
Problems, Perspectives, and Paradigms: Colonial Africanist Historiography and the Question of Audience

Harvey Amani Whitfield and Bonny Ibhawoh

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur les tendances manifestes dans l'écriture de l'histoire de l'Afrique coloniale. On peut diviser en deux groupes importants les plus récentes approches à l'Afrique coloniale, tout en ne perdant pas de vue qu'il existe des recoupements. Certains intellectuels mettent l'accent sur les tensions et les ambiguïtés du colonialisme en Afrique, alors que d'autres soulignent davantage l'état colonial et le paradigme traditionnel colons / colonisés. Ces quinze dernières années, le premier groupe, que l'on nomme "la Nouvelle historiographie" a pris de l'avance sur l'autre groupe dans l'étude de l'Histoire coloniale africaine. Il est intéressant de constater que certains de ces travaux se préoccupent davantage d'écrire pour des intellectuels occidentaux que pour les peuples même qui font l'objet de leur étude. Dans un sens, l'Afrique est devenue un objet de connaissance divorcé de ses propres populations, et cela dans l'intérêt des intellectuels qui n'habitent pas l'Afrique.

Introduction

Two distinct paradigms seem to have gained prominence in the field of colonial African historiography within the past decade. The first encourages scholars and graduate students to investigate the complexities, tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions of the colonial situation (Cooper 1994, 1997; Hunt 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997). This paradigm rejects the binary theories of understanding that once dominated African history, emphasizing

The authors thank the History Department at Brock University, the University of Vermont, and Dalhousie University. Several scholars, including Philip Zachernuck and the anonymous peer reviewers of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, provided helpful suggestions even though some disagreed with our positions.

instead the limitations of the colonial structure in determining the lives of colonized Africans. Nancy Hunt succinctly expresses this paradigm:

Colonialism can no longer be viewed as a process of imposition from a single European metropole, but must be seen as tangled layers of political relations and lines of conflicting projections and domestications that converged in specific local misunderstandings, struggles, and representations.... Social action in colonial and postcolonial Africa cannot be reduced to such polarities as metropole / colony or colonizer / colonized or to balanced narrative plots of imposition and response or hegemony and resistance. Such narratives, however refigured and nuanced in recent years, limit our appreciation of the enigmatic mutations and durations, facts and fictions, transgressions and secrecies that sustained research in the fields and archives opens up (1997, 4).

The other paradigm suggests that colonialism and capitalism were not quite so undefined (Mamdani 1996; Barnes 1999; Lambert 1995; Zeleza 1993; Mallon 1993; Vansina 1994). While it does acknowledge the diversity of experience under colonialism, it also places more emphasis on the power of the colonial state. Teresa Barnes vividly articulates this paradigm:

My research (which was as sustained as I could make it) has suggested that although a host of under-researched local misunderstandings and struggles certainly existed, a larger misunderstanding and struggle was also operative.... Not all white settlers acted like racist overlords. But most did. As much difficulty as historians have with the concept of resistance, not all Africans resisted colonial rule. In many ways, however, most did.... Liting along in deconstructionist mode, surely the creative examination of matters ever more local can lead scholars to miss the forest for the trees. Historians may abandon complex narration out of postmodernist scruple, but if narration loses its critical edge, history becomes indistinguishable from soap opera (1999, xx-xxi).

Within the past decade, the first paradigm has gained strikingly more currency. It has garnered the attention, and some might argue the acceptance, of scholars in North America. In addition, it has resulted in what some describe as the hegemonic approach to the

study of Africa and African peoples everywhere (Martin and West 1999, ix).

