Contesting Africa's 'Dissimilarity': Reflections on Global African Studies

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Thank you for the honour of inviting me to participate in the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. I thank the Head of Department, Professor Tommie Shelby, for facilitating this process. I salute the founders and builders of the department and one of the 'living ancestors' of the department, Professor Skip Gates Jn. I will also like to acknowledge three senior colleagues in the Department who have, in many ways, supported my career in the last two decades, Professor Jacob Olupona and Professors Jean and John Comaroff.

On April 10 1968, a black students' organization called Afro published an advertisement in the Harvard Crimson demanding that an endowed chair for a Black Professor be established at Harvard. They also demanded courses relevant to Blacks at Harvard, 'more lower-level Black faculty members,' and the admission of a number of black students 'proportionate to [the] percentage of black population as a whole.' This formed the bedrock of the struggle that eventuated in the founding of the department that we are celebrating this weekend.

I bring this up not merely to restate the history of this department, but because the history is pertinent to my central argument about the heritage of African, and African American or black studies in the United States and elsewhere in the world, which many departments engaging in the study of Africa have since lost or have deliberately overlooked. The socio-political and intellectual agenda of this heritage are linked. As the late Manning Marable, who was the inaugural director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia stated, 'It is only when we stand against the current, confronting the powerful forces of prejudice and inequality, that the tools of scholarship become meaningful.' But I will return to this.

Let me first discuss the challenges of studying 'the margin' in *the metropole*.

Studying *the Margin* in the Metropole

I taught 'Introduction to African Studies' for a little less than one decade in the African American and African Studies Department of the University of California-Davis. It was a lower division class for first year students who might be learning about Africa for the first time in the university – or in any systematic way in their entire life. The class also

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attracted a few students at different stages in the undergraduate programmes in different disciplines across the university. It is important to note that the deparment did not offer a degree program; students were only able to take a designated emphasis in African American and African Studies. Many of the students had the least interest in Africa. They registered for the class as a general education requirement. Therefore, for this half of the class, it was often obvious from the first day of class that, given a choice, they would be somewhere else. Each year, I would start the first day of class after the introductions by asking the students to take out a sheet of paper and write down the first thing or image that came to their minds once they heard the word 'Africa.'

Unfailingly, every year, the responses were overwhelmingly negative or, at best, exotic. The leading 'suspects' were 'lions', 'elephants', 'jungle', 'diseases', 'AIDS', 'wars', 'violence', 'poverty,' 'ethnicity' and 'colonialism.' The most positive – if they can be so described – were 'Safari', 'cradle of mankind', 'volunteering' and 'peace-corps.' Given the tragic history that binds the Americas and Africa and the continuing implications of this for people of African descent in the United States, these responses were instructive in terms of the challenges of teaching the so-called 'dark continent' to these students.

Perhaps it should be stated in parenthesis that if the ways in which these students viewed Africa appear as expressions of ignorance about the continent by recent high school graduates, we should recall the infamous position of the Oxford historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, who, despite the thoughtful, evidence-based contemporaneous efforts of the likes of Basil Davidson, insisted in the 1960s that 'African history' was the history of Europeans in Africa, because, before the Europeans came to Africa, there was only darkness – and, evidently, darkness was not a subject of history. Such vulgar prejudice, which as James Coleman suggested was 'the product of the belief that Africans were fundamentally different from the rest of mankind (sic),'[2] was also reflected by Margery Perham, the famous Oxford historian of the British empire, who in 1951:

> 'The dealings between tropical Africa and the west must be *different*. Here in place of the large unities of Asia was multicellular tissue of tribalism: instead of an ancient civilisation, the largest area of primitive poverty enduring into the modern age. Until the very recent penetration by Europe, the greater part of the continent was without the wheel, the plough or the transport animal;

[2] *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 1958, p. 2.

almost without stone houses or clothes except for skin, without writing and *so without history*.'[3]

Like Hegel before them, Trevor-Roper and Perham reflected the position of many in the west who insisted that, as Achille Mbembe[4] articulates it, 'the human experience of Blacks should be understood as *fundamental difference*.' But 'the status of the *African* sign in the midst of the economy of alterity,' as Mbembe puts it, has survived the likes of Trevor-Roper, Perham – and Hegel, long before them. When you consider the ignorance reflected by these scholars in light of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s television series, 'Wonders of the African World,' described as 'an exuberant, visually stunning journey across Africa and through the history of its glorious but forgotten civilizations,' we can understand Susan Buck-Morss's[5] conclusion about Hegel: 'What is clear is that in an effort to become more erudite in African studies during the 1820s, Hegel was in fact becoming dumber.'

