

RESEARCH ARTICLE

History and the Development of Historical Scholarship in Africa

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Abstract

How has historical scholarship fared in Africa? What is the state of decolonization and deconstruction historiography in the production of historical knowledge on the continent? What role does the state play in aiding or undermining historians' access to official historical data and the production of historical knowledge in postcolonial Africa? This article engages these questions. It harps on the reconstruction of African intellectual history as a daunting postcolonial challenge, and argues that historians on Africa need to engage with and reexamine the development of the discipline of history in Africa in relation to the debates on decolonization and the enterprise of history-writing in the production of historical knowledge and historical scholarship across the continent. This illuminates the understanding of the history of contemporary Africa. It also throws fresh light on the continent's remote past as a way of establishing its connections with the present. Complementary to the problems of writing the history of contemporary Africa, this work argues that to appreciate and understand the problems of history-writing on Africa, we need to focus on the development and limitations of the discipline across the institutional sites of the universities in postcolonial Africa.

Résumé

Comment la recherche historique s'est-elle développée en Afrique ? Quel est l'état de l'historiographie sur la décolonisation et sur la déconstruction de la production du savoir historique sur le continent ? Quel rôle l'État joue-t-il dans l'aide ou l'entrave à l'accès des historien-nes aux données historiques officielles et à la production de connaissances historiques dans l'Afrique postcoloniale ? Cet article aborde ces questions. Il souligne que la reconstruction de l'histoire intellectuelle africaine est un défi postcolonial de taille et soutient que les historien-nes africain-es doivent s'engager et réexaminer le développement de la discipline historique en Afrique en relation avec les débats sur la décolonisation et l'écriture de l'histoire dans la production des connaissances historiques et de la recherche historique à travers le continent. Cela permet de mieux comprendre l'histoire

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de l'Afrique contemporaine. Ceci met en valeur le passé lointain du continent afin d'établir ses liens avec le présent. En complément des problèmes liés à l'écriture de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine, cet article soutient que pour apprécier et comprendre les problèmes liés à l'écriture de l'histoire de l'Afrique, nous devons nous concentrer sur le développement et les limites de la discipline dans les sites institutionnels des universités de l'Afrique postcoloniale.

Keywords: African history; European colonial intellectual hegemony; historiography

Introduction

As the record of past developments and events, the practice of history dates back to antiquity and the very existence of humanity. Modern traditions of historical scholarship date back to the classical era in ancient Greece. In Europe, Herodotus (c. 484 BCE–c. 425 BCE) is widely acknowledged as the father of history. Thucydides (c. 460 BCE–c. 400 BCE) is one of the foremost ancient historians.¹ Eastern traditions of historical scholarship owe a great debt to Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). Other classical traditions of historical scholarship existed in other worlds.² As a professionalized and specialized academic discipline in modern universities, history dates back to Enlightenment Europe. This became consolidated in research centers and universities in the nineteenth century, first in Europe and later the United States of America. Of this professionalism and specialization, much debt is owed to the Göttingen School of History and Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) for the emphasis on the deployment of historical evidence; the development of modern source-based history and the emphasis on primary sources in Western historiography. The location of the archive as the major custodian of historical research and repository of state records as well as the historical journal as the trademark of the new profession are the achievements of these efforts. However, in its application to nonmetropolitan societies, this historical approach has been the subject of much criticisms. Its denial of historical knowledge to Africa and the global South; its Eurocentric focus and neglect of oral sources in the production of historical knowledge are some of the

¹ With great depth and painstaking details, Thucydides chronicled the nearly thirty years of tension and war between Athens and Sparta. His *History of the Peloponnesian War* was a major contribution that set a high standard for accuracy, concision and scope as a defining text of the historical genre. In developing this work, he relied on the testimonies from eyewitnesses as well as his own experience as a general during the war. With these, he addressed questions that are both specific in details as well as timeless in terms of their relevance. How can politics elevate or poison a society? What is the measure of a good state and a successful democracy or a statesman? What makes nations go to war? His dates of birth and death provided here are based on the most widely reported account from the gamut of sources accessed.

² As recounted by Y. Francis Fukuyama, during the Han Dynasty, Chinese historians developed a similar tradition of analytical and well-organized written historical scholarship of equal relevance compared to Western historiography. For further elaborations on this claim, see Y. Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

gaps of this historiographical approach.³ These limitations underline the impetus for decolonization and deconstruction historiography as compelling intellectual projects across Africa and the global South. The critique of Eurocentricism has been central in all such endeavors.

Discussions on Eurocentricism have become central in academic conversations and publications on world history since the Second World War. Defending the focus on Europe continued in such endeavors into the 1970s.⁴ This focus on Europe is premised on its acclaimed importance in world history after 1500. However, South-driven interventions in the production of historical scholarship have recently recorded heightened increase in the critique of Eurocentricism. Throughout the global South, nationalism and the rise of new states were the major incentives for this development. The study of European decolonization in Africa and Asia became dynamic. It also dominated the research agenda in the twentieth century. A variety of approaches – case studies, comparative, disciplinary, and multidisciplinary – to the study of decolonization emerged across these contexts and the metropolitan societies. Of primacy is the attempt at confronting the accompanied Eurocentricism. As nationalism and nationalist historiographers insist on the critique of universal history; nationalist thought in the new states betrays a characteristic element of self-contradiction. The urge to decolonize and emphasize the uniqueness of the national culture in Africa and Asia is accompanied by the aspiration towards modernity defined only in terms of the post-Enlightenment rationalism of European culture.⁵ Undermining the challenge of building indigenous institutions of knowledge valorization in the discipline of history in nonmetropolitan societies, is the Eurocentricism inherent in history-writing as derived from the concepts of modernity and theories of modernization. These concepts and theories are either considered as indispensable or used without much critically nuanced discussions. Historical scholarship in the South thus harps on decolonization as much as it is anguished by the assumed backwardness of the nation. The axioms and frameworks of knowledge that South-South history-writing employs are not different from those employed by the colonial rulers. “Nationalist thought accepts and adopts the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject; and hence the same objectifying procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.”⁶ This challenge is underlined by the contradiction and dilemma of denouncing the Eurocentricism in history-writing and simultaneously affirming its acknowledged prerogative: modernization theories and the concept of

³ On the limitations of the Göttingen School of History and Leopold von Ranke’s contribution to Western historiography, especially drawing insights from Marxist historiography; the Annales School pioneered by French Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch as well as other postmodernist critics, among other sources, see Bahru Zewde, “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 1–26.

⁴ Carola Dietze, “Toward a History on Equal Terms: A Discussion of “Provincializing Europe,” *History and Theory* 47, no. 1 (2008): 69–84.

⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Towards a Discourse on Nationalism,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 22, no. 28 (1987): 1137–1138.

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 38.

modernity.⁷ In the lexicon of decolonization, the demand to create an autonomous space within this borrowed and dominating framework of knowledge is the requirement of history-writing. I illustrate the challenges and limitations of these efforts in Africa.

