



Derelict Shards & The Roaming of Colonial Phantoms

By Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor



Thank you for such a generous introduction. Honorable Minister, Michelle Müntefering, Professor Drs Rebekka Habermas, Bettina Brockmeyer, Ulrike Lindner, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon from my side of the world. Nicole Gonsior, Katharina Klaus, Simone Baumstark thank you for all your support. To the panellists, audience, some of whom are friends signing in, a big hello. I trust that you are all holding up well in these surreal days.

A quick apology:

My presentations are usually accompanied by dramatic visuals, mostly collated from the public library that is the World Wide Web. Copyright issues associated with this session; means I have to forego the visual evidence.

When Professor Dr. Rebekka Habermas contacted me to inquire whether I would be interested in offering a keynote, I reminded her that I am a person of artistic persuasion, not an academic. "That's what we desire." She replied. I asked if she was aware that I do not have a single politically correct bone in my body." She said, "Good." "I eat sacred cows." I pleaded. She implied, "Guten Appetit."

So here we are.

Derelect Shards: ...

An opening quotation by the late Swedish author, Sven Lindqvist, who for me represents those rare human beings who do the hard work of refining and engaging a sense of their moral consciousness and conscience, however disordering that can be, in his extraordinary work, ‘[“Exterminate All the Brutes”: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide](#)’, in the first paragraph, he observes: *“You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.”*

I concur.

So this is a very preliminary incursion into what I trust will later become for this initiative, among other possibilities, an investigative, excavatory processes. Some figurative bodies might be exhumed in the process of this brief telling, and raise a stink. I don’t apologise. In this offering, Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon make technical appearances, as do other thinkers. Fanon and Cesaire are reminders that the road maps already exist. It is the will to change ourselves through implementing their prophetic imperatives that has been absent.

Also.

About Africa.

For this presentation, do hold its giant and complex pluralities in mind. I refer to the whole of Africa, the pluriversality of it, its essential diversities: there is no subbing of the Sahara in my Africa. Its territoriality extends beyond the seas., its tentacles touch every space that exists in the world.

And, although I am Nairobi and Kenya born, bred, formed and identified, the Occident has and does inform and influence me; this is an intrinsic part of the multiplicities I contain, I live my paradoxes with ease. Note that, yes, I do treat history as one of the paint palettes for my work. However, I prefer and relish the older, deeper and longer histories of the interstices of my people. As brutish as the fairly recent encounter of Africa with the Occident had been, as soul-damaging as it still is, that encounter, in the scheme of things, comparatively speaking, is but a small, viciously irritating, admittedly wildly dramatic phrase with a semicolon in the long, long, long trajectory of the book of African existence. If now it dominates so much of our historical conversations it is because it was an existential wound-creating encounter with structures, systems, ways of thought that penetrate our lives to this moment. It is, however, not the single point upon which our entire African lives pivot. Furthermore, the stories of our encounters with you are myriad, diverse and dispersed; it is not a monolithic tale. The common factor is ‘The Occident’ as metaphor, symbol, wound; as existential threat; as a diversity of forced tragic and horrific experiences, of direct encounter and brutal confrontation with wave after wave of an excess of the unexpected, unimagined, unmitigated evil occasioned by acts of war; and this invasion and its intent was war, and a war that despite the best of the myriad efforts of a people unused to encountering another people able and willing to betray both human hospitality and their word, a people willing to commit random acts of genocide...this is a war our people lost to the Occident totally.

You.

Sie.

It is this ‘you’ that this reflection and initiative first ought to attend to. I think... Before we can arrive at a ‘we’, we must exhaust the accusative, ‘you’, ‘Sie’, not directed at the individual, but to a particular and historical cultural position, idea and consciousness and its world-making choices. The German Colonial idea is fed by, formed by, fuelled by the grander Occidental colonial imperative.

The collectivised cultural will that worked as a gang to enforce and sustain the evil genius that was colonial matrix.

Shared is an interesting word in English. Still, whatever is intended by it, we first must prioritise attending to the 'us', in community and later in the collective before we can even arrive at a shareable 'We'. Also, because the colonialism catastrophe did not unfold in isolation, the 'we' encompasses other non-African and non-European worlds, who I hope are enjoined in this project, if not the conference.

Now.

This paper went through two major revisions, and I use these to set out a context: The first version prepared for, was it May, offered a point of view that called for a **forensic** historical reckoning to help stay an inevitable coming explosion of rage. That became moot when fault lines were created by the grotesque public lynching of the human being, Mr. George Floyd, and rumblings started all over the world. **History intervening**. A second revision was inspired by the world-scape created by the ongoing visitation of the Coronavirus. I was startled by the discombobulations and public health disorders of societies that have behaved for the last eighty years as if they were exempt and excused from the vagaries of human suffering, that have treated the sufferings of others in the world, like nations of Africa, as an intrinsic flaw in their nature. Around that time, I also happened upon a commentary on the June 2017^[1] World Bank Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility and the 'pandemic bonds' they had floated. The investor nations include the European Union, the USA of course, and Japan. The bonds were oversubscribed. These bunch were betting heavily on reaping profits out of pandemic-caused mass deaths, primarily in Africa and possibly in Asia. These bonds were to, "*transfer pandemic risks in low-income countries to the financial markets*". Put simply, here was the commodification of anticipated suffering, the instrumentalization of anguish for profit. The human scavengers then proceeded to package their macabre money grubbing, and obscene feeding frenzy as philanthropy. My visceral disgust focused this presentation. It is now an **Aetiological** enquiry. There is an urgent human need to interrogate a 400-year old cultural mindset. How does a dynamic culture get to lose grip of the basics of being human? How does this culture come to justify and then amplify its dependency on its predation of other humans? Is there any precedent for a culture seeing itself, and intentionally undertaking a long-history probing of its cultural conscience and collective soul? In the pandemic bond subscription story I found a perfect condensation of the essential character of the European imperialism and colonisation project.

