

SONDEREGGER, Arno (ed.). 2015. African Thoughts on Colonial and Neo-Colonial Worlds: Facets of an Intellectual History of Africa. Berlin: Neofelis. 220 pp. ISBN 978-3-95808-023-2

reviewed by

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From the 3rd century geographer Solinus to classical Greco-Roman writers and European Enlightenment philosophers through the American revolutionary leaders down to the twentieth century colonial and post-colonial eras, Western scholars and thinkers have persistently theorized Africa within the discourse of negativism and nullification. Africa was, and to many remains, a continent bereft of civilization, advanced cultures and any semblance of intellectual tradition. Africans supposedly lacked the mental and intellectual capacity to think and theorize complex ideas about politics, economics, aesthetics, arts, philosophy, etc. This is part of the broader Hamitic hypothesis which depicts Africa and Africans as reflectors and mirrors of Western intellectual history and traditions. African thinkers, if at all they existed, were copycats who lacked originality, but relied on, and copied from, Western traditions.

In November of 2014, however, a group of African and Africanist scholars gathered at an international conference organized by the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna, to engage this seemingly unending debate about, and denial and caricature of, African intellectual history and tradition. Their major task, it appeared, was to take on, and complicate Western skepticism about, and denials of the authenticity of, African intellectual history. The outcome is this collection of essays that not only establish, unequivocally and unambiguously, the wealth of Africa's intellectual history and traditions, but also its complexity and most importantly, its complication of Eurocentric intellectual history and ideologies.

In the opening essay titled "The Role of the Japanese Model in Ethiopian Political Thought (1900-1936)" Sara Marzagora discusses the influence of Japan on Ethiopian political theorizing and understanding of modernity. She contends that Ethiopian leaders opted for a top-down approach to modernization. As arbiter and architect, the state, therefore, helped advance modernization through the provision of scholarships to deserving students.

However, many of the intellectuals, products of these scholarships who came of age in the 1920s, and 30s, soon developed an uneasy relationship with the government. They rejected colonial-imposed approaches to modernization, and sought instead a uniquely Ethiopian approach. Their desire to modernize Ethiopia led to search for an appropriate model of modernization that was similar to Ethiopia. They looked for a small nation that modernized successfully against all odds and gained a respectable position among the big nations. They considered Japan a perfect exemplar. Japan exemplified the top-down, monarchy driven approach to modernization which Ethiopian intellectuals sought to replicate. This conception of modernization as the “effect of kingship” shaped Ethiopian intellectual approaches till the 1960s. Marzagora describes them as “Japanizers” who favored “appropriate appropriation” of Western modernity to Ethiopia. Their conception of modernity called for borrowing from the West, while maintaining “the best” of Ethiopian indigenous cultures and traditions. Despite their critical orientation, Marzagora argues that Ethiopian intellectuals were co-opted by, and became an extension of, the state (monarchy).

In her “Africa and Neoliberal Circuits of Intellectual Value Production,” Paulina Aroch-Fugellie uses the writings of the Tanzanian scholar-activist Issa Shivji as framework for analysis of the period from the rise of the New International Division of Labor in the late 1960s to the present. She argues that though African intellectual production sought acceptance of the “enabling global circuits of production and consumption of cultural capital” it nonetheless occupied a prioritized and independent position when it comes to “production of meaning”; that is, the “socially relevant” and “intellectually transformative” functions of theory. She invokes Shivji’s writings to establish that African intellectual tradition was rich and very much a contributing, albeit critical, component of the global circuits. Lena Dallywater’s “In Search of ‘African Aesthetics’” analyzes the writings of four West African scholars (two Nigerians, i.e. Godfrey Okechukwu Ozumba and John Isola Ayotunde, and two Cameroonians, i.e. Engelbert Mveng and Mbog Mbombog Bassong) to engage the debates on the relevance and essence of African aesthetics. She discusses the “areas of tension” about African Aesthetics, Philosophy, Arts and questions of diaspora minority identities and forms of racial and cultural nationalism.