Decolonization as Deconstruction Historiography

South-South articulations of decolonization have been dominated by reflections on four concerns. These are development and dialogue, as well as questions of race and the state. The developmental and racial components have been much covered in the literature on decolonization and thereby seem dated and much on the wane since the 1960s and 1970s. The same might be said concerning the state in postcolonial societies. Its dialogical side has, however, received far less scholarly attention.⁸ Viewed as development, decolonization critiqued the failure of the colonial project to deliver modernization and scientific progress. Many anti-colonial thinkers thought of colonialism as a betrayed commitment and broken promise. The famous formulation of this critique is Aime Césaire's statement in his *Discourse on Colonialism*.⁹ Different thinkers expressed different positions on the question of race.¹⁰ The idea of the modern state in post-Westphalian Europe that began as a philosophical-political construct meant to deal with widespread conditions of anarchy, chaos, and uncertainties through establishing conditions of lasting peace, ordered co-existence and security, sharply contrasts the violent state formation in the South – based on colonial contraptions from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the twentieth century. The resultant contradictions have continued to underline the agenda for postcolonial state reconstruction and rehabilitation.

In this work, I argue and present the dialogical side of decolonization as a corrective intervention to Eurocentricism based on the reconstruction of existing disciplinary fields following uniquely nonmetropolitan critiques and interpretations of the lived experiences of non-Western societies. I draw on the discipline of history and examine the trajectory of decolonization and deconstruction historiography in the subdiscipline of African history in the colonial and postcolonial periods. My entry point into this enquiry is to highlight the achievements and constraints of decolonization and deconstruction historiography in their critique of Africanist and colonial historiography and the production of African historiography from the second half of the twentieth century. Since the *annas mirabilis* of African history, such compelling accounts have been rare. Yet, the examination of the past-in-the present together with the critical

⁷ Dietze, "Toward a History on Equal Terms," 70.

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 46 (2005): 4812–4818.

⁹ Aime Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review, 1972), 25.

¹⁰ Race featured prominently in the formulations and thought of Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and C. L. R. James. Conversely, Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were preoccupied with colonial domination and occupation.

turning-points at which history, in this case, African history failed to turn,¹¹ offers an original contribution that an engagement with the intellectual history of the discipline of History in Africa can add to the literature in regard to the transformations taking place across the regions. This article reflects on the debates on decolonization in African historiography and the development of African History as a specialized sub-discipline on Africa *vis-a-vis* the production of historical knowledge on Africa.

I focus on the public universities in Africa and formulate the crisis in the discipline of history in terms of the failure of historians on Africa to decolonize African history and produce a usable African past from the subdiscipline. I advance the question of how historical knowledge developed and appropriated by colonial and postcolonial societies can be valorized for empowering the production of historical scholarship on these societies. I explore the possibility of cross-regional, nonhierarchical dialogue in which neither the North nor the South is taken to be the standard against which the other is measured and proclaimed backward and inadequate. I draw on Africa and South Asia, and highlight the problematic interaction between colonialism – as an effective instance of intervention and take-over – and nationalism as an instructive articulation of agency and self-determination. As an intellectual project, this enterprise entails calling to question the overall impact of the colonial experience. In addition to the debate on colonialism as either an episode or epoch in the histories of the global South, discussions and research in universities across these societies have been marked by the emergence of a distinct brand of scholarship. This scholarship has broadly been known as *writing back* to Empire from the South. As different thinkers articulate different positions, in different ways, the depth and richness of their contributions point at fundamental concerns of globalization theory and postcolonial thought.¹²

In the discipline of history, this area of scholarship bears all the signs of a permanent struggle between tendencies of imperialist biases in Third World histories and a nationalist desire by Third World historians to decolonize their pasts, *inter alia* by mobilizing Marxism in aid of the intellectual and nationalist projects of decolonization.¹³ In Africa and South Asia, much debt is owed to the works of Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt; R. P. Dutt; A. R. Desai; Anil Seal; D. A. Low; Bipan Chandra and Ranajit Guha on the nature and results of European rule in these societies.¹⁴

¹¹ See Alan J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany Since 1815* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945), 68. See also Stephen D. K. Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa," *The Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002): 1–26. Here see 4.

¹² According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, the vibrancy of this debate on colonialism benefitted from two other debates – the debate on barbarism as a stage or state in Indian history and the debate on the legitimacy of European rule in India. For a detailed account of these two debates, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4.

¹³ Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, 3–19.

¹⁴ Edward Thompson and Geoffrey Theodore Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (London: Macmillan, 1934); Palme Rayani Dutt, *India Today* (Calcutta: Manisha, 1947); Akshay Ramanlal Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1948); Anil Seal, *The*

In African history, the agenda has been the epistemological critique and transformation of the institutional and methodological contents of metropolitan historiography on the continent. Methodologically, deconstruction historiography sought to interrogate Africa's integration in Western epistemology and its conditioning effects on knowledge production on the continent. The deconstruction of European colonial intellectual hegemony was premised on the search for alternative interpretations and sources of African history.¹⁵ This privileged the critique of the colonial archive¹⁶ and the bodies of knowledge – the grand narratives of colonialism, its meta-history of the continent written in race together with its racialized historiography of the populations – rooted and transmitted in its epistemology.¹⁷ These initiatives crystalized in the reconstruction of national historiographies across the continent. The challenge here is for Africa to write its own history. Doing this requires that African historians, intellectuals, and nationalist historiographers confront Western Africanism that publishes and teaches the colonies and neo-colonies about Western institutions and their relations with Africa rather than of African societies themselves.

Deconstruction historiography set out to account for Africa's historical contributions to the world as well as the implications of its changing positions and continued roles in it. This was made possible by the establishment of the post-colonial universities. Previously, the curricula in higher education across the continent focused on African folklore. Colonial historiography dismissed and questioned the existence of African history prior to the written accounts provided by the European discoverers. During the colonial and early postindependence periods, the history taught in higher education and the universities in Africa were forcefully focused on European history. As Bogumil Jewsiewicki puts it, African societies were included in European and global historical discourses merely as guardians of “oral archives.”¹⁸ In this globally hierarchized system, historical knowledge returned to the continent as alienated official university history, hardly accessible by, nor connected to the ordinary people. Given its linkage with official

Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Donald Anthony Low, ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (California: University of California Press, 1968); Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880–1905* (Delhi: People's, 1969); Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Ousmane Oumar Kane, “Arabic Sources and the Search for a New Historiography in Ibadan in the 1960s,” *Africa* 86, no. 2 (2016): 344–346.

¹⁶ Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

¹⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity. W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53.

¹⁸ Bogumil Jewsiewicki, “Introduction: One Historiography or Several? A Requiem for Africanism,” in *African Historiography: What History for Which Africa?*, ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986), 16–17.

state structures, this historiography presents African history as the history of the savant. This poses huge epistemological problems for Africa.