However, this tradition of ignorance remains evident even in the 21st century – as reflected in Bruce Gilley's[6] now controversial article published in the *Third World Quarterly,* entitled 'A Case for Colonialism.' Gilley concluded not only that 'Western colonialism was, as a general rule, both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate,' but also that 'Anti-colonial ideology [which must include critical, anti-imperialist scholarship] imposed grave harms on subject peoples and continues to thwart sustained development and a fruitful encounter with modernity in many places.' In light of this body of 'evidence,' Gilley called for the re-imposition of colonialism in Africa.

What are the implications of such views as Gilley's for African Studies? If most of the countries in the continent are regarded as unqualified for self-rule, how can we study such an imagined 'subject' people – who are assumed to lack generalised subjectivity even in the 21st century? If Africans are not considered to be agents of history, even their own history, can the study of Africa move beyond the perennial focus on the continent's purported *essential difference*, that is, its' dissimilarities with the rest of the modern world?

The images of Africa in the minds of many of my first year students in the UC-Davis are no different from the images in the minds of those who are in control of critical spheres of decision-making in the west, particularly in contemporary United States. (If we can call a witness, then we can call a president who used a phrase to describe African countries and

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[3] Margery Perham. 'The British Problem in Africa' *Foreign Affairs,* 29 July, 1951, p. 638, emphasis added. Kenneth Onwuka Dike, the Nigerian historian responded to Perham in 'African History and Self-Government', *West Africa,* Feb 28, 1953, p. 177.

[4] *Critique of Black Reason,* 2017, p. 85.

[5] *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History,* 2009, p. 73

[6] 2017.

Haiti which cannot be repeated in polite company). Some scholars have described this attitude as a form of distance from 'critical forms of knowledge.' It is this kind of attitude to Africa that provoked the on-going attempts to 'shift the geography of reason,' to expose the ignorance that masquerades as knowledge – or what, in the more critical tradition championed by Mudimbe, constitutes a quest to dismantle the 'colonial library while promoting African epistemology'.[7] An example is Hodgson and Byfield's recent edited volume, *Global Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century*. In the introduction to the volume, Hodgson and Byfield[8] reflects on the fact that 'The deep history, vast geography, and complex local, regional, and global entanglements of people, ideas, and goods within and beyond the continent place Africa at the centre of global historical processes rather than on its periphery,' while also challenging 'those narratives that contain African history and cultures within the continent.' And as Eric R. Wolf argues in the 1997 'Preface' to his 1982 book, provocatively entitled, *Europe and the People Without History*: 'The history of European expansion interdigitates with the histories of the peoples it encompassed, and their histories in turn articulate with the history of Europe.'[9]

If Africa continues to be assumed to be so dissimilar from the rest of the world, particularly the west, should those of us who study and teach (about) Africa accept this as a given or teach and conduct our research as if this were an essential, absolute truth? That is, must Africa's assumed dissimilarity both in global history and in the contemporary global system, be the absolute departure point for our pedagogy as well as for our epistemic project? In the age of 'global studies', can we truly give a robust account of the continent's diversity, complexity as well as its presence in what Achille Mbembe recently describes as the '*in-common'* of the world, if the fundamental basis for studying and teaching Africa is its *essential* and *absolute* dissimilarity – its permanent contrast with the *normal*, the *regular*, that is, *the western* – rather than its particularities which do not occlude its similarities and continuities with the rest of humanity? Why is a continent that has always been global in its interface with the rest of the world popularly imagined and largely taught as one that was forced into global relations only in the contemporary era, and yet, still described as 'remotely global'?[10]

These are some of the questions which have partly animated the debate about African studies in the last few decades. While I cannot hope to exhaust the dimensions of the debate

[7] Diouf 2016, p. 59.
[8] 2017, pp. 1, 2.
[9] 1997, p. x.
[10] Piot, 1999.

in this lecture, I hope to address some of its important dimensions. One of my core arguments is that those of us who teach (about) and study Africa have a duty not only to draw out the continent's particularities, including its differences – which many have done excellently, if excessively – but also to emphasise and document its presence or *co-presence* in the global context.[11]

Against the backdrop of reflections on African studies in Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States – all three continents where I have had the opportunity of being trained and/or training others – what I hope to do today is to point to some of the salient issues which have been raised and add a few more that might push the debate further. My purpose is not a criticism of African Studies, but rather a critique that points to existing tensions and some of the surviving elements of the old attitudes and paradigms and the consequences of the enduring study of Africa as an *essential and negative difference* (which looks to the past), as a fundamentally dissimilar system, no less promoted by African scholars as by non-African Africanists. This '*Africa-as-difference*' perspective is particularly problematic because the *difference* has been deployed, on the one hand, as a means of inferiorizing the continent as well as the humanity and experiences of its people, and/or on the other, as a way of claiming that Africa and things African must be defined as or by anything that *is not* the West. While the first perspective was expressive in Alfred Radcliffe-Browns'[12] conclusion in his 'Preface' to Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's 1940 book, *African Political Systems,* where he states that 'In science, observation and the selection of what to record need to be guided by theory. In the study of the *simpler societies* the anthropologist finds that the concepts and theories of political philosophers or economists are *unserviceable* or insufficient;' the other perspective has been described by the Cornell philosopher, Olufemi Taiwo,[13] as one fuelled by 'occident anxiety.' Though the study of Africa has developed tremendously since the era when Africa was 'a subject of anthropological folklore,' to quote Paul Tiyambe Zeleza,[14] yet, some of the assumptions of that era linger in the contemporary era.