*Colonialism as **shared** history?* At this stage of things, a rephrasing of the theme will probably be sought. You see, when a psychopath enters a family's home and proceeds to rape, rob, eviscerate and murder them, and then settles in, takes over the family pets, the premises, the lands. Starts growing grapes and mines the gold he finds there, and then becomes extremely wealthy in the process, marries a well-brought up delicate lily from his home town, becomes a source of wisdom and starts to host the finest of classical music soirées, builds a reputation as an impressive family patriarch and, later his statue is raised in his home town on the day he establishes an endowment for scholarships in the humanities ...*now*... no matter what, the brutalised, displaced, victimised family upon whose annihilation the psychopath has built an impressive life, that wounded family, if any do survive, cannot engage the atrocity that decimated their relationship with existence as something of a 'shared experience'. The original inhumanity, the violation of an intrinsic and basic covenant of human relationality, the desecration of human dignity and decency forbid it. With very few exceptions—I can't think of any—the forced entry of Europe into our worlds linger long as a horror story of brutishness, cruelty, violence, predation and inhumanity, no matter what shining edifices have been built atop the grievous wounds.

But what else might a descendant-beneficiary of a history of heinous crime do when confronted with

the reality of this, finds a spark of horror within themselves and is afflicted by a need to make peace? A suggestion: enter naked into the worlds of the shadowed memories and knowing. Undertake to collect and collate memory from out of the crime scenes; approach with reverence the weight of tragic knowing that descendants bear. Listen. Witness. Attend to the truth (Capital 'T'). Strive for a language for the experiencing. Translate this into heartfelt human grief. Speak it out to another. Acknowledge. Be heard. Endeavour to repair. There are no expiry dates for acts of human reparation, and hope that somehow, somewhere, sometime (it cannot be hurried, demanded) the 'F' word—Forgiveness—gently enters the threshold of engagement.

Aime Césaire:

"no one colonizes innocently, ..." a nation which colonizes, a civilization which justifies colonization - and therefore force - is already a sick civilization".

I worry that unless a wilful effort is made to dig around the historical roots of the genesis of what becomes the colonial enterprise—I mean the human mindset and sequence of experiences and thought and cultural compromises that converged to make it unfold in the anti-human way that it did, yet another long season of good minds round and round a dry watering hole will unfold. There are important questions waiting for all of us at the roots. I need to understand, for example, as a human being perplexed by the depth and intensity of evil, who, will billions of others, still lives out colonialism's resonances and discontents—what was in the European cultural psyche that turned such an excess of its migrating population into sociopaths, psychopaths, and serial killers operating in the world? This was abnormal by any historical standard. Why did it happen to Europe in particular, in the way that it did? Knowing the codes of life, hiding the intrinsic sadism under the veneer of Judeo-Christianity with its *'Thou shalt not kill-Thou shalt not covet-Love thy neighbour as thyself'* tenets, in confronting the other, the stranger, why was there such a wholesale failure of faith as life and action? Future research processes, probably by combined teams of forensic pathologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts might uncover some of the reasons for this aberration, which then proceeded, mostly through a hitherto unexperienced will to violence, will to annihilate masses, will to genocide, to turn its derangements into laws of and for the world.

By the way, I use the metonym 'Occident' to refer to the ideological space from which the originators and architects of the catastrophe that becomes colonialism emerge for the sake of aetiology and the tomb-poking process that is this presentation.

Oh yes, about those pandemic bonds... Good news. Fortunately for humanity, the winds of fate do sometimes blow fairly. Covid-19, that equal opportunity existential threat has caused the would-be-vampires to join the rest of humanity in reflecting on the meaning of human vulnerability and mass suffering; of dealing with uncertainty and making peace with the unknown. The papers on which the bonds are printed are bulkier and more valuable than the anticipated returns on investment. And this year, the World Bank ditched its second offering.

Colonialism as Shared History. Past, Present, Future? There is a one-word answer to the implied question: What we share most because of colonialism is that Greek word, *trauma*. But what to do with it when that trauma is a multi-prism, multi-form distinct-character presence? Lay these out, I guess. Listen, at the core of the tragedy of colonialism is the sadness of wilful destruction of the gift and treasure of the intimacy of humanity, of what-could-have-been-had-we-met-differently-and-humanly. Our greatest shared loss occasioned by a violent and hubristic encounter was each other. We lost each other. *'Derelict Shards'* the title references jutting, sharp and pointy bits that still pierce our ease with one another. These phantom shrapnel from the fallout of our fatal encountering in this ghost-making project, not aided by a faux-innocence and deliberate amnesia that sweeps our many restless dead, the terrible deeds done to secure advantages (yours and ours) under so many

metaphorical carpets.