The colonial state prioritized and privileged the teaching of classics, European studies and geography among other nonideological disciplines. It suppressed history, philosophy and political science. Funding was denied to these disciplines. In place of African history, colonial education supported European history and other diversionary themes. To justify its denial of autochthonous historical education and political science scholarship, the abstract study of nature was considered more beneficial and transformative than the study of human nature. Regretfully, many postcolonial regimes in Africa have pursued this inherited script. The trajectory of postcolonial development in Africa, however, reveals that history is never more compelling than when it gives an insight into how one's own experiences are constituted. Moreover, the knowledge derived from studying nature can hardly be empowering if it does not enlighten and liberate the society about the specificities of their conditions. The demand to address this gap was central to the nationalist agenda. However, to undermine such efforts, isolation and suspicion were deployed as the underlining colonial attitudes towards the educated colonial subjects.¹⁹ The challenge of reconciling the state to accommodate African historians and relate to them as stakeholders in state building has remained unaccomplished. In the postcolonial period, this problem plays out, mainly, in the tensions characterizing the relationship between the state and the universities in Africa. The resultant attitude informed the thinking that if allowed its autonomy and freedom, the intelligentsia would threaten the state and its *status quo*. Hence the suspicion and tensed relations between the universities and the state. Successive postcolonial regimes have continued in this direction. Evidenced by the banning of history as a course to be taught in many African schools; the impacts of continued governmental hostilities towards the historians have been overwhelming on postcolonial development. To instantiate my case, the institutionalized state-led neglect of historical scholarship as well as historians and the lived experiences of university academics in Nigeria's public universities are discussed in this work.

The decolonization impulse in Africa dates back to the 1970s. The literature on this intervention is expansive.²⁰ The discipline of history has been most committed to this enterprise. This effort was extended to other disciplines and African studies.²¹ Africanist historiography began and developed in the 1950s and 1960s when university colleges were established in the states in Africa in the

¹⁹ See Christopher S. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

²⁰ See Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist History, A Critique: Post-colonial Historiography Examined* (London: Zed Press, 1981); Jewsiewicki and Newbury, *African Historiography*; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "African Historical Studies: Academic Knowledge as Usable Past and Radical Scholarship," *African Studies Review* 32, no. 3 (1989): 1–76; and Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "The History of Africanization and the Africanization of History," *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 85–100.

²¹ On the context of decolonization in African Studies and its continued fortunes and frustrations across Africa, see Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997). See also Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Studies: Knowledge Production, Agency and Voice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2022).

late colonial period. This coincided with heightened decolonization and the introduction of African history in the curricula of American and British universities in these colonies. The essence of colonial educational institutions was to institutionalize European intellectual hegemony on the colonies. African studies thus developed first as an imperial agenda to study the continent and its populations from the perspectives of Western theories of development and modernization. Its aim was to account for the lack of development in the traditional societies. Its endgame was the denial of colonial underdevelopment and the recommendation of Eurocentric unilinear development.²²

As a counter-development, African historiography also gathered momentum in the second half of the twentieth century – albeit under different circumstances.²³ The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison encouraged Africans to reappropriate the capacity to represent themselves within the discipline of history. Jan Vansina and Roland Oliver led the efforts to establish African history at the universities in the United Kingdom and the United States.²⁴ Africans and Africanist historians trained at Madison and SOAS broadened the scope and spread of African historiography. Of lasting impact was the role played by SOAS in establishing the *Journal of African History*. This set the standard for the production of historical scholarship on Africa. These initiatives underlined the historiographic revolution and the development of the methodology for the deployment of oral sources for reconstructing the history of nonliterate societies. These were consolidated through the establishment of African historical studies as well as the expansion of the Centres and Institutes of African Studies across the continent. The two schools of historiography – Ibadan School of African History led by Henry F. C. Smith, Kenneth O. Dike, and latterly, J. F. Ade Ajayi,²⁵ and Dar es Salaam School of African History under Terence Ranger, John Iliffe, John Lonsdale, and Walter Rodney – illustrate these achievements.²⁶

²² These issues have been examined in the literature. For an account of the genealogy of African studies and a critique of area studies as a post-Enlightenment agenda in Africa, see Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe, “African Scholars, African Studies and Knowledge Production on Africa,” *Africa* 86, no. 2 (2016): 324–338.

²³ Africanist historiography is concerned primarily with the history of non-Africans on Africa. Conversely, African historiography is preoccupied with the history of Africans rather than of Euro-Americans on Africa.

²⁴ Zewde, “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography.”

²⁵ In addition to training the first-generation of Nigerian historians at Ile Ife, Lagos, and Zaria, the Department of History at the University of Ibadan spearheaded the development of the nationalist historiography in Nigeria. It founded the Historical Society of Nigeria as well as the Ibadan History Series and the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. These enabled the department to affirm its historiographic imprint and norm nationwide. This was later challenged by its offshoot – Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. In addition to the Islamic tradition of northern Nigeria, historical scholarship at Zaria emphasized research and teaching on the Islamic Library of Muslim West Africa. The major specialization from this focus is the Islamic Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa. Furthermore, drawing upon radical inspiration from India and South Asian historiography, it also introduced a Marxist perspective to the study of Nigerian history.

²⁶ Here, Terence O. Ranger is in conversation with Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper. See Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper, “Nationalist Historians in Search of a Nation: The ‘New Historiography’ in

Development of Historical Scholarship in Africa

The late colonial era and the first two decades of the postindependence period in Africa marked the outset of conscious radical efforts at decolonizing and endogenizing the discipline of history and the field of African studies. This began with the continent-wide attempts at indigenizing their curricula. It continued through the engagement with the question of orality that informed the development of African literature; the development of globally competitive books and journal publishing houses affiliated with African university presses as autochthonous voices on knowledge production on Africa; the introduction of African history as a teachable curriculum at all levels in African colleges, schools and the universities as well as the debates and research that ultimately affirmed the relevance of African languages and African philosophy. These underlined the significance of indigenous systems of knowledge and thought. They were foregrounded by the schools of thought developed at Dar es Salaam, Ibadan, Nairobi, and Tanzania. Another high point in the development of anti-imperialist historiography in African history was the critique of Georg W. F. Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*.²⁷ Hegel claimed that history moves from the West and returns to the West; and that Africa only existed liminally at its footnotes – in its margins. To this claim is added Marx's thesis on the Asiatic mode of production as an equally appropriate historical scheme for understanding the modes of production in Africa, Asia and other non-Western societies.

Quite provocative in the twenty-first century is Yusufu Bala Usman's critique of Heinrich Barth's thesis on Kasar²⁸ Katsina.²⁹ Barth had claimed that prior to colonial conquest in Nigeria, the people lived in traditional societies made up of ethnic groups and "tribes" of different sizes and various degrees of interaction among one another – with their major historical changes rooted in relations of absorption, mixing, and subjugation between races and "tribes" articulated through barbarism, conflict, and warfare.³⁰ Usman's critique shows that contrary to Barth's claims, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, there was already confirmation that the key institutions making for a centralizing power had been developed and put in place in northern Nigeria.³¹ Drawing on Jan

Dar es Salaam," *African Affairs* 69, no. 277 (1970): 329–349; Terence O. Ranger, "The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam: An Answer," *African Affairs* 70, no. 278 (1971): 50–61; Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper, "The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam: A Rejoinder," *African Affairs* 70, no. 280 (1971): 287–288).

²⁷ Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944).

²⁸ In Hausa language and literature, *Kasa* means *land* or *homeland*. However, in its reference to a specific *homeland*, it takes the form of *Kasar*, as in *Kasar Hausawa* or *Kasar Kano*.