Why African Studies in Africa?

I will use my personal trajectory to illustrate a strand of the continental experience of studying Africa. Before I went to Cambridge to study anthropology, a discipline that has had the most historic dissimilarizing effect on the study of Africa, I joined the Department of

[11] Diouf 2016, p. 59.
[12] 1940, p. xiii.
[13] 2019, p. 26-27.
[14] 2009, p. 114.

Political Science in the University of Ibadan in 1999 as an assistant lecturer. The Ibadan School of Political Science was famous for its solid scholarship, but not of the radical form. It had an epistemological tradition that was as grounded in Western traditions as it was focused on Africanist, as well as comparative, interpretations of local and global dynamics. This produced theoretical re-evaluations and reinterpretation of received Western orthodoxy. The School's direct and indirect dialogues with the famous Ibadan School of History is perhaps one that is best represented in the debate between Jacob Ade Ajayi, the late preeminent African historian, and Peter P. Ekeh, the political sociologist of the Ibadan School of Politics. The two disagreed on how best to approach colonialism in African history. While Ajayi (1969) insisted that colonialism was a mere episode – among other episodes – in the *longue dureé* of African history, Ekeh in his famous 'two publics thesis' (1975) argued that colonialism constituted an epoch in Africa's history, one that not only changed the colonial present and postcolonial future, but also how to understand the precolonial past.[15] This debate is too familiar to Africanist scholars to bear repeating here. What I want to draw attention to, however, is the tradition of engaged and critical scholarship to which we were heirs in the political science department in Ibadan. It was a tradition that embraced global scholarship without regarding its own rigorous traditions as inferior to any prior traditions of studying society.

Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune's famous book, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*[16] was a compulsory text in the graduate school for my generation of students of comparative politics in Ibadan as was Ekeh's 'Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement.' Przeworski and Teune's clarification of theory construction techniques and strategies and the logic of explanation regarding the problems of contemporary political science[17] were fascinating to us, even if, initially, slightly elusive. For those us who were interested in comparative cross-cultural research, their argument about the primacy of understanding systems through the lens of the *most similar* and the *most dissimilar* systems was most enlightening. Studying Ekeh's two publics and his comparative analysis of the emergence of the public spheres in Europe and Africa and the fundamental difference that colonialism made in bifurcating the public sphere in Africa constituted a great example for some of us of how the perspective of 'the most dissimilar system' in comparing Europe with Africa could be problematic. But the greater value of Ekeh's thesis, for us, was

[15] Olufemi Taiwo (2019: 25) recently dismissed this model of periodization of African history (pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial) as 'simplistic historiography with severe implications for knowledge production.'
[16] 1970.
[17] Labvitz 1971, p. 329.

not merely to draw out dissimilarities, but also to use dissimilarities in historical evolution through human agency and structural changes in pointing to the reasons for different social, economic and political outcomes in two parts of the world. Its greater value was in pointing out the fundamental basis of a myriad of social crises which emphasised the epochal nature of colonialism.

From the 1960s, Ekeh's University of Ibadan, like a few others of its generation, including the University of Ghana, Legon, the University of East Africa – which later became Makerere University (Uganda), Dar es Salaam University (Tanzania) and University of Nairobi (Kenya) – took on the mission of ensuring that knowledge production reflected Africa's history and emergence in the modern world. In doing so, some felt that it was important to establish Institutes of African Studies. This was opposed by others who argued that there was no need to study Africa separately in an African institution. However, a few critical voices and leaders insisted that Institutes of African Studies were necessary as centres driven by the need to engage in 'forms of knowledge production about Africa that challenged colonial categories and the conventions of academic disciplines; that was Africa-centred, Africa-based, and *globally engaged*; that sought to transcend the politics of the Cold War and defy the hegemonic impulse of US racial politics'.[18]

Two examples of this were the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana which was started in 1960, but formally opened in 1963, and the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ibadan which was started in 1962. 'African Studies' was approached in Ibadan, not as a fundamentally different form of knowledge, but as 'Africa's own contribution to the *global pool of intellection*' with the aim not just for Africans to understand themselves, but also to present knowledge about Africans to the rest of the world from Africans' perspectives.[19] The Institute in Ibadan started as an interdisciplinary research institute with a mandate 'to build a body of knowledge and to construct an attitude of intellection that will not take for granted the heritage of African peoples, their experiences in the present, and their aspirations for the future.'[20] However, the mission of the IAS in Ibadan while liberationist, was not as radical as the IAS established in Legon. This was not surprising given the differences in the nature of their founding and their funding. IAS Ibadan was partly funded at inception by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. In the case of IAS Legon, the involvement of the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in setting the

[18] Allman 2013, p. 183.
[19] Pogoson 2017, p. 4, emphasis added.
[20] IAS 2017, p. 8.

mandate of the institute with regard to knowledge production, largely determined its initial trajectory. The Legon IAS mission was to challenge what had constituted African Studies at that point in the West.

