that postcolonial theory is not a singular body of knowledge with a singular genealogy. This is why one finds Pal Ahluwalia (2001; 2010) arguing that postcolonialism and post-structuralism have African roots and not European. He posited that “some of the most profound contemporary French theorists who have challenged the very precepts of modernity [...] have been deeply affected in some way by France’s African colonial project” (Ahluwalia 2010: 2). His position is that postcolonialism is a “counter-discourse that seeks to disrupt the cultural hegemony of the West, challenging imperialism in its various guises, whereas post-structuralism and postmodernism are counter discourses against modernism that have emerged within modernism itself” (Ahluwalia 2010: 3). Empirically, Ahluwalia highlighted the geographical, epistemic, and political significance of the Maghreb region and the Algerian anti-colonial struggle while also tracing the life of theorists like Michel Foucault, who spent time in Tunisia, as well as Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous, who were born in colonial Algeria (Ahluwalia 2010).

If the postcolonial turn resulted in a new complex understanding of such concepts and ideas as Africa, power, resistance, development, identity, representation, epistemology, and others, it did not succeed in decolonizing African Studies but only expanded its premises, frontiers, and problematics. Decolonizing African Stu-

dies is back on the agenda once more with its radical orientation towards “undoing,” “dismantling,” and “unlearning” the unjust systems, institutions, epistemologies, assumptions, and practices on the one hand, and on the other creating and constituting “alternative spaces and ways of knowing that transcend our epicolonial inheritance” (Kessi et al 2020). What then are some of the key tasks of decoloniality of the 21st century?

Conclusion: The Tasks of Decoloniality in the 21st Century

The mapping of the genealogies and trajectories of African nationalist decolonial epistemological initiatives was meant to also highlight the issue of unstable continuities within problematic discontinuities in the struggles for epistemic freedom. At stake has been the task of establishing a connection between African nationalist decolonial epistemological initiatives with the current formations such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movements. Toyin Falola (2022: 2) introduced the concept of “the decolonial moments” in his drive to make connections across time. He delineated four broad moments. The first being the emergence of a new African historiography intertwined with issues of modernization, pan-Africanism and nationalist liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The second is the birth of the underdevelopment and dependency theories informed by Marxism “as a political and intellectual epistemology in the 1970s and 1980s” (Falola 2022: 2). The third is the post-apartheid Africa and the rise of an African renaissance and emphasis on African political thought in the 1990s. The fourth is the moment of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa and the Black Lives Matter in the twenty-first century— “continuing the unfinished business of epistemological and racial decolonization” (Falola 2022: 2). Falola (2022: 7) concluded that:

The politics of both the RMF and BLM have promoted the ideas of decoloniality, further opening the space for insertion of the “epistemology of the South” in various academies. Although “decoloniality” has gained currency in recent years, the distinction between it and “decolonization” can be blurred.

In this article, it was not differentiating between decolonization and decoloniality which mattered but the connections and overlapping. In the words of Geo Maher (2022: 22) “I hope to contribute to a broader project of building—rather than burning—bridges between movements struggling against settler colonialism and anti-Black racism.” What are the connections? The connections are not casual.

They are complex. The Black Lives Matter movements which emerged within the United States and the Rhodes Must Fall movements which erupted in South Africa in 2015 embodied the spirit of decoloniality of the 21st century. At the centre were entangled existential, epistemological and (in)justice issues traceable to the time of enslavement of Africans and the invention of “Black” people as deficient beings. Both quickly assumed planetary scale resulting in the popular attacks on monuments and iconography celebrating imperialists, enslavers and racists across the world. Writing about the situation in the United States, Mahmood Mamdani (2020: 41) highlighted that African Americans are racially oppressed and reduced to providers of cheap labour under a white supremacist system of government whereas the native Indians are colonised, dispossessed of land, and their belonging to America was denied. They were subjected to genocide not enslavement.

Both South Africa and the United States have undergone efforts at democratization without decolonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Mamdani 2020). Both South Africa and the United States deny their being colonial states. The United States highlights that it fought against empire in 1776 and whereas South Africa through the Act of Union of 1910 emerged as a “whitestan” (state for whites) and by 1961, it declared itself to be a republic. These moves had everything to do with the liberation and freedom of white settlers in both the United States and in South Africa. It had nothing to do with the liberation of the Indigenous peoples and the freedom of African Americans in the United States. For South Africa, the apartheid policy was officially adopted in 1948 to consolidate white supremacy that emerged in 1910. Both South Africa and the United States have undergone struggles for civil and political rights rather than decolonization. The United States exist as a successful settler state. For South Africa, what was achieved in 1994 was democracy, not decolonization. Therefore, both countries enable a mapping out of some key aspects of the tasks of decoloniality in the 21st century. For both South Africa and the United States, it has become clear that “racial emancipation is not decolonization” (Mamdani 2020: 96).

Both countries have an unresolved land question. In the United States, decolonization entails restoration of land taken from indigenous Indian people. In South Africa, land has yet to be reclaimed by its previous owners. In the United States, Black lives are yet to matter. Even at a world scale, Black lives are yet to matter. This point is clear from the demands of the Black Lives movements. The grammar of abolition rather than decolonization is gaining traction in the United States where incarceration of African Americans is easily connected with the long history of enslavement.

In South Africa, the higher education landscape embodied apartheid and became differentiated according to race into English, Afrikaans, and Black institutions. The Rhodes must Fall movements were reacting to this apartheid colonial ordering of higher education, which continues to be seen in iconography and curriculum; language of teaching, learning and research; staff and student demographics (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). The examples of South Africa and the United States clearly indicate that decolonization is incomplete and unfinished. There are clear signs of the existence of a resilient cognitive empire and its coloniality of knowledge.

This is why the key tasks of decoloniality are framed mainly by epistemic issues which are not decoupled from the existential questions, issues which Amo was well seized with. The first issue is that of Black lives that continue to be exposed to dehumanization and dismemberment. Their land has not yet been returned. They remain as providers of cheap labour as they don't own the means of production. The second matter arising includes the rethinking thinking and even unthinking thinking itself as part of a liberatory agenda of the 21st century. This is important in a context where Eurocentric knowledge is still dominant and African knowledge is languishing in the margins of society. The third is the issue of shifting the biography and geography of knowledge so as to open up to a plurality of knowledges. Africans in general and women's scholarly productions and publications remain outside what is considered the canon. There is need for decanonization of knowledge so as to enable the expansion of the shoulders of the giants to include African scholarship in general as well as feministic and gender scholarship in particular. The fourth task is that of relevance of knowledge and making the institutions of higher education anchored in the African context in which they are located to enhance the relevance of what they deliver to the young generation of Africans. At the moments, there are "universities in Africa" rather than "African universities" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). The knowledge that is generated, learnt and taught remains largely irrelevant to the African conditions and problems.

This takes us to the issues of curriculum, pedagogies, and languages of learning, research and teaching as well as access to education. There is need for overall decolonization across all these domains if the knowledge is to be of service to Africans. This also means that the decolonization/decoloniality of the 21st century has to consider diverse contexts and the contextual problems that give it content. What appear as epistemic issues simultaneously speak to existential problems that require a decolonization targeting structures, systems and institutions of power asymmetries; as well as personal issues of consciousness change and relational aspects of interdependence of people.

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