²⁹ Yusufu B. Usman, "History, Tradition and Reaction: The Perception of Nigerian History in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in *Beyond Fairy Tales: Selected Historical Writings of Yusufu Bala Usman* (Zaria: Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, 2006). See also Yusufu B. Usman, "The Assessment of Primary Sources: Heinrich Barth in Katsina, 1851–1854," in *Beyond Fairy Tales*.

³⁰ Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa: A Journal of an Expedition Undertaken under the Auspices of H. B. M.'s Government, in the Years 1849–1855*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, 1857–1858/1965).

³¹ Administratively and politically, such institutions were accommodated in the Emirate system, which appointed and presided over (a) the Chief of Army Staff and War; (b) the Islamic judges; (c) the

Vansina, Usman highlighted the need to critically examine oral and other sources in terms of the distinct world outlooks informing them.³² He says doing this enables historians purge their sources of the distortions and interpellations undergirding them, thereby meriting appreciable credence within carefully defined contexts and specified limits. This is because all sources – not just oral but also written sources – are subject to alteration based on bias and prejudices. Detecting the bias of other sources is simply a first step in history-writing. The more important problem, however, is how to detect and deal with one's own biases. Every historian faces this basic dilemma of detachment, distance, and objectivity in relation to one's own work. Usman says:

This is a fundamental problem in the physical, natural and human sciences. It is the problem which makes the study of history and society far more profound and complex than the study of physical and natural phenomena. The person with a perception of history who is studying history has been produced and moulded by history. The very concepts he uses are historically determined and produced. And he is involved in looking at what has produced and is moulding him. It is a much more complex and fundamental thing [*sic*] than the study of rocks and plants, for example

Unfortunately, some of our colleagues in the study of society and history, impressed with the precision and quantification of the physical and natural sciences run around and chase after what they regard as the prestige of these other sciences. As a result, that, [*sic*] they give the impression that all you need is to develop better techniques and better computers, then you can reduce the study of history to the same level as the study of atoms. But in fact, they will find that no matter how fine the techniques they introduce, the phenomenological fact that you are studying yourself cannot be removed. You cannot relate to yourself as you relate to a donkey or a rock.³³

The head start in the decolonization of historical knowledge and knowledge production on Africa began in the 1960s–1970s at the University College Ibadan. This institution was renamed in 1962 as the University of Ibadan. Its latest manifestation is the “Rhodes Must Fall” anti-apartheid protest at the University of Cape Town. Its rallying concept or phrase for animating this age-long aspiration across the academies of postapartheid South Africa is “change and transformation.”³⁴

Minister for Water Resources; (d) the palace administrators; (e) the system of royal slaves and slave villages from which the army, the courts and the police were derived; as well as (f) the Waziri, among other state officials. Economically, such institutions were represented by the *Gandu* – an expanded system of landed estate hierarchically organized around (i) the family heads, (ii) the ward heads, (iii) the village heads and (iv) the emir. The third institution was Islam – after the Jihad.

³² Jan Vansina, “Knowledge and Perceptions of the African Past,” in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (London: Sage, 1986), 28–41.

³³ Usman, “The Assessment of Primary Sources: Heinrich Barth in Katsina, 1851–1854,” 41–42.

³⁴ On 9 March 2015, in protest against what he described as continued colonial dominance at the University of Cape Town, a fourth-year political science student at the university poured a container

Under the leadership of Henry Fredrick Charles Smith (1920–84) and Kenneth Onwuka Dike (1917–83), the Department of History at the University of Ibadan inspired talented Africans and Africanists who developed instructive and path-finding insights on the decolonization project. The highpoint of their contribution was their critique of the colonial archive and the colonial library, which dominated the production of African history and historical knowledge on Africa in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁵ Their intervention underlined the central place of Arabic sources and oral sources in the production of historical knowledge on Africa. A major specialization strengthened by this anti-imperialist historiographical scholarship is the Islamic intellectual history of Muslim West Africa. Together with historian John Owen Hunwick (1936–2015), Henry F. C. Smith created the Centre for Arabic Documentation at the University College Ibadan. From 1960 to 1967, Hunwick founded the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan as well as mentored and recruited the first generation of its research and teaching staff.³⁶ Other institutional offshoots of these investments included the establishment of the Historical Society of Nigeria, and the National Archives of Nigeria – first at Ibadan and, later, at Enugu and Kaduna.

After relocating to Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Henry F. C. Smith converted to Islam and became Abdullahi Smith. His works contributed immensely to the decolonization of nineteenth-century West African historiography. He corrected the assumption of the dominant European influence as the major inspiration in the production of nineteenth-century West African history. The Centre for Documentation and Historical Studies, now known as Arewa House in Kaduna is one of his legacies. Other history departments were later developed across other Nigerian universities. Of note to the reconstruction of the intellectual history of Muslim West Africa, is the contribution by Murray Last. After his doctorate degree in history at the University of Ibadan in November 1964,³⁷ Last became a prominent figure in the School of History founded by Smith in Ibadan and Zaria. His *magnus opus*, *The Sokoto Caliphate* is one of the strongest

of feces on the statue of the seventh prime minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902). This occurred at the University of Cape Town campus in South Africa. This was followed by the occupation of the university's Bremner Building by a group of aggressive angry students who circulated the following petition, "We demand that the statue of Cecil John Rhodes be removed from the Campus of the University of Cape Town as the first step towards the decolonization of the University as a whole." This action informed the decision by the University Council, a month later, to remove the colonial statue. For a treatment of the "Rhodes Must Fall" intervention in the direction of decolonization in Africa, see Mahmood Mamdani. "Between the Public Intellectual and the Scholar: Decolonization and Some Post-independence Initiatives in African Higher Education," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2016): 68–83.

³⁵ On the colonial archive, see Premesh J. Lalu, *The Deaths of Hints: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2009). On the colonial library, see Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, x.

³⁶ One of his lasting works here, is John O. Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa, Volume 2: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

³⁷ Supervised by Henry F. C. Smith, this was the first doctorate degree awarded by a Nigerian university.

statements on the relevance of Arabic sources in the decolonization of African history.³⁸ He collected more than 10,000 Arabic manuscripts and established the Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. This collection became the core repository of Arabic sources for future historians working on northern Nigeria, the Jihad, and in particular, the Sokoto Caliphate.³⁹

Underlining the decolonization project is the critique of post-Enlightenment traditions of European historiography in their references to nonmetropolitan cultures. In Africa, its genealogy dates back to Fanon's critique of colonialism and racism,⁴⁰ Diop's thesis on the Black African origins of Pharaonic Egypt,⁴¹ the critiques of negritude, and the ideas of Pan-Africanism. Here, nationalism demanded the decolonization of history and knowledge of the African pasts. Illustrative inspirations came from the scholarship of Aime Césaire, Albert Memmi, C. L. R. James, Edward W. Said, Eric E. Williams, Ranajit Guha, Walter Rodney, and Wilson Harris, with all their radical theoretical analyses of colonialism, racism, and slavery in Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Much debt is owed to the insights gleaned from the Latin American contributions to the theories of dependency, political economy, and underdevelopment together with the subaltern studies intellectual project that emphasizes the question of history-writing from below as an alternative historiography in India and South Asia. Drawing on these efforts, is the continued attempts at retrieving historical evidence for affirming the authenticity of non-Western societies, thereby bringing to the fore the multidimensionality of their lived and ongoing experiences.