This paradigm is, however, far less influential in Africa and among African scholars. This gap in the interpretation of colonial African history is significant, not so much because it underlines the disparities in opinions among scholars, but more so because these perspectives seem to indicate a fundamental divide that reflects the distinct sociopolitical contexts from which these histories, as well as the audiences they address, emerge. This is not to suggest that scholarship about Africa fits neatly and only into these two paradigms. If these paradigms reflect two distinct highways of historical scholarship, we recognize that there are many different off-ramps that represent the diverse work of individual historians. Nevertheless, the general paths have led to very contrasting, if not polarized, conceptions of Africa — highway one representing the shift towards complexities, tensions, and ambiguities; and highway two representing the continued attention to the hegemonic power of the colonial state in Africa. Thus, in discussing some recent contributions to the field, we do not wish to lump very different historians together, but rather to recognize similarities in their work that may allow us to comment on and criticize a generalized, if amorphous, trend.

Our argument is that although extremely helpful in broadening our understanding of the colonial situation, some of the works that have been undertaken within the traditions of highway one (centred on the ambiguities and contradictions of colonialism) tend to lose sight of the larger structures that defined the colonial experience. Relevant questions based in binary frameworks have been dismissed, while the hegemonic power of the state has been elided in favour of localized studies, which question the findings of broad paradigms of historical understanding. We argue that highway two (underlined by an attention to broad political and social structures) offers another mode of historical inquiry that may be as beneficial, and perhaps even better suited, for the audience in Africa than the first highway. In an age of global capitalism and in an international world order in which Africa is being increasingly marginalized, it is clear that African states face problems and challenges significantly different from those in the developed world. It is, therefore, important that historical scholarship reflect these differences and focus

more on the crucial issues of forging national, or even continental, identity by improving people's understanding of themselves and their societies. Narratives written with this in mind might be more relevant to African states as opposed to localized studies that reinforce fragmentation and difference. This may explain their appeal to scholars in the continent.

Recent contributions to cultural history are exceedingly important, allowing us to understand aspects of colonial African history that the research of earlier historians did not reveal. Yet, in an age of globalization, underlined as it is by the continued tension between universal models and local exigencies, there is room for other histories that might bear fruit by focusing on the importance of the state and national identity. The site of contention between these two highways might rest partly on the question of audience. The issue may be posed in the form of a simple question: for whom are today's Africanist historians writing their history? Further, how relevant is this history to African populations and the daily realities they face? Before attempting to answer these questions, it is important to discuss how we arrived at the questions through a short examination of earlier nationalist and political economy paradigms in colonial African historiography.

Africanist Historiography: Problems and Paradigms

John and Jean Comaroff have identified seven "propositions," which, they argue, sketch out the dominant "theoretical orientations" in the study of colonialism (1997, 19). This is not the place to discuss these "propositions" in detail. For our purpose, it suffices to outline them briefly. First, colonialism was simultaneously, equally, and inseparably a process in political economy and culture. Second, to the extent that it affected the state-of-being of native populations, colonialism depended less on the formal apparatus of colonial states than on the agents of empire, such as missionaries, merchants, and settlers. Third, colonialism was as much involved in the making of the metropole, as well as the identities and ideologies of the colonizers, as it was in remaking peripheries and colonial subjects. Fourth, neither "the colonizer" nor "the colonized" represented an undifferentiated social or political reality, save in exceptional circumstances. Fifth, despite the internal complexities of colonial societies, they tended to be perceived and re-presented

from within as highly dualistic, oppositional terms that solidified the singularity of, and distance between, the ruler and the ruled. Sixth, contrary to the way in which "non-Western" societies have been described in scholarly and popular literature in the West, these societies were never "closed," "traditional," or unchanging. They tended, rather, to be complex, fluid, and dynamic. Finally, having arisen in a dialectic relationship with industrial capitalism, colonialism was founded on a series of discontinuities and contradictions. For instance, colonizers espoused an enlightened legal system but "invented" and enforced "customary law" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 19-27). In spite of the rich diversity in intellectual thought that each of these propositions reflect, one thing is common to all of them. They mirror the peculiar global and continental concerns of the periods in which each "proposition" became dominant.