'*Shared colonialism*'? So which of the thresholds of our discontent do we cross into first? Epistemic, Economic, Theological, Scientific, Conceptual, Ontological, Philosophical, Historical, Industrial, Economic, Linguistic, Cultural, Militaristic, Technological, Artistic, Scientific, Biological, Civilizational, Imaginational, Aesthetic, Teleological, Psychological, Typological, Natural? Pathological? There is tangible historical evidence to go with each of these and other unmentioned categories.

You wanted a speech. I have none to give. If a type is required for this presentation, then call it a **dirge**, or an introit for a requiem, or a literary autopsy. A dirge is a call for introspection for both dirge-singer, bereaved family, community and the deceased, whose life, most African cultures understand, is a continuum. The dead must still account for the meaning of their choices, their existence, and the effects their lives had on others. There is a witness. The dirge is a site and space of, among other things, argument, audit and debate. The dirge is a site of witness, and also outpouring and acknowledgment of pain and sorrow. But when there is pain, there is paradoxically, still life; there is hope. And oh yes, after the dirge has detailed the things that needs to be shouted out, the dirge singer is at once forgiven and is not held accountable for things said. (**I am indemnifying myself.**) The dirge becomes an outlet for the release of sad ghosts that would lurk restless, for the sorrow that might consume, for the deceased that died afraid their lives, loves and meaning would be forgotten.

A different point: I treasure the word 'autopsy'[\[2\]](#), in its etymological and aetiological sense, as a method of inquiry and investigations. *Autopsy: see for yourself* in naked, unvarnished truth the innards of what is before us in a prosaic and philosophical quest. For colonialism's form-changing, euphemism-dolling phantoms, I wish to offer a ruthless autopsy service.

This presentation unfolds in both a literal, digital and metaphorical Berlin: a city one cherishes, yet a city that is also in itself an unsecured multi-level crime scene of historical proportions. I heard a tentatively hopeful question behind the provocative conference title. Here is my position: **it is still premature to ask it.** You see, we have not yet even evolved a philosophy or grammar for the reconciling of our rattling skeletons, those dread phantoms and sometimes frolicking ghosts that roam the carnage of the devastated landscapes of tragically generated pasts that leach into the present with a lack of acknowledgment, with excessive noise, with ceaseless conceptualising and abstraction, and with which we collude to do nothing, and through this do-nothingness suffocating the life and keeping sealed the doors of hope for a robust, living, human future between us.

Back to aetiology.

Sie.

You.

The **Occident.**

Not just Germany.

As with many shape changers founded on ether, the Occidental notion always reshapes and reforms itself. Where are we now? The Five Eyes Alliance? The North, The West, Developed, First World, Nirvana? What is your presently trending metonym? Anyway, the idea of the Occident, was given a dogmatic imprimatur through the June 7, 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and the associated Papal Bull that launched the alleged Age of Discovery. Didn't anyone think to interrogate such a ridiculous

demarcation of worlds? No?

Ok, let us leap across centuries.

Timeline: Berlin, (Nov. 15, 1884-Feb. 26, 1885):

A summit of the leadership of the world's thieves, protagonists of the Age of Discovery, plus a few others, gathered ostensibly to resolve the Occidental Invader-created questions connected with the Congo River basin in Central Africa, but in actuality to apportion to themselves pieces of a grand old continent withal its cultures, kingdoms, nations, peoples. They will create borders between villages, assert territorial possession by means of a long, mostly asymmetrical war, flying the twin trojan-horse fig leaves of a civilising mission, and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, neither of which they believe in. In this event, the real human motive: avarice, lust, obsession, wealth, power is kept concealed. Every gross intention is made to sound like philanthropy and humanitarianism, and is published as such over the objections a few good humans. Has this template ever changed? Soon after, murderous European hordes, mandated by their home nations, will fan out across an ancient continent looting, burning cities to the ground, committing mass murders, erasing humans; raping, spreading thirteen different diseases (ranging from dengue fever to syphilis; measles to the plague), rewriting histories so that, years later an apparently educated French president, Sarkozy, will stand in what had been a trans-oceanic, transmodern trading centre systematically distorted by his earlier compatriots, and confidently state that Africa had no history to speak of until... the European. [3]

Derelect shards:

