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Toyin Falola. *The Humanities in Africa: Knowledge Production, Universities, and the Transformation of Society.* Austin: Pan-African University Press, 2016. 443 pp. $32.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-943533-02-2.

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Tradition, Hegemony, and the Crises of Africa's Academies

The book is a collection of disparate lectures given at different locations over a span of five years but it is connected by purpose and content: that of creating competitive relevance for the humanities in a perpetually hostile environment. The phenomenon of globalization, industry, and the Internet or digital media have conspired to promote the interest of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, with its newfound acronym, STEM. The bookâs argument, in a roundabout manner, firmly establishes the fact that the expunging of history as a subject from the school curriculum in Nigeria has hampered the humanities in their effort to liberate themselves from the shackles of relegation and marginalization. The book not only identifies humane institutions, such as universities, as sources of growth but also highlights personages and personalities as bulwarks of education and development, hence the biographical identifications of such individuals as Nelson Mandela, Steven Biko, Tai Solarin, Edward Blyden, Harold Tarver, Benjamin Brawley, Desmond Tutu, Willis Weatherford, John Henrick Clarke, and many others. The book also makes reference to the preoccupation of postcolonial literature and studies with pan-Africanism. It is a potpourri of ideas and historical events as they affect education and the humanities in Africa and its American diasporas that Toyin Falola refers to as âthe other.â

The methodology that underlies the book and that is crucial to its critical understanding is actually outlined in the last, but most extensive, essay. This essay was first delivered at the inaugural conference of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) held at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, in November 2015. The title of the essay is the same as the conference presentation: âPluriversalism.â What does this omnibus term mean? It is a coded reference for a general review of methodology in all systems of knowledge production. The author wants Africans to reconceptualize all received ideas in order that present universalities will be reconstructed to include an Africanist perspective. In every way, Falola wants attention for Africa in a way that will encourage the emergence of African solutions to Africaâs problems. He hopes this will lead to the indigenization of knowledge and ideas as well as to mutual respect and understanding among world cultures and civilizations.

Viewed from another perspective, the author queries the validity of globalization as an intellectual phenomenon or tool of analysis and identification for Africa in the twenty-first century. He makes allusions to the predators of the past and of the present. However, what remains unclear is this: if we regard the colonial powers as the predators of the past, are the political leaders of the postcolonial twenty-first century predators of the present? The authorâs point on the dislocation between institutional invention and knowledge impartation is truly valid, but are African universities African

or British? What constitutes an African university? Is it the mission, vision, or the curriculum? How can Africans contextualize knowledge and help to build the basis for societies or genuine democracies in their third world nations? Given Ramon Grosfoguelâs (2007) thesis of calibrating the indices of standard written script, history, development, and democracy as representative of a peopleâs attainment of power, how have we moved geometrically in time and space within the last century?[1] What are we to do now to localize the global and reverse the prejudices and underdevelopment of the past? In spite of the odds and the high stakes, Falola remains eminently hopeful and futuristic. His solution: âOur combative epistemic rebellion must reject intellectual domination, and affirm the integrity of African epistemologies to promote all forms of Africanizationâ (p. 274). The author worked assiduously through the nine chapters of the book to advocate and reestablish a counter-discourse or discourses to reconfigure various aspects of African studies methodology. For instance, he recommends that we begin to explore the writing of canonical texts that will become universal epistemologies capable of righting the imperialistic wrongs of the past. He genuinely believes that such âpluriversalistâ efforts would account for the differences within Africa as well as make the distinction between Africa and the West. One great strength of the work is the broad range of its textual and extra-textual references. The bibliographic range is truly panoramic.

Falolaâs logic is commendable as he weaves the idea of creating a base for organic, organizational intellectuals in the context of classic university education and a humane military-industrial complex that has sustained Western societies as a model that Africa can replicate in its quest for development. This will confirm the West Indian-born cultural historian, journalist, and political activist Cyril Jamesâs pan-Africanist call that there is room for all civilizations at the rendezvous of victory. The book recognizes that there have been eras of devastation as in the stories of slavery, colonization, and apartheid, as well as the establishment of utopias in Pharaonic Egypt; the philosophies of Ubuntu and Omoluabi on the continent of Africa; and seminal diaspora ideas, such as the back-to-Africa movement, Afrocentricity, and post-blackism. These generally give room for hope regarding a world that is not beyond redemption and restoration. They also grant the impression that creative engagements in activism and in the academy are ongoing. To borrow Chinua Achebeâs phrase (1975), it is âmorning yet on creation day.â[2] The only minor omission in the theorizing here is the absence of contextualization in the discussion of Africaâs traditional and homegrown intellectuals. Historical evidence has always pointed to the fact that the activities of intellectuals are particular to their respective continental spaces. There is no reason to suggest that it will be different in the present context and era.

The book is eminently readable but the illustrations are somewhat uncoordinated. Beyond this, however, the book is a bold and daring intellectual adventure, straddling disciplines and vocations in ways that democratize intellectual and professional spaces. It will contribute to the general discussion of what has become a peculiarly African predicament in the continentâs history of underdevelopment.

Notes

[1]. Ramon Grosfoguel, âThe Epistemic Decolonial Turn,â *Cultural Studies* 21 (March 2007): 211-223.

[2]. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (New York: Anchor Press, 1975).

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