Africanist historiography has always developed in dialogue with developments in world history. The nationalist school of Africanist historical scholarship emerged at a time when colonized people throughout the world were struggling for independence and national identity. As Caroline Neale (1986) notes, the success of these movements resulted in the writing of "independent history." This was evident in the rewriting of colonial African history. Arguably, the most prolific of these scholars came from the universities of Ibadan and Dar es Salaam in the 1950s and 1960s. These historians refocused colonial historiography away from European personalities and achievements toward an African-centred approach. They sought an interpretation of African history that went beyond the story of Europeans in Africa. Owunka Dike's groundbreaking *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* (1956) demonstrated that an analysis grounded in African states, kings, and merchants could be just as beneficial to understanding the history of the Niger Delta as the preceding imperialist approach, which had emphasized the importance of colonial officials, white missionaries, and white merchants. This approach was followed by a number of works that glorified the Nigerian past, connecting it with the contemporary nation state (Biobaku 1957; Ajayi 1967, 1969; Ayandele 1966). Terence Ranger (1968) also employed this paradigm in his well-known article about the connections between primary resistance movements and modern mass nationalism in

Africa. Ranger's early scholarship, similar to that of his counterparts at Ibadan, focused on African initiative and agency.

The nationalist school was marked by a fundamental conception of the divide between colonizer and colonized and understood colonialism mainly in terms of African response or resistance to European encroachment. But beyond their quest to rescue African history from "colonial distortions," the Dar es Salaam and Ibadan schools also reflected a period of unbounded optimism in which African history was viewed as progressing toward the contemporary nation-state.

Although the contributions of the nationalist school were important in deepening our understanding of African history, the approach was also problematic. In the race to paint a glorious African-centred past through a romanticization of resistance movements, elements of the colonial situation that might have disturbed this linear and progressive understanding of colonialism were glided over. For example, as several scholars have pointed out, these historians did not pay enough attention to the contradictions of the colonial project — social history, women, gender relations, or class differences within the confines of their works (Neale 1986; Isaacman and Isaacman 1977; Sunseri 1997; Falola 1993; Vansina 1994). The failure of many African nation-states in the 1970s compelled historians to question the kind of African history that had been written, along with the point of view from which it was written. The answer seemed overwhelmingly pessimistic, concluding that the nationalist school was elitist and elided important aspects of African history. The concentration of nationalist scholars on resistance, states, and elites gave way to a new paradigm that focused on the political economy. This paradigmatic change reflected a shift from the unbounded optimism of the 1960s to the pessimism of the 1970s.

Many of the historians who employed the political economy model believed that Africa's economic history and contemporary position were heavily influenced by outside factors. The three most prominent forms of the political economy approach were the dependency school, the liberal market economy school, and the Marxist school. The dependency school, illustrated in the work of Walter Rodney (1972) and Edward Alpers (1973), emphasized the role of Europe in causing Africa's underdeveloped economies.

Rodney, in particular, believed that the nationalist school did little to help explain contemporary Africa's political and economic powerlessness; historians needed to look beyond politics to the underlying determinants of the socioeconomic order. The dependency school scoffed at the notion of an autonomous Africa in the capitalist world market. The market approach, illustrated by A.G. Hopkins (1973), focused on the idea that Africans were rational agents in a capitalist economy. In addition, Hopkins did not believe that economic activity was determined by cultural beliefs or localized institutions.

The Marxist school also critiqued the nationalist school. According to Ralph Austen (1993), these writers were influenced by Claude Meillasoux (1973) and Pierre-Philippe Rey (1979). They argued that African societies must be seen in universal class terms and that differences within African societies could be understood in terms of Marxist class difference (Van Onselen 1976; Temu and Swai 1981). However, these scholars recognized differences within the societies that they studied, such as opposition between elders and younger males, which they believed had a material basis. Although they critiqued different aspects of the nationalist approach, there were significant similarities. All these approaches had, in common, impatience with the political elitism of Africanist historiography. All demanded that the unacknowledged acceptance of a vague modernization theory be replaced with more conscious use of Western social science to achieve fuller analysis of the basis for African development problems (Austen 1993, 208). In short, the political economy approach, in its various forms, sought independence from the elitist euphoria of the 1960s, which it considered detrimental to a clear understanding of African history. Yet, these historians, like their predecessors, were influenced by Western modes of historical inquiry and methodology.