There are a trillion 'pieces' of 'Colonialisms' scattered across our worlds, transcending borders and time and space. Your museums, collections, libraries filled with looted artwork, power objects, documents that bear testimony to the egregiousness of your ancestors acts, the intrinsic evil of the catastrophe of our sustained meeting. How come Mr Sarkozy education does not allow him to connect the Senegalese high-value looted art work, the elaborate cultural items, the human body parts in French stolen-good clearing houses (museums and collections) with the young people he addresses in the city where his earlier compatriots had enacted those crimes? Such an unreflective conscience, such a moral void even if it can deliver poetic twaddle with an intensity of super-confidence that is shocked when questioned. Do you ever wonder what psychological processes allows one culture to project an emptiness upon an older, grander, continent and all its people while transporting, and hoarding the bounty of that civilisations to its cities? I ask: what psychic force gives confidence to a European to affirm the sobriquet of cannibal to another's when it is to Europe that the ripped-up body parts of our numerous dead, the murdered, are transported, are kept, are fetishized, are stored and are even debated over? You Germany, with your shrines and reflections on the devastation of the Shoah, that there is to this moment a dispute about what to do with stolen, appropriated, desecrated human remains, the horrific evidence of the Occident's inability to come to terms with its own ghastly conscience, its will to murder, its compromise with intrinsic and moral evil. But for how long, my dears? That this depth and scope of unadulterated evil does not seize the national conscience says all that needs to be said, not only about our fundamental disconnect, but the fact that the site where the most difficult work is to be undertaken is in that space of re-humanisation. So, dear Germany, how often have you asked yourself what it means to be human? And having explored that thoroughly, what is your reply to the sibling question: what does the humanity of the other mean for me?

Let me now take this dirge an octave higher.

For your culture and peoples, what you call 'colonialism' was your obscene worship of the Golden Calf, the actioning of your dedication to Mammon to which you gave over your essence and souls in

exchange for others' power, wealth and control, at the expense of a reverence for human existence, and a recognition of the rights of nature. You! You suffocated your own humanity, plunging the earth into grief, tragedy, anguish, sorrow. And you still refuse to reckon with that reality, with your disease distribution, your bewildering necrophilia, to which you are still so attached. You compound your murderousness with an amazing (in a bad sense) inability to agree to let the stolen dead home.

Who are you?

You tell us.

It means your own interrogation of your historo-cultural conscience; but would you dare to undertake this most challenging of tasks, this 'examen'?

Let's try this:

Open the crypts today, exhume the graves and put out the formaldehyde bottles where you have stored the bodies and body parts of our desecrated dead, and invite a pathologist to generate a report; that is also an historical document, isn't it? You cohabit with colonialism quite unbothered, don't you? The Occident: Why are my ancestors bodies and body parts still mouldering in your museums, those elegant shrines to that gesture to the thieving spirits of your ancestors? Why are you still struggling with respectfully returning the stolen deceased home?

Talk to us.

Is it that you secretly believe that by keeping them you are able to retain a powerful and magical hold over our lives? Are these your vibranium? But seriously, how will we ever bridge the fissure of the daily airbrushed Occidental conscience regarding Africa's humanity? Will you dare to name the bones of our people you still have in your museums, collections and store-rooms? And while you are at that, shut down your awful zoos: these loathsome legacies of, and evidence of the extent to which your acquisitive savagery extended itself to nature. Must you possess what belongs to others even at the expense of a right to thrive in life? Sharing colonialism? Look well; somewhere in Europe there is an East African Savannah Giraffe named Gretel shivering in an enclosure, a cage, in a winter cold that is most alien to her species. Her role is to satiate ravenous gazes of those who need to feel that they possess her, have access to her essence. But friends, what sort of collective cultural insanity tolerates this sort of sickness, renders it 'normal', a signifier of 'progress', a mark of 'civilisation'?

Colonialism, you wonder?

But my dears, it is only a plane ride away.

You have great choices: Australia, Canada, United States of America, Brazil, and New Zealand: cool destinations. Northern Ireland—yes, that too. There are quite a few islands to choose from: Chagos, St. Helena, Reunion, Mayotte, Lampedusa, the Malvinas. Are those places too far from home?

Easy: Your Museums, University store rooms, so many private collection; archived materials, even libraries. Permit me to remind you of a most excellent, oft overlooked site: The grand old banks with mandates that originated in the Colonial feeding frenzy. Their records. Photographs, their listings. And their networks. The Auction houses too. And how could we neglect all the chartered companies? All the imperialistic nations of Europe had plenty of these, including the play-innocent strangely amnesiac Scandinavians. Chartered Companies: mandated beneficiaries of a long, long season of murder, plunder and brigandage. Many of these chartered companies evolved into the myriad companies, with new names; companies you uphold even today as beacons of great light on a benighted world.

The purpose of the colonial project was singular:

Seize wealth and profit by all means necessary, even genocide. And your people did so with extraordinary success. Nothing says 'shared' as does African goods building European economies for 400 years. But now...in a cold, business sense, in the interest of sharing proceeds, as part of a new historical mandate, if you are serious, let us share research, collect records and set up an independent forensic accounting project for every one of these ex-chartered companies and their affiliates. There is a Mount Everest of debt to the African continent that that has not ever been repaid, let alone referred to; it includes royalties in commodities illegally benefitted from for over 400 years. These include coffee, diamonds, gold, and uranium. Human labour, taxes. This is just a start. I suggest that in consideration of infrastructure laid, and some compassion (to cushion the shock to the delusional system), perhaps the interest should be calculated over the **outstanding debt** rather than the full and original amounts and benefits generated from profits made out of African stolen resources. And please, let nobody confuse this settling of outstanding accounts with reparations. Reparations is a completely separate conversation. In this strict accounting process, the acts of violent plunder, the paid militia, the manufactured wars, the human trafficking and slave-making, the genocide mandates these brutish trading companies supported by the state, institutions, and the security apparatus are not factored in. (These can be dealt with in a separate tribunal.) The despicable modus operandi continues to this day in places like the DRC, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and Bolivia. The Occident: Is this really what fulfilling the imperatives of living your highest human ideal looks like? Is this what your culture defines as meaningful existence?