Based on my background experience, the most instructive insights for critiquing colonial historiographies and also for understanding the full complexities of the imperial legacies across the global South have come from the scholarship and texts of the Subaltern Studies Group in Indian and South Asian historiography.⁴² Hinged on deconstruction historiography and the engagement with history-writing as a retrieval project, this intervention advances the decolonization of the discipline of history as the melting pot of the narratives of modernization and nation building. It undertakes the discursive construction of political modernity, post-Enlightenment rationalism and secularization with the much-deserved critical attention. The critique of race in relation to its position in liberal thought and Empire are central components of this

³⁸ Murray Last, "Sokoto in the 19th Century, with Special Reference to Vizierate," unpublished PhD thesis (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 1964). See also Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longmans, Green, 1967).

³⁹ Kane, "Arabic Sources and the Search for a New Historiography in Ibadan," 345.

⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

⁴¹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1974).

⁴² Between August 2006 and July 2007, I was a SEPHIS Fellow of the Humanities and the Social Sciences at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta (CSSSC) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) New Delhi. This brought me under the supervision and works of Partha Chatterjee and other Subaltern Studies authorities.

scholarship.⁴³ Its statements on colonialism as an epoch in colonial and post-colonial histories are arguably the strongest theses on the backwardness, deindustrialization, stagnation, and other transformative impacts of the colonial experience on Third World societies. Two major testaments of its critique of post-Enlightenment ideas of Eurocentricism and race are Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*.⁴⁴ The continued impact of this scholarship is noted at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and University of the Western Cape, South Africa among others.

Historical Scholarship in Postcolonial Africa

Three achievements announced the arrival of the decolonization project in historical scholarship in postcolonial Africa. The first was the establishment of the Historical Society of the Gold Coast and Togoland in 1951.⁴⁵ The most outstanding strength of this endeavor was its commitment and openness in transcending disciplinary boundaries by working with a number of multidisciplinary experts and methodologies in anthropology and archaeology as well as history, linguistics, and oral tradition – in reconstructing West African history. Its name was changed after Ghana's independence in 1957 to the Historical Society of Ghana.⁴⁶ Also established was the Historical Society of Nigeria in 1955 and the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* in 1956.⁴⁷ Published by the Historical Society of Nigeria and now circulated by Princeton University Press-housed JSTOR, this journal offered a competitive alternative to the *Journal of African History* published by Cambridge University Press. It was the second autochthonous dissemination medium of knowledge valorization on historical scholarship in Africa. It was complemented and followed by *Kronos: Journal of Cape History* in 1979. This was published by the Institute for Historical Research at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa. Following the post-apartheid transition in 1994, the Institute for Historical Research at the University of the Western Cape was renamed the Centre for Humanities Research.⁴⁸ The journal's name was also changed to *Kronos: Southern African Histories*. The second achievement was the publication of Kenneth O. Dike's *Trade and Politics in the*

⁴³ Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe," *Radical History Review* 83 (2002): 146–172.

⁴⁴ See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ Its major publication from 1952 to 1956 was *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society*.

⁴⁶ It was founded by Adu Boahen, Alexander Kwabong, J. B. Danquah, Kobina Sekyi and Nana K. Nketsia. Its membership included archaeologists, historians, and linguists drawn from all the public universities in Ghana. Its flagship publications included *Ghana Notes and Queries*, *Teachers Journal*, and *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*.

⁴⁷ Complemented by Ibadan History Series, these were foremost in the dissemination of African historical research.

⁴⁸ Institute for Historical Research was created in 1969. The Centre for Humanities Research was founded in 1994.

Niger Delta.⁴⁹ The third was the publication of Yusufu Bala Usman's *Transformation of Katsina*.⁵⁰ From this period, many developments have characterized the national histories and trajectories of historical scholarship across the academic departments of history and universities throughout Africa. I highlight some of the changes, commonalities and continuities noted in the postcolonial struggles at decolonizing history-writing and the discipline of history across the continent. I focus largely on Nigeria and South Africa. Illustrations are drawn from other contexts.

Notwithstanding the achievements highlighted above, the dominance of Africanist historiography on Africa was not immediately eliminated in the postindependence period. Much of what was known about the continent at this period still came from the colonial library. Fredrick L. Lugard's *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*; Margery Perham's *Native Administration* and *Lugard: The Years of Authority, 1898–1945*; Basil Davidson's *African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity and Modern Times* and *History of West Africa*; and Heinrich Barth's *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* remained dominant on the continent.⁵¹ Later, the domineering influence of these texts on Africa was gradually challenged. A new generation of postindependence African historians emerged. These focused on different issues and themes on the continent. They began the deconstruction of colonial historiography. They championed the reconstruction of various nationalist histories. They also underlined the relevance of Arabic and oral sources for historical reconstruction and history-writing on Africa. At Congo Brazzaville and Congo Kinshasa – Zaire – Mumbanza mwa Bawele, Ndaywel è Nziem, and Sabakinu Kivilu championed the production of postindependence nationalist historiography.⁵² In Ghana, the role of Albert Adu Boahen, Alexander Kwapong, J. B. Danquah, Kobina Sekyi, and Nana K. Nketsia in transforming the production of historical knowledge on Ghana and West Africa was phenomenal. At Ibadan and Ile Ife, the list includes Adiele E. Afigbo, Ebiegberi Joseph Alagoa, Emmanuel A. Ayandele, Obaro Ikime, Philip Aigbona Igbafe, Saburi Biobaku, and Tekena Tamuno.⁵³ These were complemented by a number of expatriate historians – Alan Charles Ryder, Christopher Fyfe, John B. Webster, John D. Omer-Cooper, John E. Flint, Michael Crowder, and Murray Last – who established the Department of History at Bayero University Kano and the Department of History at Usman Dan Fodio University Sokoto. These two institutions alongside Ahmadu Bello University Zaria became the hub of scholarship and teaching on the Islamic Library of Muslim West Africa. Successive generations of their faculties and students have received strong influences from the Maghreb and universities in Cairo, Rabat, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. In

⁴⁹ Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

⁵⁰ Yusufu Bala Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina. 1400–1883: The Emergence and Overthrow of the Sarauta System and the Establishment of the Emirate* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981).

⁵¹ The works in this classic are many. I have only mentioned a few.

⁵² This list is in the alphabetical ordering of the names of these scholars. It does not reflect dates and other emphases.

⁵³ This list is in the alphabetical ordering of the names of these scholars.

addition to inter-institutional exchange programmes, some have relocated to these institutions. A good number of the existing faculties and graduate students received their higher degrees there.