The various political economy approaches would subsequently be challenged for their reliance on western paradigms for the study of African people, as well as their disproportionate focus on collective identities, to the neglect of individual experiences. For example, in focusing on labour, some historians of the political economy school posited this aspect of identity as definitive and more important than other parts of an individual's experience. Another important limitation of this school was its emphasis on linear models of

historical “development” and “underdevelopment.” As Jan Vansina rightly observes, some of the contributions to the Marxist-oriented school “promoted a false, rigid evolutionary view of history” (1994, 206). The social and cultural histories of the 1980s and 1990s would ably call into question these aspects of the political economy school. However, these historians built on the political economy school’s emphasis on peasant and everyday experiences.

The “New” Historiography

In the 1980s and 1990s, the historiography of Africa became more complex. It would take more than a few pages to examine the varied trends and patterns that developed in the writing of African history during this period. This short overview is not a comprehensive review of the literature, but rather a focus on some of the important trends.

Historians’ understanding of colonialism was influenced by the ideas of Edward Said (1978), who sought to examine the importance of discourse in defining colonialism and the colonial. African history was enriched through studies emphasizing social history, cultural history, women’s history, gender relations, and, perhaps most importantly, intellectual history. The study of “invented traditions” became one popular mode of historical inquiry, with several writers exploring the invented nature of tribalism and customary traditions in African societies (Ranger 1983; Chanock 1985; Vail 1986). These works encouraged historians to question the claims to antiquity of supposedly timeless traditions. Leroy Vail’s work, in particular, contains numerous examples of traditions constructed by missionaries, their young converts, and would-be elites, who sought power and tried to establish claims to a distinguished past. For the most part, tradition was found to be a construction of elites during the colonial era to retain political power and control over women.

One major contribution to colonial African history engendered by this new historiography was made in the field of women’s history. Many studies undertaken within this framework focused on African women’s relations to the state, as well as the importance of gender in defining women’s roles in society (Oppong 1983; Robertson 1984; White 1990; Hunt 1989; Allman 1996). These

works, at the very least, made scholars rethink notions about collective identity. Equally important contributions were made by studies emphasizing social history, especially the Heinemann Social History of Africa series. These works covered a diversity of topics ranging from slave resistance on the Swahili coast to gender and initiation in Zambia (Glassman 1995; Moore 1994).

In the 1990s, some of the most important contributions to understanding intellectual history were made by Kwame Appiah and Steven Feierman. Feierman (1990) added much needed complexity to the writing of intellectual history, in terms of giving voice and agency to those previously left outside of the pale of political action. Appiah (1992) questioned the very racial categories that had underlined and dictated studies about the educated African elite. Later works emphasizing various aspects of cultural history have done much to highlight issues in colonial African history that were ignored by earlier historians. One example is Tim Burke's *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, which explores issues of social identity and commodification in colonial African societies. These works did more than simply fill gaps in the historiography. They also provided a different perspective from which African history could be studied. Issues such as sanitation and personal hygiene, which, in the past, had attracted hardly any attention, provided keys for opening up other less studied aspects of colonialism and its affect on culture (Burke 1996; Vaughn 1991).

In our opinion, the most significant change in the historiography during the last fifteen or so years is the use of discourse and locally grounded narratives to question older paradigms of historical understanding. Florencia Mallon (1993, 389) argues that one trend in the 1980s was to use perspectives on hegemony, discourse, and culture to deconstruct national-level claims, while building regionally grounded, postnational, and postcolonial perspectives on the role of popular resistance in socioeconomic and political change. Some works emanating from this paradigm have challenged longstanding orthodoxies and elicited very interesting findings. For example, Thaddeus Sunseri (1997) and Jamie Monson (1998), employing this paradigm in two separate studies, broaden our understanding of resistance and political development in Tanzania during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most importantly, these works gave voice to a wide range of

African actors previously ignored by the nationalist school (Geiger 2000).