You do love to gently insert and tout 'Development Aid' as the panacea, the conscience salve, your holy grail—the poverty and pity economy is a lucrative one, as the pandemic bonds suggest—but I trust that you know that we know that you your debt to us is far, far more than those couple of coins you toss our way. We are aware that at least 65% of the resources, probably more, from our continent sustain your economies. Colonialism as continuity: does the persistence of this set up, the trade structures rigged entirely in your favour still make any sense to you? Why must a system with roots in that catastrophe that we call colonialism still persist and undergirds what we call 'economy' today? It is likely the failure lies fully with us, not you. Evil never yields the advantages it has secured for itself. If we are to trust in the shared intent to repair historical wrongs, are you suggesting that you are prepared to endure what assessing and unravelling the economic matrices would entail? Are you yourselves prepared for what you will lose? I am not necessarily concerned about Occidental angst, as much as I am about having our people sucked into another energy-drinking, seasonal thought laundering machine that will, at its best, yield an excess of hot air.

By the way, I should have asked this earlier: **What do you want of us now?** What is your agenda this time? Our experience of you is that your interests in Africa have never been without a motive that is only for your benefit. So tell us upfront what you want and **what is in this for us**. Whatever your answer keep in mind that between us lies a chasm filled with irresolution, of unexpressed sorrow, of systematic erasures; of denial, contempt, and gaslighting aided by willed amnesia, propaganda, rebranding, theorising and appropriation.

Anyway, as we autopsy colonialism what must we effect to gain deep insight into the cultural imperative that was even able to transform human beings into commodities, and hold nature ransom? What pathology infected the Occidental so that it could do this to the earth, wounding it so abysmally? We understand that Europe has had a terribly long history with the slaughter of its own people; the reason for the ghastly Westphalian principle of sovereignty exported worldwide stems from needing to end the thirty-year war, with its over 8 million dead. But what fed this ease with human slaughter so that this becomes an abiding feature of the Occidental hegemony? To explore this theme we would need to call in theologians and theologian-exorcists to work with researchers, for by asking it we understand that we enter into the realm of seeking to understand the mystery of

existential evil.

It is true there are only a few states that might have been historically been exempted from experiencing some form of colonisation. The occupation and domination of another's territory and their physical, imaginative, historical and cultural life seems to be a human habit. Regarding European colonisation though, in my experience, there is often times a certain shudder of secret pleasure at the memory of having once dominated others, a nostalgia and even longing for a time of imagined imperial glory. What many of the Occidentals I encounter find almost impossible to engage with, are the probable sites of shared (de)humanisation, their particular stories of victimisation by others. The Swedes I have met quickly gloss over the history of ancestors turned into serfs in their own country, who were forced into building St Petersburg in horrid geographical conditions, and were mostly worked to death doing so. Now then, as a site of mutual inquiry, of gathering insight of the affect, might the German consider the season it refers to, when it does, as the 'Occupation by Allies' as a possible space and place of a profound cultural and human woundedness and humiliation that would find resonances with the colonial experiences of others? I am an outsider—so I am probably stumbling into a volcanic sore point as a bull in a ceramics shop. I mention this, because in my brief sojourns here, I have been struck by the telling absences, the familiar silences, the recognition of the species of ghosts, and the complexity of unease in speaking about this time. Perhaps this has as much to do with why such an occupation took place in a country that was also spliced. Nevertheless, the gaps are interesting: the absences and silences in historical telling and literature. The meanings of occupation and amputation. Displacement within your own home. Of losing worlds. Of living under the insult of mediocrities that lord it over you, and as they do so they inform you how this is for your own benefit. To dare to speak, even of the meaning, affect, sense of this experience in a truthful way, is it not possible? Understand this, such a dangerous (in a good way) space of engagement would help subvert an expectation of an engagement that still strongly preferred, for all manner of reasons including power dynamics, to read Africa as the pitiable perpetual victim, helpless scapegoat upon which so much horror has been visited, to permit the perpetrator(s), now undergoing political repentance, to adorn themselves with the sackcloth of restorer, administrator and deliverer of just balance and goodwill to the once again passive African recipients.

Please don't do that.

It is debilitating.

Listen, the power of the African space as a listener to the histories of the Occidental, especially its acknowledged miseries, is viable if our mutual goal is towards the re-humanisation of peoples. There are immense possibilities in juxtaposing similar experiences to arrive at a common human jargon of lived and embodied histories. *Uncomfortable?* Good. You see, if we are to break into the heart where our exchange becomes meaningful, transformative and future-making, then we have to stand metaphorically and historically naked before each other. We traverse a tenebrous nightscape. To survive it, knowledge, order, fearlessness and truth are weapons to seek and wield. Let's drop the airs, the layers, the sophistry and associated bullshit from the get-go. A visceral, courageous, even messy human engagement is what a new kind of history of us requires.

Oh!

I remembered something else.