Stated Nkrumah at the opening of the institute: 'First and foremost, I would emphasize the need for a *reinterpretation* of our past… We have to recognize frankly that African Studies, in the form in which they have been developed in the universities and centres of leaning in the West, have been largely influenced by the concept of old style "colonial studies," and still to some extent remain under the shadow of colonial ideologies and mentality.'[21] Nkrumah encouraged the study of African history, culture, institutions, languages and the arts in what Jean Allman has described as 'new African-centred ways – in entire freedom from the propositions and presuppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment.' Also, Nkrumah encouraged the study of Africa '*in the widest possible sense – Africa in all its complexity, diversity and its underlying unity.*'[22]

There are three important points here – as noted by Jean Allman – in relation to the study of Africa in the present –with implications for the future. First, Nkrumah wanted Africa to be studied not as part of 'colonial science' or 'area studies'[23] – the latter which emerged as part of the national security and strategic planning as well as global surveillance in the Cold War era. Second, he wanted Africa to be approached in all its dimensions, ancient and contemporary heritage – including the study of North Africa; he wanted us to transcend the Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Arabophone divides in knowledge production about Africa; therefore, he argued for the inclusion, in African Studies, of Africans in all parts of the world, including in the Americas, Europe and Asia.[24] Third, he called for a reimagining and reinvention of how knowledge about Africa was produced, interpreted and circulated.[25]

However, in the 1960s, this mission did not preclude recruiting Western scholars to help in its implementation. After the University of Legon failed to recruit Evans-Pritchard from Oxford, Thomas Lionel Hodgkin, also an Oxonian, accepted the position of the director of the institute in 1962. Hodgkin saw his mission as one in which African studies could assist

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[21] Nkrumah 1963: 2-3, quoted in Allman 2013: 183, emphasis added.
[22] ibid, 6, emphasis added.
[23] cf. ibid, p. 184.
[24] Ibid, p. 191.
[25] Ibid, p.192.

the process of 'African revolution'[26] by exposing racist colonial myths and taking on the mission of the 'reinterpretation of the evidence' and the wide dissemination of this reinterpretation – as Jean Allman described the mission. On his part, Nkrumah argued that it was in these centres that it was possible to produce knowledge about Africa in which one could have confidence.

It is therefore not surprising that W. E. B. Du Bois became part of Nkrumah's larger project alongside his investment in the IAS. Nkrumah mobilised Du Bois to work on the *Encyclopedia Africana*, which had been partially sabotaged in the 1930s by Melville Herskovits – the man regarded as the 'founder' of African Studies in the United States.[27] Jerry Gershenhorn's book, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* acknowledged that Herskovits sabotaged *Encyclopedia Africana* because he felt that it was 'propaganda'. Of course we know better than that.

However, it is important to note that the popular view of Herskovits as the founder of African Studies in the US is a deliberate attempt to obscure the study of Africa pioneered by African Americans in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) which preceded the period in which Herskovits became the vanguard for the study of Africa and the formation of the US African Studies Association in 1957. The African American pioneers of African Studies 'focused on Africa's civilizational status, the Continent as a whole, and its diasporic connections.'[28] This started with Leo Hansberry who imposed a coherent approach towards the programme in African Studies when he joined Howard University's History Department in 1922.[29] Despite the opposition he faced, Hansberry started a series of courses on 'Negro Civilizations of Ancient Africa.' Du Bois later introduced a course on ancient Africa at Atlanta University in 1936.[30]

In what Allman[31] correctly describes as the reimagining of knowledge production about Africa on African terms, Nkrumah, who was trained in one of the HBCUs, that is, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, was a critical figure. This fact is often elided today in the scholarship on African Studies, in particular, and knowledge production in and about Africa, in general. Indeed, as Allman points out,[32] the December 1962 International Congress of Africanists held in Accra, Ghana in which members of the IAS and the Secretariat of the

[26] Ibid, p. 190.
[27] ibid, p. 193.
[28] Zeleza 2009, pp. 110, 118-119.
[29] Robinson 2007, p. 240.
[30] Ibid.
[31] 2013.
[32] Ibid, p. 196.