In this line of historical inquiry, works by the Comaroffs (1991, 1997), Cooper (1997), and Hunt (1997) have all emphasized the need to view colonialism as a site of contradictions and localized struggles. Cooper points out that, “the ambiguous lines that divided engagement from appropriation, deflection from denial, and desire from discipline not only confounded the colonial encounter, it positioned contestation over the very categories of ruler and ruled at the heart of colonial politics” (1997, 6). Other inquiries, most prominently illustrated by some of the works of the Comaroffs (1991) and Hunt (1997), emphasize the need to see colonialism as a site of contradictions and localized misunderstandings. This, however, is not to group all these historians and their works under a single category. It is recognised that there are important differences in the ways these writers have approached their various works. Rather, it is to emphasise that most of their recent writings seem to be underlined by similar thinking — the idea of colonialism as a site of localized confrontations and contradictions that cannot be understood in terms of colonizer / colonized (Cooper 1994). For instance, one finds in some of the works of Cooper and Hunt (perhaps with the notable exception of Cooper’s *Decolonization and African Society*) a predilection for an emphasis on localized conflicts and less attention paid to works or evidence that might find the colonial encounter to be more rigidly defined in Manichean terms. In fact, Cooper (1994, 1517) dismisses the latter as a myth (Hunt 1997, 4).

The Question of Audience: Beyond Academic History

Interestingly, the shift in emphasis by some Africanists to the “ambiguities and contradictions” of the colonial project comes at a time when the epicentre of African history is no longer in the continent. Madison, Evanston, and Los Angeles have clearly replaced Ibadan, Dar es Salaam, and Makerere as the premier centres to study African history, at least in North America. The reasons for this are manifold. A combination of adverse economic and political developments have, since the 1980s, made African universities and centres of historical scholarship less productive than they were in the 1960s and 1970s. The hub of scholarship in Africa has moved

from universities to research institutes such as CODESRIA, African Association of Political Science (AAPS), and the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). As a result, publishing outlets in Africa have dwindled significantly, leading to a shift in the arenas of debate about Africa to Europe and North America.

This geographic shift in the production of African history has coincided with a similar shift in the historiography such that one is compelled to wonder for whom the new histories are being written. These developments also raise the issue of the relevance of recent works of African history, as produced in the West about Africa, to Africa and Africans. Some recent works seem more concerned with meeting a demand in the Western academic market rather than dealing with contemporary problems and questions that might affect African populations. This reflects the widening gap in content and method between the production of knowledge in the continent and in the West.

Most continental African scholars and institutes continue to focus on topics that can illuminate the contemporary nation-building problems they face or on themes that are relevant to the ideological debates in their countries. This tendency is demonstrated by the themes that have engaged the interest of some continental African historians. For example, into the late 1980s and early 1990s, annual congresses of the Historical Society of Nigeria focused on practical issues confronting the Nigerian state, such as: "Historians in Nation Building" (1987), "History and Nigeria's Third Republic" (1989), and "History and Development" (1991) (Dibua 1997). This trend is also reflected in the teaching of history. At the University of Ghana, for example, the undergraduate curriculum is structured in a way that clearly emphasizes state formation and African engagement with European imperialism. Major courses in History include: "Colonial Rule and African Response," "Nationalism and Independence," and dual courses about the Fante State in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the University of Botswana, the advanced graduate seminar entitled "Imperialism" focuses on the dynamics of imperial rule and state formation in Africa. In contrast, at Michigan State University, one graduate seminar in African history is titled: "Alternative Modernities in Recent African History." This obvious

difference in the tone of these two courses is indicative of the growing divide between Africanist models and continental scholarship.