My dear Germany, just what the hell was that reparation offer you recently made to Namibia after so many years of negotiations?[\[4\]](#) On top of that you even toss your 'safe word' development aid into the mix. Have you gone totally mad? Such obliviousness and mediocre engagement from you,

Germany? The Nama and Herero endure a horrible invasion, put up a spirited fight to secure their existence; suffer a gruesome genocide for their efforts, lose their country, their world-view, their self-knowing, and imagined futures because of your choices. A good number of your descendants, your German Diaspora in Africa, live as Namibians in Namibia to this day, and that offer is what you come up with?

We have come to expect this gaslighting thinking outcome from the responsibility-denying, self-mythologising Anglo-Americans, or the perpetual-performance-of-innocence Swiss and Scandinavians, but not you, not a nation and people that has managed to keep a stern, clear gaze on its shadows and chasms. There is probably more behind the scenes than what we hear about, but what was made public suggests intense historical dissonance, a lack of depth reflection and genuine regret at the atrocities committed by known ancestors, and shockingly lazy thinking. What a missed opportunity.

But I also get it: There is an underlying terror that probably informs this insulting gesture. The full opening of that Pandora's box of reckoning would reveal the kind of skeletons that dismantle the slick veneers of imagined civilisation. To admit to and an intrinsic impulse to genocide, to necrophilia, to inhumanity would damage your carefully cultivated civilised Euro identities. Too late! The African space-scapes are a scrying mirror for Occidental culture: look in it. Do not get so entranced by your reflections there. That is not the point. A scrying mirror reveals the depths of soul. Pay attention instead. Try. For the sake of the next generation.

More on this topic.

I looked around for what other imperially offending nations had offered as gestures towards seeking to reconcile a heinous past: You are aware of "The Murayama Statement released by former [Prime Minister of Japan Tomiichi Murayama](#) on August 15, 1995: "On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the War's End". Murayama apologised for, and named Japanese war and colonial crimes and atrocities, admitting to Japanese responsibility for the deaths of millions. Can this conference imagine such an engaged cultural reckoning with conscience?

By the way, no human desires another to wallow in guilt.

That is selfish.

Guilt will not magically change the past.

What is sought and desired by the afflicted is to be seen, heard, acknowledged, to be soothed, to be given a chance to face the offender. To hear the offender accuse himself of the fault is meaningful. Such courage might unleash a treasury of options that open doors to the imagination of a more forgiving future. Reckoning must be written on the body, then we can really begin to experience history as shared. But one does not hold one's breath. The Occident on its own volition seems incapable of the basics of such a gesture. *Hubris*. They are however likely to when the ascendant star-ship China locks into place and wishes to finally have a discussion with the descendants of the architects and perpetrators of their 'Hundred Years of Humiliation'. Don't hold it against us if at that time we ask China to squeeze from you our apology statement while they are in the process of collecting theirs.

Speaking of China, I note with mild amusement your chattering fluster about Africa's tryst with the East. First, Chinese historiography is intricately connected with Africa's older and recent pasts; this is a reactivation. Second, the attraction of China? A change of script is as good as a rest. And the BRI is compelling in its vision. Third, Our continent should also have bound its fate and future to the

intentions and ambitions of Bandung I and II, and not pivoted westwards into a modern-era trap.

A brief digression: Just to make things clear; the type of speech I would make for an Africa initiated process would be different. There I would speak of turning within, of observing, re-strategising with a goal to winning this overlong war of worlds; to take a soul audit: and to admit to our own losses, to study the systemic failures of our historical cultural and structures against your onslaught, to note the terrible imaginal and epistemic disruptions, and at last give in to the grief over our millions and millions of stolen and dead, all those humans our ancestors were unable to protect, the nature that was ripped apart. And afterwards to focus on rediscovering a delirious love for ourselves and to make our nations the bounty that they are for our own. And to prioritise Asia, South America, the Middle East, Caribbean and Oceania. *End of digression.*

Another thing:

There are unseen rarely admitted to layers we will need to engage with in order to call in another kind of future history: How would scholars of the world today engage an Occidental culture that is seemingly committed to nihilistic moral disintegration, of what friend and scholar Dr. Wandia Njoya calls suicide-bombers tantrum-throwing that threatens humanity with annihilation if humanity cannot give it what it wants? Have any of your thinkers ever reflected on how and why the Occident entered that way of being in and with the world?

I have an untested hypothesis.

It is situated within and around the history of the European plague (pestilence) (from mid-1300 up to 1500) which came on the back of the Great Famine (1315-17). An existential terror that penetrates the bones of the cultural spirit, a continent almost annihilated, losing to 60-80% of its entire population. A ceaseless season of extensive trauma and the deepest suffering would thoroughly distort any human psyche, more so because this is an act of invasion and conquest of vast territories by rats and fleas that neither prayer nor monarch nor army could contain. Did Europe suffer a soul wound that unchecked, became a spiritual black hole? I have been struck by how much the plague references show up in your lexicon regarding Africa, although we had little to do with it: you were not as important as Asia and what you come to call the Middle East in our economic and trade networks. But I have been more and more fascinated by how much of your plague shadows are cast upon the black body, upon your imagination of blackness almost as if by doing so revenant keeps away from Europe. 'The Black Death', some of your people call it. In this might lie the clue as to the rather bizarre, archetypal, fetishist unreasoning responses received to questions of African agency, beingness or histories.