Collectively, the four scholars argue for the authenticity of African Aesthetics.

Anais Angelo's "Virtues for All, State for No One," looks at the political ideas of Jomo Kenyatta and his discourse of post-colonial. Kenyatta was critical of reliance on, and cautioned against the seductive and destructive power of, colonial miseducation. Africa constituted the core of his modernization theory. He believed that modernization has to preserve Africa's traditional forms and culture. According to Angelo, Kenyatta was very critical of the "detrribalizing" effect of urbanization. He prioritized instead preserving and respecting tradition. The family, whose moral authority Kenyatta upheld, was central to his philosophy. He considered the family the ultimate social basis of the state, and conceptualized the state as strictly a legal institution, and not an instrument of social transformation. Though Kenyatta's political imagination was molded by both Kikuyu and Western cultures, he would not sacrifice his Kikuyu traditions for the West. Ever cautious against the force of "colonial mentality", Kenyatta sought to preserve the best of African tradition.

In "The Making of Biko," Myra Ann Houser discusses Steve Biko's role in bringing *Black Consciousness* to the fore of the international anti-apartheid struggles, and enhancement of the work of the *South African Project of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights* in its efforts to become active in the anti-apartheid movement. She analyzes the Project's association with the Biko led *South African Students Organization* (SASO) and *the Black People's Convention* (BPC) in the Terrorism Trial of 1975-76. She highlights Biko's activism and intellectual contributions to the anti-apartheid struggles.

In "Bwanamvinyo, Protean Nyerere, and the Battleground of Ideas," Lutz Diegner highlights and analyzes the intellectual worth of neglected African language literatures, specifically Swahilophone intellectual literature from Kenya and Tanzania. This subject remains a neglected theme in African intellectual studies and discourses. When critically analyzed, the author argues, Swahili fictional texts provide rich insights into the wealth of East African intellectual history. In their writings, these neglected African thinkers (Euphase Kezilahabi, Said Ahmed Mohammed, and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere) use the medium of Swahili to interrogate neocolonial history. They contribute to East African intellectual history in numerous ways not the least by engaging the idea of the "great thinkers" of East

Africa, Africa and Asia in order to challenge colonial and neocolonial epistemological criticisms of Africa.

Ninja Steinbach-Hüther's "Near and Far: African Academic Literature in France and Germany" challenges the notion that African academic literature is either nonexistent or on the margins of global knowledge production by showing the wealth of African intellectual production in French and German publishing houses. Through this quantitative analysis of academic writings by African intellectuals in the Social Sciences and Humanities published in France and Germany, Steinbach-Hüther challenges and complicates the prevailing Eurocentric nullification and devaluation of African intellectual heritage.

In "Knowledge Production about the Cameroonian State," Janine Kläge challenges the established tradition of colonial discourse in which knowledge production regarding Africa was the exclusive domain of European terminology or shaped by "institutionalized" description produced in non-African contexts. African thinkers have challenged this claim and produced knowledge about Africa in both colonial and post-colonial eras. Through interviews conducted in urban areas with intellectually-engaged activists, the author analyzes how knowledge about the Cameroonian state is produced and circulated among the people. Cameroonian intellectuals were however divided on how they perceived the state. The division was largely between Francophone and Anglophone intellectuals, with the former preferring the Western "Welfare State" and the latter the "Liberal State" model. Contrary to Western mischaracterization of the African state as "weak" and "failing", these Cameroonians perceive their state and government as being in need of reform but not necessarily weak, or failed or illegitimate. Nonetheless, Kläge contends that Cameroonian intellectuals' construction of knowledge about the state is influenced by Western models. However, their perception of the state is derived from personal experiences which contradict Western notions.