Encyclopedia Africana participated, brought together Africanists from all parts of the world, north and south, east and west. There were attempts even at this point to take over the control of this process from Africans, as 'racial politics of knowledge production' surfaced. This was successfully resisted. Yet, this 'seismic shift in the balance of power in the production of knowledge about Africa,' succeeded for a few years, as the Africanisation of African studies raised important questions about the mission of the postcolonial university.[33] These questions, unfortunately, were to be answered in disastrous ways in most institutions of higher learning in Africa from the mid-1980s and later in the post-Cold War era.

What happened to African Studies, specifically, and knowledge production in Africa, generally, since the coming of military rule, one-party states and authoritarian regimes of different hues is common knowledge. Whatever was left of the integrity of higher education was exposed to the devastation wrought by the IMF and World Bank through the structural adjustment programmes as implemented in most African countries in the 1980s and early 1990s. One of the most devastating consequences of this was the hollowing out of the centres of knowledge production in most African countries and the subversion of the project of the 1960s to reimagine and reinvent how knowledge in and about Africa was produced, interpreted and circulated.

However, it is important to note that the South African case constitutes an interesting experience, because of its peculiar history. When South Africa emerged from apartheid into multi-racial democratic rule in 1994, its leading universities struggled with the legacy of 'Bantu' education in the attempt to reimagine and reposition African Studies, which was initially provoked by what was called the '*native* question'.[34] The case of University of Cape Town involving Africa's leading social scientist, Mahmood Mamdani, who was recruited to help lead this initiative, is a signal example of the crisis of knowledge production in the post-apartheid context. In 1997, Mamdani was appointed the Director of the Centre for African Studies at UCT. As he eloquently describes the crisis that led to his exit – which, I will suggest, also constitute part of the backdrop for the present struggle to decolonize higher education in South Africa – the 'bantustanization' of African Studies in the former whites-only university meant that Mamdani was initially 'hired as an advertisement, a mascot for the Centre for African Studies.'[35] This centre was 'totally marginal to the real work of the university, teaching and research.' The key question that Mamdani raised in South Africa in

[33] Ibid.
[34] Thandabantu Nhlapo, 'Preface,' *African studies in the post-colonial university*, edited by Thandabantu Nhlapo and Harry Garuba, p. vii.
[35] Mamdani, 1998.

1997 is yet to be fully answered satisfactorily two decades after: ‘How to teach Africa in a post-apartheid academy?’ In fact, about a decade ago, there was a rumoured plan to ‘disestablish’ the Centre for African Studies at UCT, which raised a controversy.[36] As Lungisile Ntsebeza argues[37] ‘a serious debate and discussion about what we understand and what we mean by African Studies at UCT is yet to happen.’ However, as the recent movements to decolonize the curriculum by students in South Africa show, concerned forces have taken given up this challenge, despite the illusions of South African exceptionalism – such as the assumptions of its cultural, economic and political *dissimilaries* with the rest of equatorial, or what is called, Black Africa.

African Studies in the United States

Earlier, I mentioned the experience with the class on ‘Introduction to African Studies.’ I should add that the good thing about this was that the students who took the study of Africa seriously, or who considered Africa to be interesting enough (and these included students of all races) often registered for upper division classes in African Studies where they encounter a ‘different,’ but not so dissimilar, Africa; in fact, an Africa or Africans whose social processes are as dissimilar as they are similar to the social processes in the United States. I will give one brief example. One of the new classes I designed and taught at UC Davis was ‘The Politics of Life in Africa.’ The objectives of the class were to present ‘an overview of the politics of life in Africa, including how social, economic and political lives are constituted and the implications of this process for whether Africans live well or not, how they die and their struggles for alternative lives - both within and outside of Africa….’

The class usually started with a quotation from Achille Mbembe[38] which I found instructive: ‘If we want to reflect critically on the borders of life and the drama of being, on what it means to be alive today, then we have to get out of the petrified systems and languages in which certain traditions of social science have imprisoned the African experience.’ I tried to encourage critical, relational and comparative thinking about life in Africa – and beyond – including putting things in historical and social context, relating the position of African social and lay theorists about life in Africa to western theorizing about life in the west. What I found most striking was that, half of the time for discussion was often devoted to the reality of life in the United States (and other places where some of the students

[36] Garuba, ibid, p. vi.
[37] ‘African Studies at UCT: An Overview’, p.2
[38] 2010.

came from). For instance, when we discussed the ‘credit apartheid’ in South Africa, we were often discussing the reality that some of the students lived through in the United States. There are, of course, major differences, but these differences do not define our essential and common humanity, rather, they have historical, geographical and social explanations that give them both specific and general forms. [As Octavia Hudson pointed out yesterday]. Thus, cross-cultural comparisons between Africa and the United States are not defined within the context of the politics of life by only dissimilarities, despite the wide disparities in the quality of life index. Indeed, as I pointed out in the class, Botswana’s infant mortality rate was comparable to that of great State of Mississippi. The lesson is that an African country is not fundamentally dissimilar to one of the historically important states in the US in the structural and social conditions that affect life. Though Botswana is one of the best cases in Africa and Mississippi, undoubtedly the worst case in the United States, there are some historical, structural, political and sociological reasons that can be used to account for, understand and analyze their similarities.