A Cesairean exhortation is to see and think history clearly, and another important word here, do so *dangerously*. We certainly need a way to put to rest what broils in our soils and souls, of the intimate losses that happen when one set of humans chose to break a covenant of dignity and decency with other humans, a psychic disruption that not only destroyed the codes of hospitality, but served to calcify the human heart. Whatever gifts and benefits our encountering produced will not be truthfully and wholly articulated before the seeping wound between us is addressed and dressed. The history we seek lies elsewhere; within the ruins and ghosts and sadness of what-could-have-been, inside the lives of descendant-survivors of Occidental depravity. Your ancestors seem to have deployed some preternatural forces that they let run amok: These need to be understood and confronted in order to be returned to the metaphorical bottle. They need to be named. Naming is also exorcism; and this we need between us.

Where else can we look for salvage? Inside older histories. You have somehow conveniently 'misplaced' the stories of your much older culture of encountering varieties of Africa; whether

through the multi-century German veneration of the unmistakably African Commander of a Roman Legion, the Christian (before Europe's own embrace of Christianity) sainted St Maurice, who died in Acanum Switzerland, patron saint of the German Holy Roman Emperors, for whose lance, spurs and sword Henry the Fowler (919-936) ceded the Swiss canton of Aargau to an Abbey, whose items were part of the regalia used at coronations of Austro-Hungarian emperors until 1916 (yes, the twentieth century). There were three early popes from the Roman Africa Province, and Generals like Hannibal Barca, and Scipio Africanus. An 'Age of (un) Enlightenment' revisionism constructs and forces on the Occident an unbroken melanin-free European genealogy: Isn't that daft, don't you think? The pluralities and diversities of people in a society seemed to have been the norm there as it was elsewhere. Recognising this can lead us to the right and proper question: When and where did the break occur? Why? Who gained? And whose bright idea was it to prioritise pigment and then entrench the psychosis of racism? And why is there still a posse of zealots always disputing the evidence of historically multicultural, multiracial Europe?

Is the repair of the consequentially tragic (recent) past lost to us?

Of course not.

We are human imbued with an infinite imagination.

We can race into realms where ten thousand worldviews that survived the Occidental onslaught still exist to read the lingering memories there. Out of these might a new grammar of history emerge. *Is there a kinder more human future for and of and between us?* Probably, and most likely under and through the China-originated BRI, since you are a part of it too. We are likely to re-encounter one another again as Mandarin speakers.

But more seriously. Some thinkers-on-trial work is required. Is your culture willing to poke at your Charles Darwins, , John Lockes, Carl Linneaus, Immanuel Kants? Not forgetting that completer of philosophy too, the beloved Georg Hegel who boldly stated that '*man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence.*' And we the non-existent, in a Hegelian sense, have had to live out the strong belief of the Occident in this capsule of condensed stupidity. Will you be stoical as our scholars saw the feet of your gurus and bring them down to their right and proper size? You seek to write a way into another future? Of this we are in agreement; but apart from panoptic-minded thinkers from across the disciplines, we shall need new words, fresh imaginings and imaging. We might also need to recover the old words which your ancestors and you blocked, mocked, derided. To this purpose, will you also allow representatives of the people your ancestors murdered, traumatised, and wounded to meet you in an amphitheatre where memory and history throb, where the rites of repair and reconciliation can be effected? Will you allow yourselves to be silent and listen, or drink bitter herbs and eat the things, the sacraments that lead to wholeness? Will you learn also for your own sake, and the sake of your descendants? You know what, we need gestures. We need an official armistice ceremony, probably in Berlin to close the conference that launched the war against our worlds. We also need to co-create a liturgy of shared grief, a way to reconcile our ancestors, these wandering ghosts. We need to find another phrase to replace the benign 'colonialism'. I propose, The Horror? Mostly out of mischief. To return to Europe that damn Conradian gaze. We would be needed to 'do' history differently: a muscular approach that is transformative and restorative of lost humanity.

Playing with a few scenarios:

One:

I imagine a process created by and for a legion of excellent thinking-persons representing the

disciplines, from all parts of the world, who swear allegiance and belonging to no nation, apart from the realms of History, Truth, Justice, Confession, Atonement and Reconciliation, who would oath themselves to the highest human values including integrity, courage, justice, truth, fearlessness, impartiality. They would re-open the records of the old imperial companies, and other private and commercial institutions with long colonial roots. They would audit the museums and collections. List the plundered assets of cultures and prepare a fee note. We are not talking about reparations yet. We mean the first order: the financial settling of outstanding historical accounts. Families and colonial company beneficiaries are known. The money trail is meticulous and the evidence lies in bank vaults, An audit and recovery of assets historical process becomes a necessity if historical truthfulness is to be reached, isn't it? No one is demanding the trial of beneficiaries, although an apology and acknowledgment would be desirable as part of a reparative activity. They team would visit descendants, or host descendants: they would listen, archive, honour, witness, learn, record, collect, exhume, uncover, audit, analyse, reconstruct histories from communities. They would be film makers, story tellers, dancers, data specialists, biochemists, anthropologists, photographers, coders...those needed to think, create, hear, imagine. They would develop new questions. They would deliver accountability reports to the nations.