At Ibadan, the Centre for Arabic Documentation established by Hunwick and Smith in 1964 provided additional material sources for studying African history, philosophy, politics, and religion. In 1965, Hunwick expanded this center into a larger project that collected Arabic sources and writings throughout Africa. He founded *Research Bulletin* at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan. This became the flagship bibliographic outlet through which several volumes on Arabic scholarship and writings on West Africa have been collected and published. A noted achievement of this project has been its publication by John Hunwick together with Sean O'Fahey and other experts, of a seven-volume encyclopedia of Arabic writings on Africa. Most of these collections are, however, yet to be explored and studied by historians and other experts.

In Zaria, Abdullahi Mahdi, Alkasum Abba, Enoch Oyedele, George Amale Kwanashie, Kyari Tijani, Mahmud Modibbo Tukur, and Sa'ad Abubakar belonged to the early generation of scholars produced by Abdullahi Smith. In Kenya and Senegal, postindependence history-writing was spearheaded by Bethwell A. Ogot and William R. Ochieng, as well as Mohamed Mbodj and Mamadou Diouf respectively. The exception on the continent has been South Africa. Historical scholarship on South Africa is marked by an alarming minority of black scholars. The discipline of history in South Africa remains dominated by non-Black South Africans – largely white scholars.

As an achievement, the first and second generations of African historians affirmed African history as a knowable branch of the discipline of history. They also instituted African history as a legitimate and teachable branch of universal history. Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Makerere University, University of Dar es Salaam, University of Ghana, University of Ibadan, and University of Nairobi – together with all their scholars affiliated with the development of historical scholarship – determined the direction of modern African historiography from independence to the late 1970s. The historians and other disciplinary experts associated with these and other early postindependent African universities were mostly trained at the overseas universities of their former colonial powers – Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, and the United States of America. These, in turn, taught and trained the subsequent generations of home-based African historians. They were instrumental to the development of the history departments as well as the expansion of historical scholarship to other parts of the continent. It is also from these institutions that many of the now *diaspora-based* African historians and other disciplinary experts were taught and trained.

The institutional achievements of these historians are considerable. These are most outstanding in the study of the European expansion and the African reaction to it. Detailed studies of economic development and political history have been undertaken. The broad outlines of the regional foci of African history are now clear. The turning point in the entire feat was the continent-wide critique and engagement with Hugh Trevor-Roper's derogatory denial of the existence of African history. In 1963, Hugh Trevor-Roper followed Georg W. F. Hegel's depiction of Africa as an *ahistorical* continent marked by the absence of

development and lack of progress. In a series of lectures at the University of Sussex transmitted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and later published in *The Listener* in 1963, Hugh Trevor-Roper stated that “we should not concern ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the world.” This statement was later published as a book in 1965.⁵⁴ He differentiated African history as *disciplina* from the goings on – *the res gestae* – of the African past. He warned against attributing credence to African history. Hegel had claimed that real history was the story of the Idea, the progressive unfolding of Being; and that, marked by conflict, usurpations, and war, African societies were without direction.⁵⁵ They began to exist only after their discovery by European explorers. In Hegel’s work, Africa is limited to south of the Sahara. It is not continent-wide. North Africa belongs to the Middle East. The spread of Arabo-Islamic civilization in Africa ends at the Equator. Following Hegel, Trevor-Roper argued that in a world entirely dominated by European history and European ideas, the end of history was to account for the European past and its continued relation to the present modern.⁵⁶ “Unhistoric” Africa and the rest of the world are best understood in terms of their locations and relations to Europe.⁵⁷ These Eurocentric positions received some of the fiercest responses from African historians.

Southern Africa is hardly integral to the above achievements.⁵⁸ Evidenced by the continued difficulties of accessing archival, state-controlled, and other primary sources, the decolonization of historical scholarship and democratization of history-writing as an enterprise are far from taking place. In Namibia, the absence of a South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) archive together with the embargo on governmental files of thirty years constrain research on German colonialism and the South African occupation. As of 2024, the state-owned documents in all the National Archives in Namibia are yet to be declassified. These archives adhere to the Archives Act Number 12 of 1992. This Law is a revised version of the colonial South West African Archives Act of 1987. Its chief attribute has been its paramountcy in enforcing

⁵⁴ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 9–11.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

⁵⁶ An authority on seventeenth-century European history, Hugh R. Trevor-Roper (1914–2003) was from 1957 to 1980 Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford, UK. His post-Hegelian statement on precolonial Africa is that the continent had no history that could be reconstructed, recovered, or even worth retrieving.

⁵⁷ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, “The Past and Present: History and Sociology,” *Past and Present* 42, no. 1 (1969): 3–17. See also Finn Fuglestad, “The Trevor-Roper Trap or the Imperialism of History: An Essay,” *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 309–326.

⁵⁸ My account on Southern Africa draws on my three-year research and teaching experience as American Council of Learned Societies’ (ACLS) African Humanities’ Programme (AHP) Research Fellow at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa (2009–10); Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of the Western Cape (2011); and A. C. Jordan Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cape Town (2013–14). Beyond South Africa, the funding from these international research programmes enabled me to build and deepen – through numerous visits – collaboration with colleagues at universities in most of the states across southern Africa.

state secrecy and total closure of all official files. Despite the celebration on 22 March 2019 of Namibia's thirty years of independence, it is still being awaited if the expected declassification will be effected. In the current circumstances, much challenge is posed to the conduct of historical research on Namibia. The legal stipulation that all governmental records are to be classified for a thirty-year period has remained. Ellen Ndeshi Namhila and Tycho van der Hoog show that the repressive nature of the state in Namibia against historical knowledge continues to undermine public awareness among children and the youth about its past.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the lack of access to governmental records – produced since the 1990s – needed for holding the ruling party accountable, poses huge limitations to the conduct of historical research. Withholding such historical resources has made the understanding of Namibia's past inaccessible.

South Africa presents an equally gloomy picture with respect to the problems of history-writing on Africa. The continued marginalization of black voices in South African historiography is directly connected with the legacy of apartheid. This plays out in the untransformed character of the postapartheid state and the impoverishment and repression of Black agency and voices. The apartheid state was an ethnographic state that enforced the regime of colonial difference. As an institutionalized operation, apartheid was a racialized system based on the operations of laws that classified population categories according to differentiated access to citizenship rights; land and other privileges and resources. Through its codified knowledge and legal regulations, this system determined and restricted the people's identities, marital choices, occupational and residential possibilities together with what they could study or even be taught. Notwithstanding the postapartheid transition, institutional transformation in South African universities has not overcome the historical and ongoing limitations undermining the transformative emergence of a new generation of Black historians. Given the denial and dispossession that came with apartheid-imposed white minority rule together with the untransformed character and nature of the supposedly postapartheid state, South African history continues to be written primarily by white historians. Questions of class and race, which dogged its past, also continue to undermine change and development.⁶⁰ Studies on the historiography of class, racism, and white minority rule continue to be written by non-Black South Africans. Barring Ciraj S. Rassool and Premesh J. Lal (Indian South African historians) and Tlhalo Radithlahlo, Black representation in the discipline of history in South Africa remains marginal. Works by Bill Freund, Martin Legassick, Shula Marks, and other South Africanists have continued to retain their dominance even in the postapartheid period.

⁵⁹ Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, *Little Research Value: African Estate Records and Colonial Gaps in a Post-colonial National Archive* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017). See also Tycho Van der Hoog, "A New Chapter in Namibian History: Reflections on Archival Research," *History in Africa* 49 (2022): 389–414.