One of the key texts in my other class at UC-Davis, ‘African Modernity and Globalization’ is Olufemi Taiwo’s important book, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*,[39] where he argues for the singularity of the Enlightenment project and rejects any claim that the Enlightenment is not a common heritage. You can link Taiwo’s core argument to Susan Buck-Morss’s core contention in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*[40] about the need to salvage ‘modernity’s universal intent, rather than calling for a plurality of modernities.’ Taiwo shows that colonialism was not an extension of the Enlightenment but a subversion of it. Though based on Enlightenment pretensions, colonialism, Taiwo argues, pre-empted modernity which missionary Christianity implanted in Africa. He therefore posits that to understand the trajectory of modernity in Africa, we need to disentangle modernity and colonialism. Taiwo’s understanding of African agency in the project of modernity is very useful for our contemporary understanding of Africa’s contribution to knowledge production. While he focusses on the non-material processes of engagement with and appropriation of the ideals of the Enlightenments by Africans in Africans, Taiwo’s book can be read as a conversation with David Scott’s book, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment,*[41] which focusses on a violent and discursive engagement with and appropriation of the Enlightenment by displaced Africans inHaiti. I have used this

[39] 2010.
[40] 2009, ix.
[41] 2004, Duke University.

perspective as a departure point in my own study of the contributions of the leading elites of the newspaper press in late 19th and early 20th century Nigeria to the elaboration and domestication of the Enlightenment project in West Africa.

I use these examples to illustrate some of the limited changes in the teaching of African Studies in the United States, largely due to the massive increase in the number of African scholars now teaching (about) Africa in north America. I do not claim that my intervention in curriculum design to expand how African Studies was taught at UC Davis is unique or emblematic. There are far more useful examples that others can provide. However, it is suggestive of the role of the new African Diaspora in teaching Africa in the United States. Despite lingering prejudice and persisting ignorance, the fact that more Africans are now teaching about Africa in the United States has not only ensured diversity, it has helped in raising questions about the nature of knowledge production in ways that has expanded the horizons of students studying Africa.

In some cases – and this is significant – the new African Diaspora are also able to point attention to the conveniently forgotten history of African Studies in the United States. With the larger presence of people of African descent in African Studies departments/programmes/centres in the United States, we have had a greater the opportunity to intervene and rewrite the history on African Studies in the US. Zeleza's wprk is an excellent example of the need to emphasize that African Studies in the United States was actually pioneered by African Americans.

A crucial point in this context is the fact that while, indeed, African Studies did not start in Africa, in its first iteration, it was indeed a study of Africa's past, present and future and *of* Africans by displaced Africans. Thus, it included a vision of 'Global Africa' in which people of African descent all over the world were incorporated. However, in its Herskovits iteration, it became a study *of Africa*, not *of Africans,* as Mamdani[42] has argued. African Studies of the Herskovits tradition, which became dominant in the United States and which, in a way, followed the tradition in Europe, developed in the context of colonialism, the Cold War and apartheid. 'This period,' Mamdani argues, 'shaped the organisation 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 the experience of people of colour as an ethnic experience.'[43]

[42] 1998, p. 63.
[43] Ibid.

This was partly why Nkrumah wanted to take Africa out of the ghetto of 'area studies' within Africa to make it a foundation for knowledge production that related to the rest of the world on equal terms, that located itself in global history as part of what Mbembe calls our *in-common*, that is, part of a common human heritage, an heritage located, like others, in a specific, but not essentially dissimilar, region of one world.

No doubt, the opposition to the ghettoization of African Studies or one that *dissimilarizes* Africa as just 'an area,' continues to exercise the mind of those who want to control African Studies – as Herskovits exhibited in his relationship with DuBois. It was evident in the historian, Phillip D. Curtin[44] who saw the growing number of Africans teaching African history in the United States as anathema and therefore a 'ghettoizing of African history.' Some intellectual ruckus was raised in the Africanist community in the United States when Curtin wrote in a 1995 issue of *Chronicle of Higher Education* that the new phenomenon of hiring scholars of African descent to teach African history was a form of 'intellectual apartheid', because he believed white historians were not being hired, thus leading to declining standards. The reactions to Curtin in a way can be read as an attempt to take the 'area' out of African Studies and globalize its essence in the larger debates on the politics of knowledge production. Yet, the *area-ness* of African Studies has survived in the United States – and in Europe. However, there are recent and critical efforts to globalise African Studies which has led to moving African Studies from 'area studies' – the *Bantustan* – to 'global studies' in some universities.[45] For example, in Columbia University, African Studies is under Global Studies. In Oxford, we still combine the 'global' and the 'area', thus, African Studies Centre is under the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA).