Scenario two:

Are the under-40s represented here? *Listen.* Flee! Run! Tear away from the elders of another generation, figuratively and metaphorically. Physically too. On your way out, raid the libraries, and pick out the literature that they ignore. Distil these, and evolve a new grammar of action and thought system as you ruminate on the poetry and prophecies. Go beneath the surfaces and evolve a method to guide your original quest to restore humanity to wholeness. Exhume the graves the elders hide from you. Bring up the cold bones in vaults to the sun to be named and to be accounted for. Raid the museum storehouses. Re-write the texts on walls where the bounty from atrocities are on display. That which should not be displayed in the first place, send home. Take the canon and set it on aflame and see what endures. Dismantle the typologies, the boundaries and hedges that sustain a collective stupidity that is obsessed with dissipating truths. Write apology notes for assorted ancestors. Begin, at last, the real age of human discovery of the human and of the custodianship of the earth using the instruments of your time; technology, platforms, codes that confuse us. Judge us ruthlessly. Spare nobody. Doubt everything. Doubt me. Escape before you are seduced into inheriting the stench and weight of a billion ancient ghosts.

Third option: aka, the story-maker's fantasy:

This scenario is inspired by the aptly named-for-this-moment novel, *End of the Affair*: Graham Greene has Maurice Bendrix, his protagonist, wrestle with a God that overwhelms everything he understands, a God that also seizes from him that which he loves the most, and he gets to understand that this God is after him: he writes his relinquishment of the fight as a final prayer:

"I wrote at the start that this was a record of hate, and walking there beside Henry towards the evening glass of beer, I found the one prayer that seemed to serve the winter mood; "O God, You've done enough. You've robbed me of enough, I'm too tired and old to learn to love, leave me alone for ever."

Standing here in the swirl of a long, long epoch of a toxic relationship with the Occident (its associates, its satellites, its proxies), I offer this prayer: not that you are God, although you have heretically appropriated that role for yourselves.

To the Occident:

You've done enough. You have plundered enough from us. You expect us to account for your inhumanity *ad infinitum*, to diagnose your pathologies and also deliver your absolution. We are weary and wary of you. The truth, unless you define it is alien to your mind, goodness unless you decree it is alien to your conscience, as for beauty—see what your money-grubbing, mammon-worshipping choices have made of our earth. And like the planet, we are weary and wary of you. We are tired of bleeding every time we meet you. You are exhausting. Often, whenever you open your mouths in reference to us, bile and venom pour out, maledictions saturated with saccharine, as if you are the odious scions of the Three Witches of Macbeth. You are soul-draining. You feed off violence. You tranquilise your corruption by turning them to laws that you then raise as sacrosanct. Your existential insecurity drives you to endlessly compare yourselves with others just to affirm that you are still at the summit of some fantastical pinnacle. Who cares? We are tired of your appetite for blood, your moral void, your soul loss, all those phantoms entrapped in your cold-glittering necropols. Gaslighting, absurdity and amnesia: your preferred methods of interpreting us. We are exhausted by your theatre of innocence, your primordial resentments. Our spirits need distance to process the effect of the four centuries of your hungry-angry frenzy. We have our own long outstanding appointment with grief; the ghosts in and of our history will not let us rest. It is time for us to attend to them. We have a date with our history: we must learn how earth's wealthiest continent, cradle and crucible of human knowledge trade allowed itself to be bamboozled, bullied, weakened, possessed, and disordered by a vicious, delusional, bubonic-plague tormented race that arrived at cosmopolitanism so, so late in history, whose primal parochialism keeps it superstitious about pluralism and diversity. Your insanity, its tenacity do not matter to us anymore. With this in mind, apart from the basics of meet and greet, and the cool pragmatics of settling your 400-year old outstanding business debt to us...Please... Leave us alone. *Just leave us alone.* (Lasse uns... in Ruhe)

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[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-11/pandemic-bond-investors-brace-for-wipeout-as-coronavirus-spreads>

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/425m-in-world-bank-catastrophe-bonds-set-to-default-if-coronavirus-declared-a-pandemic-by-june>

<https://www.ft.com/content/70dd05ac-54d8-11ea-8841-482eed0038b1>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/28/world-banks-500m-coronavirus-push-too-late-for-poor-countries-experts-say>

[2] **autopsy** (n.) 1650s, "an eye-witnessing, a seeing for oneself," from Modern Latin *autopsia*, from Greek *autopsia* "a seeing with one's own eyes," from *autos*- "self" (see *auto-*) + *opsis* "a sight" (from PIE root **okw-* "to see"). That is my attempt to extend the many meanings of *autopsy*, it was shipped into *necropsy*, which is still Ok. The idea of colonialism as an always morphing phantom that needs to be exorcised/autopsied, faced fearlessly. I like the dimensions of that word.

[3] The tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history ... They have never really launched themselves into the future. The African peasant only knew the eternal renewal of time, marked by the endless repetition of the same gestures and the same words. In this realm of fancy ... there is neither room for human endeavour nor the idea of progress." July 27, 2007, Nicolas **Sarkozy. Speech** at Cheikh Anta Diop University in **Dakar, Senegal**

[4]
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/12/namibia-rejects-german-compensation-offer-over-colonial-violence>

<https://www.dw.com/en/namibia-germany-reparations/a-54535589>

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