Some might argue that this disparity can be explained by the fact that those doing history in the continent are simply doing "bad" history, owing to their lack of resources. This explanation assumes that continental African scholars are not following the hegemonic discourses of Africanist scholars because they are unable to get their hands on newer and more recent scholarship. The evidence suggests, however, that this may not always be the case. It is plausible that scholars and students in Africa have slightly different concerns from the dominant North American Africanist community. For instance, the graduate studies program in History at the University of Ibadan offers a mandatory graduate course on "Problems of Theories and Methods of History," with a reading list that sufficiently exposes students to the "new historiography" that has become dominant in North America. The University of Botswana (2003, 34) has a similar graduate seminar entitled "Historiographical Issues in Modern Southern Africa."

The reason this "new historiography" has been far less influential there, or elsewhere in the continent, must be sought beyond the supposed limitations of continental scholarship. We suggest, instead, that a more plausible reason may be the lack of relevance of the "new historiography" to the concerns of scholars in the continent. Indeed, as Martin and West argue, "Africanist models not only ignore African scholarship and realities but are irrelevant to local issues of social justice and transformation" (1999, 17). Such a chasm between the writing of African history by Africans and by outsiders has a real tendency to blight the field as a whole and needs to be addressed. As Vansina (1994, 221) cautions, we should all be writing our major works with the interests of the African public in mind.

Jean and John Comaroff have narrated their experience in 1996, teaching graduate students at the University of North West in South Africa. They were "puzzled" that their African students, ... talking articulately about their own history, continued to insist on seeing it, above all, as a narrative of domination. Of an uneven struggle, with lines clearly drawn, between colonizer and colonized (Comaroff 1997, 407).

The Comaroffs state that this trend in the Tswana perception of

their history has “long puzzled” them:

... why is it — despite all the twists and turns of past actions, events, and attitudes, despite complex patterns of relationships, resistance and alliance, despite the irreducibility of the past to black-and-white — that course grained oppositions and antagonisms remained salient to Southern Tswana for well over a century. Or, more accurately, *remain* (1997, 407 [original emphasis]).

Might it be because the Tswana have found this a more useful approach to understanding and coming to terms with their past? Might it also be that this paradigm is more relevant to explaining the present oppositions, polarities, and antagonisms that characterize contemporary South African society? These questions deserve more attention than they have so far received among Africanists. This is not to suggest that the only relevant history is history written solely with African perspectives and populations in mind. However, there is clearly a problem when inquiries in “African history” are pursued without African perspectives in mind. Academic research and, in this case, Africanist historical scholarship are critical not only for the sake of academic enterprise, but also for the cultural identities of nations and peoples.

The point is that recent trends in African historiography suggest a growing divide between these two functions of scholarship. The result is that the younger generation of scholars interested in Africa are sometimes faced with the dilemma of deciding between undertaking historical inquiries along the lines of *Colonial Lexicon* (Hunt 1999) or *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Comaroff 1991, 1997) on the one hand, and the more structured analysis of the works of Mahmood Mamdani (1996) and Teresa Barnes (1999) on the other hand, which tend to be more reflective of continental African perspectives. Differences in research methodology among the disciplines may sometimes account for this distinction. Anthropologists likely see things differently from social scientists with their predilections for theories and structured analyses. Often times, however, graduate students in African studies across the disciplines are increasingly encouraged, and sometimes even guided, to embrace the more deconstructionist approach of the “new” historiography. They are hardly encouraged to address the needs of African populations in their choice of

models and paradigms. Rather, emphasis is placed on producing works that fall in line with the dominant research paradigms in the West even when these models bear little relevance to the crucial issues affecting the continent. One needs only to look at the titles and abstracts of some recent PhD dissertations in African History from North American Universities to observe this trend. African history has thus become little more than an arena to test supposedly universal models, theories, and paradigms produced in North America and Western Europe (Zeleza 1995, 7).