The mission of the Institute of African Studies in Columbia University is a good example of a new approach to African Studies. While recognizing its specificity as grounded in a region of the world with its own particularities, including a 'unique set of impulses, experiences, and knowledges', the institute is eager to fully embrace Africa's insertion historically, in the present and in the future, in the world, but not as a 'constitutive lack.' The major goal of Columbia's IAS, as its Director, Mamadou Diouf,[46] articulates it, is 'to understand Africa in a global context and to insert an African presence in discussion of globalization and global issues.' In navigating the *global turn*, this positioning places Africa at the centre of the *longue dureé*, using 'inter- and cross-disciplinary discussions and debates

[44] 1995.
[45] Such as Columbia University. In Oxford, we still combine the 'global' and the 'area', thus, African Studies Centre is under the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA).
[46] Diouf, 2016, p. 62.

in new ways that challenge pre-existing assumptions and move the field in new exciting directions.'[47]

Though some scholars, such as Judith Byfield,[48] have noted that 'global studies creates a lengthy list of dilemmas for area studies programmes in general and African studies in particular,' I am not suggesting merely the study of Africa as part of global studies, but the foregrounding of *Global African Studies*. This will involve the transformation of pedagogy, including the transformation of how issues concerning Africa in its *globality*, its multidimensionality and multi-spatiality are approached. Let me quickly add that I do not mean to attach 'the global' to African Studies as part of the fad in the age of globalisation. Rather, following Kamola,[49] I use this in the sense of the value in the current era of *the global imaginary* – which, among others, has 'profoundly altered the relationships of academic knowledge production.' It also means taking the entirety of the African world as our 'point of departure', which, as the Comaroffs[50] have argued, implies transforming this world into 'a source of theory and explanation for world historical event.' But in my reading, it would mean the *African world* in both the global south and the global north.

In the final part of this talk, I will elaborate briefly on how this new vista can be beneficial in thinking about the future of African Studies reflecting on my experience in the United Kingdom.

The Future of African Studies: Path to Global Africa

I wish to draw out what I consider as the key questions that arise from this in the light of the existing challenges in the history of African Studies in Africa, United States and Europe.

One of the most articulate analyses of the dynamics of African Studies in Europe and Africa is John Lonsdale's 2005 plenary lecture at the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies conference in London. I will argue that a key question that Lonsdale raised more than one decade ago can be a departure point for rethinking or reorienting African Studies from the standpoint of what has been called 'Global Africa.' Lonsdale asks: 'How far might our own analysis of *Africans' societies, economies and polities* be better adapted to exploring how far *African agency* might combat local and *global structures* of inequality, injustice, and misrule?' (Lonsdale 2005: 377).

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[47] Ibid, p. 62-63.
[48] 2016, p. 55.
[49] 2019, p. 4.
[50] 2012, p. 113.

Three phrases are critical for me here. These are 'African societies, economies and polities,' 'African agency' and 'global structures'. I think Lonsdale's phrases can be explored in the light of the mission of the Institute of African Studies as articulated by Nkrumah more than five decades ago. I will like to argue that we cannot adequately address the 21st century challenges inherent in Lonsdale's question without first approaching Africa in a global perspective – that is, as global Africa, both historically and in the present – as Nkrumah long proposed. We can do this by 'shifting the geography of reason' – as the Caribbean Philosophical Association has urged us to do.[51]

First, African Studies Centres and African Studies in the US, Europe, Asia as well as Latin America should re-interrogate what constitutes 'African societies, economies and polities'. They have to be reimagined not only from the conventional continental location of Africans in Africa (particularly, sub-Saharan Africa, as it is often done) but also from their dislocation and relocations in all parts of the world – as the likes of Du Bois worked hard to concretize from the early 20th century up to the mid-20th century. Du Bois, like a few others in his generation, 'tried to understand and situate Africa into worldly representation and recognition, to affirm African presence that was both unique and equal to others.'[52] Against this backdrop, the African Diaspora should become a central part of African Studies curriculum. Students should not have to move entirely out of African Studies to African American or African Diaspora Studies to study some common themes which unite the global black experience. Is it possible to imagine Jewish Studies that ignores the Jewish Diaspora? Under the concept of Global Africa, as Mamadou Diouf recently argued, the African American, Caribbean, Latin America, Indian Ocean as well as North Africa libraries should no longer be treated as extraneous to core African Studies. As Nkrumah stated, the study of Africa must be approached 'in the widest possible sense – Africa in all its complexity, diversity and its underlying unity'[53] or what the Martinican intellectual, Aime Cesaire[54] long described as the 'totality of the black world'. Therefore, inter- and multidisciplinarity in African Studies Centres, Institutes or Programmes must add the inter- and multi-spatiality of people of African descent to their core remit. What would this mean for the Departments of Africa and African American Studies in general? It could mean that we will have Departments of Global African Studies with units that focus specifically on the African,

[51] see Diouf 2016, p. 64.
[52] Zeleza 2009, p. 132.
[53] Allman 2013, p. 6.
[54] 1955, p. 90.