In "Ethiopian and Ghanaian Thoughts on Asia's Rise," Felix Müller discusses how intellectuals of both countries looked to Asia for models of development and modernization in their quest for "development" models that could locally be adapted. Through cultural transfers, Ghanaian and Ethiopian intellectuals and state representatives were heavily influenced by what they perceived as the success of the Asian approach. Based on

interviews conducted in Ghana and Ethiopia in 2013-14, Müller theorizes that intellectuals in both countries challenged the capitalist and socialist orthodoxies. They turned instead to China, Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan. Inspired by the Asian models, this developmental-state approach challenged neo-liberal and socialist orthodoxies.

Joanna Tegnerowicz's "Rebel against Colonial Ties," is a critical appraisal of the neo-colonial and post-colonial thoughts of the Nigerian cultural critic, Chinweizu (born Chinweizu Ibekwe), as represented in his seminal but neglected book *The West and the Rest of Us* (1975 and 1987). She describes the book as a scathing rebuke of the West and its influences on African intellectuals. In Chinweizu's view, Tegnerowicz contends, the West had nothing but negative and destructive influences on Africa, particularly the intellectuals whom he derided as lackeys of Western influence. Chinweizu seemed to valorize African intellectuals who are rooted in traditional cultures. He blamed colonial education for what he characterized as his "miseducation" and internalization of negative and self-loathing consciousness. Colonial conditioning had alienated Africans, especially the Western educated intellectuals many of whom had become what he termed "Ariels" who had been seduced to become instruments and defenders of Western interests. He accused them of equal culpability for Africa's predicaments. He highlighted the psychological aspect of power and exploitation; and the ability of the exploiter to induce the exploited to internalized values and attitudes that perpetuate exploitation and subordination. Tegnerowicz contends that Chinweizu's ideas and critique of colonialism and neocolonialism remain relevant and enduring rebuke of, and answer to, Western discourses on Africa's alleged intellectual inferiority.

In the final contribution, "Which Way Africa?," Arno Sonderegger reexamines George Padmore's 1956 publication "Pan-Africanism or Communism?" in the light of debates about the directions of African states in post-World War 2 era. In Padmore's view, this period confronted Africa with the critical challenge of choosing a path to the future that could enhance economic and political freedom. Padmore was sceptical of the "nation-state" approach; given the colonial situation and its stranglehold as well as the endemic ethnic and regional differences and divisions. He did not think it was possible for a nation to effectively lead and free its people under those conditions. He also rejected capitalism as an option due to its

exploitative and divisive character and tendencies. The choice as Padmore saw it was between Pan-Africanism and Communism. Of the two, Padmore was convinced that Pan-Africanism was the more viable for Africa. He deemed Communism incapable of dealing with the complex realities of Africa. Sonderegger describes Padmore's ideas as perceptive and indeed prophetic. The failed paths taken by African states since independence were precisely the ones Padmore had warned against: Capitalism and narrow "Nation-state" models. Padmore's perspectives, according to Sonderegger, derived from his understanding of the mechanisms of colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. This led him to suggest Pan-Africanism. Sonderegger concludes that the question Padmore asked in 1956 "Which Way Africa?" remains unanswered and relevant today.

African Thoughts on Colonial and Neo-Colonial Worlds is a collection of essays that makes a compelling case for the wealth and complexity of African intellectual history. The authors, from different backgrounds and disciplines, and utilizing different methodologies, successfully unravel entrenched Western and Eurocentric discourses and claims about Africa. African intellectuals theorized about their states, their societies, about colonialism, about neo-colonial and post-colonial challenges. Their ideas were equally inwardly directed and self-critical. They engaged the social, economic, political and cultural challenges of their respective nations. Their writings and contributions have garnered international attention and interests. They complicate prevailing discourses that nullify and argue against the authenticity of African Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Epistemology. The study also underscores that even as African intellectuals challenged and complicated Eurocentric discourses, in their quest for solutions to some of their pressing national challenges, they often turned to foreign (Western, Asian) models. Some argue for combining the best of both African and foreign models and ideals. Others reject the West, emphasizing instead, the potency of indigenous institutions and values.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding not only the dynamics of African intellectual history and heritage but also the sophisticated and advanced nature of colonial and post-colonial critical knowledge production among Africans.