Clearly, there is insufficient engagement (not to say a total lack of it) between Africanist scholars and continental issues and/or concerns. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, the aspiration of most Africanist scholars was to engage as much as possible with African societies and the peculiar developmental issues they confronted, the appeal now seems merely to be engaged in, and relevant to, the current paradigms about Africa that have found acceptance in Western universities and centres of learning. As Bogumil Jewsiewicki puts it:

Who thinks today of publishing in the journals of Africa as we once did in the 1960s? Young historians from Africa used to dream in the 1950s or 1960s of staying in Africa, teaching at a local university and immersing themselves in "oral traditions." Young researchers today compete for places in Western universities so as to become historians like their colleagues (1993, 219).

What needs to be emphasized here is not so much the validity or legitimacy of the models and paradigms that have been employed to explain African history but rather their relevance — in this case, the relevance of current historiographical models to the African experience. There is a need for a model of historical scholarship that might answer Vansina's call to write histories that may be more relevant to African populations. Such scholarship would employ paradigms that place Africans at the centre of the knowledge creation process (Keto 1999, 186). Yet, engaging in such scholarship need not necessarily mean a return to the old nationalist and political economy paradigms, with all their limitations. Inquiries that might put some stock in binary understandings or the power of the colonial state might be dismissed as an attempt to return to the days of simplified historical understanding. The point, here, is that

African history today, whatever the models we choose to adopt, should strive to be more relevant to the needs of African peoples.

Conclusion

African history today suffers from an alienation and displacement, which is a sad result of the fact that its production is controlled by scholars residing far from the continent, who are sometimes insufficiently engaged with its current realities. In circumstances eerily reminiscent of its colonial past, Africa has become an object of knowledge from which its very populations are becoming increasingly alienated. These concerns are not new. In 1994, a group of scholars at the University of Illinois organized a conference on the issue of reconstructing the study and meaning of Africa as a response to what they considered "the hegemonic approach to the study of Africa." The conference attempted to address "student dissatisfaction with the teaching of Africa," as well as "the rising tide of discontent" that threatens to destabilize the institutions and communities dedicated to the study of Africa (Martin and West 1999, ix, 1).

This article has expressed similar concerns. It has arisen from the realization that Africanists in North America are failing to engage adequately with issues and ideas that are gaining importance throughout Africa. The implications of this trend are significant. Although the Africanist establishment in the West might survive even if it ignores issues important to Africans, the cost will be its irrelevance to both popular and powerful constituencies (Martin and West 1999, 28)

Certain aspects of the current developments in the study of Africa are reminiscent of past historiographical models. In 1976, Terence Ranger conceded that the nationalist school suffered from "flabbiness" because it was blinded by our need for cultural heroes. Historians involved in the study of Africa, he argued, did not rigorously analyze archival sources and wrote for a too easily satisfied constituency in their own colleagues (Ranger 1976, 18). Since Ranger's "confession," Africanist scholars have begun to investigate archival sources more thoroughly and have developed some cutting-edge theoretical paradigms, which have enriched the field. Nevertheless, it seems that historians might still be writing for a too easily satisfied constituency in that certain topics serve to

satisfy academics but accord little or no attention to the needs and perspectives of African populations. These needs might very well include studies about cultural heroes, the development of national or even continental identity, the effect of colonialism on contemporary state structures, and the relations between the state and its people. It is along these lines that the benefits of attending to the structures of colonialism and the state might be found. If broad structural issues concerning the colonial project, state power, and collective identities are pursued without ignoring the current emphasis on complexities and contradictions, we might be better placed to help African populations deal with the increasing importance of global capitalism, hegemonic international political institutions, and their relation to the developing nations of Africa.