African American and Diaspora strands but speak directly to one another about the specificities of each and also the commonalities.

Second, when we reimagine what Africa means as a global phenomenon that is territorialized as well as deterritorialized, how we study African agency has to change, both qualitatively and quantitatively. To go back to shifting the geography of reason, while the French and the American revolutions have been the two pivots on which 18th century democratic revolution has been theorized and taught, changing our approach means that we must start teaching the major contributions of African agency to global democratic history from the departure point of the Haitian revolution – the first black revolution in the modern world with global implications. It should be a cause for concern that in many students go through a course of study in the African Studies Centre or the African track in some African American and African Studies Departments without taking a single class on race. Yet, as Cornell West announces in his celebrated book, 'Race matters.' Thus, the reading list in African studies track must include the works of CRL James, (1963), Paul Gilroy (1993), Cornel West (1993) Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), Sybylle Fischer (2004), David Scott (2004), Susan Buck-Morss (2009) in relation to Franz Fanon (1961, 1965), Walter Rodney (1972), Edward Said (1978), Claude Ake (1979), Hountondji (1983), Mudimbe (1988) as well as Achille Mbembe's recent *A Critique of Black Reason* (2017).

The silence in dominant western history about the Haitian Revolution as the third in the triumvirate of 18th century revolutions that redefined modernity can be best corrected not only by teaching it as part of Caribbean history, but as a core curriculum in Global African Studies. As Paul Gilroy[55] has argued, we need to show students 'that the experiences of black people were part of the abstract modernity' and 'show evidence of some of the things that black intellectuals had said…about their sense of embeddedness in the modern world.' As Nkrumah said, we need to study Africa in 'new African-centred ways – in entire freedom from the propositions and presuppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment.'

Third is global processes. A lot has been written about globalisation in Africa and Africa in the global age. However, beyond the debates on Africa's place and the challenges and opportunities within globalisation is the recognition that Africa was not 'remotely global' in the dawn of the 21st century, it has been truly global, at least since the 17th century when it became central to international trade systems, despite the ravages of history. Thus, we have a

[55] 1993, p. ix

duty not only to study how global processes affect Africa, but also how Africa affect global processes.

Finally, to return to the critical issues raised by Taiwo[56] in his recent piece where he identified 'occident anxiety' as a phenomenon that is 'haunting African intellectuals.' African, as well as Africanist scholars, teaching about Africa within and outside the continent must abandon their (un)conscious embrace of the 'ideological history of the west' which has turned 'a human inheritance into a local [western] patrimony' – and which leads scholars into 'an anxiety about Africa's place in the world.' Taiwo encourages African(ist) scholars to 'abandon any racism-inflected metaphysics of difference that takes Africa out of the normal circuit of human doing and thinking.' This is because 'African problems are contingent iterations of human problems.'[57]

Africa is not *a difference;* it is neither dissimilar from the rest of the world, nor is it constituted as an essential *dissimilar problem* in global history and in the contemporary era. Thus, it should not be so studied. In fact, what Global African Studies must do is to take as much cognizance of external factors such as Africa's insertion in the trajectory and career of global capitalism as much as focus on dynamics that are internal to the African world and how these dynamics condition and are conditioned by external relations and global contacts. African studies must transcend what Zeleza calls 'pathologies of otherness'[58] which Taiwo describes as 'occident anxiety.'

In 1955, Aime Cesaire wrote that 'people could write a history of the world civilisation without devoting a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had made no contribution to the world.'[59] We can no longer continue with the dominant tradition which assumes that global Africa has contributed nothing to 'the work of the universal', to use Mbembe words. Thus, the epistemic basis of Global African Studies must be the central role of the *African world* in understanding and accounting for our common humanity and the sharable goals of human dignity. By doing so, we can raise the profile of African studies as a field of knowledge production and as a point of entry into an unending project of intellection about the human condition. And by embracing the totality of the African world in the context of Global African Studies, we will find that, to paraphrase Eric Wolf,[60] *the African world*

[56] 2019, p. 23.
[57] Ibid, p. 27.
[58] 2007, p. 5.
[59] 1955, p. 92
[60] Wolf, 1997, p. 3.

'constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes'; therefore, *'inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality.'*

I think that reassembling the '*totality of interconnected processes'* of the African world through Global African Studies is one important way to honour the memories of the black students, who, organized under the name 'Afro', published a charge in the Harvard Crimson about 52 years ago.

I thank you for your patience.