⁶⁰ Paul Maylam, *South Africa's Racial Past: The History and Historiography of Racism, Segregation and Apartheid*, Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2001).

Conclusion: The Future of Historical Scholarship in Africa

How effective has the decolonization project in African history and African historiography been? The twenty-first century is an appropriate period to assess the fate, fortunes, and continued performance of the discipline of history across Africa. A lot has taken place from the colonial to the postcolonial period in Africa. Several bodies of knowledge and epistemologies have intellectualized different aspects of the continent's historical existence. Beginning from the mid-twentieth century onwards, when nationalist intellectuals began to deconstruct European colonial intellectual hegemony through the search for alternative interpretations and sources of African history, to date, much has been achieved in the attempt at decolonizing historical scholarship and history-writing on Africa. The contribution by Cheikh Anta Diop whose scholarship highlighted the connections between Egypt and the rest of the continent to claim Ancient Egypt's historical legacy for the continent, together with the radical affirmation at the University of Ibadan, of the relevance of Arabic sources and oral tradition for decolonizing African history, are the apogees of such achievements. Nevertheless, several challenges still loom large. As Ousmane O. Kane has correctly observed, the most compelling postcolonial challenge in Africa, is to reconstruct African intellectual history.⁶¹ Resolving this challenge demands bringing different intellectual perspectives, positions and traditions into nonhierarchical conversation. Beyond the limitations of colonial historiography, the operations of imperial historiography are reinforced by the activities and policies of the postcolonial states in Africa. The resultant Africanism is no longer entirely Western. This is further implicated in the orientations of the postcolonial state. It has also become inseparable from the institutional and material reproduction of the linkages that imperial power maintains with the state in Africa. This is illustrated in the lack of interest by the state in funding historical research and the refusal to support the *continued* teaching of history as a course of study.

In developing this section, I draw on my two-year research experience as Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Professor and Senior Researcher at the Department of History as well as the African Studies Programme at the Institute of Asian and African Studies and the Käte Hamburger Collegium "Work and Human Life Course in Global History"⁶² of Humboldt University of Berlin together with my Seminars at Karl Marx House and Museum and my and taught classes in African history at the University of Trier, Germany (2021–23). History is one of the best-funded academic disciplines in Germany and modern Europe. This is evident in the annual reports of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), (the German Research Council), and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), the German Academic Exchange Service. Such funding support is made available for local and overseas faculties and researchers as well as postgraduate and undergraduate students worldwide.

⁶¹ Kane, "Arabic Sources and the Search for a New Historiography in Ibadan," 345.

⁶² This is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany – the Bundesministerium für Bildung and Forschung (BMBF).

This presents a sharp contrast to the situations across Africa, and in particular Nigeria and West Africa. History is one of the most neglected disciplines in these societies. It is described by state officials as the least important to the developmental needs of Africa and other developing societies.

As we continue to engage with and (re)examine the development of the discipline of history and the enterprise of history-writing across Africa, we must continue to engage the following question:

... is it possible to propose another form of discourse without touching the very foundations of the fragile legitimacy of the state itself? Lacking the firm basis necessary to maintain a discourse responsible to local needs and demands, there is the risk that the development of such a new form of historical understanding will simply produce new forms of integration to a revived Africanism.⁶³

With different local dimensions and sometimes unconnected national dynamics, the continued problems of history-writing across postcolonial Africa are linked with the crisis of higher education and the universities in the continent. In all African economies and societies, the postcolonial state has been the major inhibition to the continued production of historical knowledge. In the twenty-first century, its knowledge-repressive character is expressed in its policy decisions that suggest the higher importance of some academic disciplines in national research centers and the universities than others. Beyond Africa, this state-led contradiction and crisis against the continued production of historical knowledge and the teaching of history as a course of study, is experienced in Latin America and South Asia. In Argentina, Brazil, Ghana, India, Nigeria, and Senegal, the economic crisis of the 1980s constrained the universities from hiring and retaining qualified manpower. It also redefined the national contexts for the renewed governmental hostilities against the humanities and social sciences in the public, state-owned universities in West Africa. This has been expressed through the spending cuts in the annual budgets for higher education and state-owned universities. National experiences certainly vary.

In Brazil, from the 1990s and in the wake of President Jair Bolsonaro's 2019 attacks on history, philosophy, and sociology as well as the assaults against the Federal Fluminense University (*Universidade Federal Fluminense* [UFF]), the Federal University of Bahia (*Universidade Federal da Bahia* [UFBA]), the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (*Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora* [UFJF]), and the University of Brasilia (*Universidade de Brasilia* [UnB]), the humanities and the social sciences have been labeled as useless disciplines.⁶⁴ The exact sciences have been redefined as the most appropriate disciplines for maintaining the

⁶³ Jewsiewicki, "Introduction: One Historiography or Several? A Requiem for Africanism," 17.

⁶⁴ Sidney Chalhoub, Marine Corde, Angela Facundo Navia, Celine Mavrot, and Romain Tiquet, "Current situation: attacks on the humanities and social sciences in Brazil. An interview with Sidney Chalhoub, Marine Corde, Angela Facundo Navia, Celine Mavrot and Romain Tiquet," *Emulations: Revue de Sciences Sociales*, 21 April 2020.

competitiveness of Brazilian universities in the global innovation scene.⁶⁵ In Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, the fortune of history as an academic discipline has paled into insignificance and oblivion. The achievements of the golden ages of the discipline in these states have been dissipated and exhausted. During the Golden Jubilee Anniversary that marked the fifty years of existence of the Historical Society of Nigeria in October 2005, the helpless lamentations by its members and practitioners, of the strains and stress of the discipline confirmed the claim that historical scholarship and the study of history in Nigeria have relapsed into irrelevance.⁶⁶ The details of these experiences vary across the subregions. From the late 1980s to 2024, the study of history was excluded from the curricula of all the junior secondary schools in Nigeria. There is currently the burning threat of its expulsion and extinction in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This threat is underlined by the already established disjuncture, namely the absence of continuity in the study and teaching of history from the junior secondary schools to the higher tertiary institutions. Other manifestations of this problem have been discussed.⁶⁷ The compelling one has been the cluelessness of public officials in the federal ministries of education that continue to make policies and take financial decisions affecting public universities based on narrow-minded neo-patrimonial considerations. To this is added the failure by the state to accommodate the intelligentsia as equal partners, rather than detractors and enemies in the state-building project. This is noted in the refusal to acknowledge the academic freedom of the academics and respect the institutional autonomy of the universities.