Bibliography

- Ajayi, Ade Jacob. 1969. "The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonial Rule." In *Emerging Themes of African History*, edited by T.O. Ranger. London: Heinemann.
- . 1967. "Colonialism: An Episode in African History." In *Burden of Empire: An Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of the Sahara*, edited by Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan. New York: Praeger.
- Allman, Jean. 1996. "Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender, Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante." *Journal of African History* 37.
- Alpers, Edward. 1973. "Rethinking African Economic History." *Ufahamu* 3, no.3.
- Appiah, Kwame. 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Austen, Ralph. 1993. "Africanist Historiography and Its Critics: Can there be an Autonomus African History?" In *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, edited by Toyin Falola. Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman Nigeria Plc.
- Ayandele, E.A. 1966. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. Longman: London.
- Barnes, Teresa A. 1999. "We Women Worked So Hard": *Gender, Urbanization, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956*. London: Heinemann.
- Biobaku, S.O. 1957. *The Egba and their Neighbours 1842-72*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Burke, Timothy. 1996. *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification,*

- Consumption and Cleanliness in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Chanock, Martin. 1985. *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Comaroff, Jean and John L. Comaroff. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, Volume 2*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cooper, Frederick. 1994. "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History." *American Historical Review* 99, no.5.
- . 1996. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dibua, J.I. 1997. "The Idol, Its Worshipers and the Crisis of Relevance on Historical Scholarship in Nigeria." *History in Africa* 24.
- Dike, Kenneth O. 1956. *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Falola, Toyin, ed. 1993. *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*. Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman Nigeria Plc.
- Feierman, Steven. 1990. *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Geiger, Susan. 2000. *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Glassman, Jonathan. 1995. *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast 1856-1888*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Hopkins, A.G. 1973. *An Economic History of West Africa*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hunt, Nancy Rose. 1997. *Gendered Colonialisms in African History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 1999. *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Lambert, John. 1995. *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press.
- Mallon, Florencia E. 1993. "Dialogues among the Fragments: Retrospect and Prospect" In *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*, edited by F. Cooper, A. Issacman, et al. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Mamdani, Mahmood 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Meillasoux, Claude. 1972. "From Reproduction to Production: A Marxist Approach to Economic Anthropology." *Economy and Society* 1.
- Monson, J. 1998. "Relocating Maji Maji: the Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Eastern Highlands of Tanzania 1870 — 1918." *Journal of African History* 39.
- Moore, Henrietta L. 1994. *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.
- Neale, Caroline. 1986. "Writing 'Independent' History." In *African Historiographies: What History for which Africa?*, edited by Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Oppong, Christine, ed. 1983. *Female and Male in West Africa*. London and Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Pierre-Phillippe, Rey. 1979. "Class Contradiction in Lineage Societies." *Critique of Anthropology* 13-14.
- Ranger, Terence 1976. "Towards a Usable African Past." In *African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson: Proceedings of a Seminar in Honour of Basil Davidson's Sixtieth Birthday at the Centre of African Studies*, edited by Christopher Fyfe. London: Longman.
- . 1968. "Connections Between Primary Resistance Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa." *Journal of African History* 9.
- Robertson, Claire C. 1984. *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socio-economic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sunseri, Thaddeus. 1997. "Famine and Wild Pigs: Gender Struggles and the Outbreak of the Maji Maji War in Uzarambo Tanzania." *Journal of African History* 38.
- Temu, Arnold and Bonaventure Swai. 1981. *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique: Postcolonial Historiography Examined*. London and Westport, Connecticut: Zed Press.
- Tshloane Keto, C. 1999. "The Challenge of the Africa-Centred Paradigm in the Construction of African Historical Knowledge." In *Out of One, Many Africas: Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa*, edited by William G. Martin and Michael West. Urbana and

- Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- "The University of Botswana, Department of History Graduate Handbook, 2003." Also available at <http://ubh.tripod.com/download/handbook/hh02.pdf>.
- Vail, Leroy, ed. 1989. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: Currey.
- Van Onselen, Charles. 1976. *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*. London: Pluto Press.
- Vansina, Jan. 1994. *Living with Africa*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Vaughan, Megan. 1991. *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- White, Luise. 1990. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zezeza, Paul Tiyambe. 1993. *Modern Economic History of Africa*. Senegal: Codesria.
- . 1995. "Noma Award Acceptance Speech." *Issue 23*, no. 1.