Within African universities, internal developments and recent malpractices by African historians and other academics from the late 1980s onward, erode their collective relevance. The earliest lamentation of these self-inflicted crises

⁶⁵ The exact sciences refer to the academic disciplines in the natural and pure sciences. Of all the states across the global South, Brazil and Nigeria offer the closest comparative illustration of the decline of history as an academic discipline in the public, state-owned universities. In Brazil and Nigeria, the public universities – federal and state universities – account for 95 percent of all the scientific research produced. The productive transformation of these societies therefore depends on the efforts of these institutions. Resulting from the massive expansion of the system and the adoption of strong affirmative action policies in admissions over the past fifteen years, the demographics of the public universities in Brazil have become remarkably diverse in the composition of their students' population. Sidney Chalhoub et al. show that the percentage of students of African descent in the public universities is now close to the overall percentage of people of African descent in the entire Brazilian population. About 53.6 percent of the Brazilian population is of African descent. This makes Brazil the second African nation in the world after Nigeria. These underline the connection of the universities in Brazil to the larger society.

⁶⁶ Themed the "*Historical Society of Nigeria at 50: Reflections on the Discipline of History*," the celebration of this Golden Jubilee Anniversary was understandably held at the University of Ibadan – the base and fount from where it all began in 1955.

⁶⁷ Emmanuel A. Ayandele, "The Task before Nigerian Historians Today," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 4 (1979), 1–13. See also Christopher B. N. Ogbogbo, "Beyond Nomenclature: Current Challenges of Historical Scholarship in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society in Nigeria* 20 (2011): 166–178. On the literature on this subject across West Africa, see the works cited in note 12 by Ogbogbo.

by Nigerian historians came from Emmanuel A. Ayandele.⁶⁸ Beyond the denial of funding by the federal governments and ministries of education, the expectation of effectively representing African societies – in the discipline of history – has been disappointed. Many have abandoned their first love – knowledge production and research. The commitment to research-based publications has sharply declined. The practice of critical scholarship has been substituted for collegial adulation, empty hagiography, and immodest hero-worshipping. In South Africa, the emphasis on hiring strictly Black South African academics by most Black-oriented-universities, through the acclaimed postapartheid implementation of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Programme (BEEP),⁶⁹ has continued to limit the productive expansion of Black scholars in history and other disciplines in South African universities. Most West African universities are currently saddled with immobile, in-bred locally produced academics with little or no international experiences and exposures. This is underlined by the absence of continental and globalized collaborations. Conferences, seminars, and workshops have become very rare. At Ibadan, university academics, especially professors, hurry out of academic seminars, which they are wont to avoid. Yet they patiently sit tight – committed and focused – for long hours, sometimes from 10:00 to 18:00 periodically during administrative – Council, Departmental, Faculty, and Senate – meetings. More efforts are invested in producing the reports of such administrative meetings than in producing academic publications and research proposals. As state-imposed hostility against the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) continues to constrain and undermine its intellectual capacity and moral strength for defending and fighting for major national causes, its members continue to relapse into brain drain and emigration internationally – as well as empty sloganeering and beer parlour intellectualism locally. The culture of collegial reading groups among faculty members has collapsed at Ibadan and other Nigerian universities. This has given way to shoddy scholarship and a WhatsApp lifestyle. The only seminars held regularly by academic departments in Nigerian universities today are limited to the appraisals of postgraduate students. Travelling for international research fellowship programmes by the few qualified faculties is criminalized by arm's-length university administrators – deans and heads of departments and other sit-at-home scholars who must lament the excessive and overbearing workloads left behind by their frequently traveling colleagues. It is therefore not surprising that the cumulative research outputs from Nigerian and West African universities have continued to decline and nosedive since the late 1980s to date.

All the flagship journals across the disciplines in the first-generation-public universities in Nigeria and West Africa are either in extinction or have lost their comparative quality and international competitive regularity. The overall

⁶⁸ Ayandele, "The Task before Nigerian Historians Today."

⁶⁹ This policy is an affirmative action of the South African government. In principle, it aims at redressing the economic inequalities and other material injustices created by apartheid. Its implementation, which entails the extension of preferential treatment to mostly unqualified Black South Africans, especially in the universities and other merit-driven institutions, has been the subject of much heated criticisms by scholars.

qualities of their contents have also been limited and narrowed down to area studies – focused on African studies – focused on data gathering with little or no critical theorization.⁷⁰ In history, the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* together with *Research Bulletin* and *Tarikh*, which were once globally acknowledged as authoritative outlets of instructive knowledge on Africa, are now only published once yearly. Unbridled commitment and quest for administrative appointments within the universities and the normless struggles for political positions in government offices, have continued to undermine the efforts at seeking the needed funding to sustain the continued production of these publications on an appropriate periodic basis. Mentoring traditions have also collapsed. Senior colleagues have become irredeemably autocratic, self-seeking and self-serving. Most relate to their junior colleagues and postgraduate students as competitors instead of mentees and partners in career development. Most devastating has been the abandonment of research and teaching for political appointments outside the universities. Nigerian academics perceive professorship as an end in itself.⁷¹ After attaining professorship, the commitment to contribute to knowledge ends. As more senior academics resort to political appointments with a rat race, individual universities and the National Universities Commission (NUC) describe them as offering community assignments and inter/national services. They are also considered eligible for executive approvals for leave of absence by their universities and the NUC. This continues to dissipate the existing manpower available for the core assignments and functionalities of the universities. How can anyone blame colonialism and the officials at the ministries of education or the presidency for these compromises and failures? Beyond other external factors, these internal aberrations, malpractices, and perversions are responsible for the decline in the development of history as an academic discipline as well as historical scholarship and history-writing in Africa. They offer insight for understanding the ongoing decay in other disciplines in the universities in postcolonial Africa.

Notwithstanding the limitations imposed by the constraining conditions across the continent, the decolonization of African history and the continued production of “usable African pasts” are not entirely foreclosed. Beyond the politics of citation that continues to underrate African universities, among other institutional problems that are internal to them, few promising developments can be pointed at, in some of these institutions. The post-COVID-19 development of the history laboratory – a joint institutional initiative by the Department of History at the University of Ibadan and the History Departments at Princeton

⁷⁰ Compare for example, (i) the affiliations and international demographic spread of the contributors publishing in these journals together with (ii) the affiliations and international spread of the editors and members of editorial boards and the international advisory boards of these journals during their golden ages in the 1950s with their compositions in recent times. Evidently, economic crisis and other limitations continue to undermine their qualities.

⁷¹ At Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, only a few academics wait to become professors before jumping at political appointments outside the universities. In most universities in northern Nigeria, the completion of the doctorate (PhD) degree is the penultimate criterion and demand. Most of these academics leave for local or national political appointments as senior lecturers. This explains the absence of transferrable academic traditions in these institutions.

University and the University of Cambridge, is an illustration of such possibility and promise. By offering opportunities to outstanding students at Ibadan for exchange programs and graduate studies at Cambridge and Princeton among other universities in the United Kingdom and the United States, this program holds the promise of improving future academic manpower among Nigerian and West African historians. A similar ray of hope is spotted in South Africa. As observed and reported by Terri Barnes, the demographics at the history departments of South African universities are changing. Some of these departments are gradually being staffed by young Black historians.⁷² With a majority of them Zimbabweans, these new entrants are now making their mark and also publishing. The possibility of checking and stemming the ongoing dominance by the older Indian-South Africans and white historians in South Africa's citation and publication records is assured.

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⁷² An electronic communication with Terri Barnes on Wednesday 17 April 2024. For eleven years, Barnes was a professor in the Department of History at the University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa.

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