Elephant Conversation II: Zein Abubakar – There is No Struggle Without Culture

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Mwalimu Nyerere Speaks on the Rhodesian Crisis in 1976

Elephant Conversation II: Pan-Africanism Today with Brian Kagoro

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Elephant Conversation II: History of Pan-Africanism with Brian Kagoro

AFRICA: The continent has all the potential to become the world's future food basket

Two decades ago, a storm was brewing in Kenya's teacup. Kenya's smallholder tea farmers were ready to throw in the towel. Inefficiency, bureaucracy and corruption was impoverishing them. Grossly dissatisfied with their fortunes, many were contemplating to uproot their bushes, threatening to send Kenya's leading export into the sort of crisis that had befallen coffee, which tea had displaced as Kenya's leading foreign exchange earner. Kenya's coffee production has plummeted from 130,000 to 40,000 tonnes a year.

But for a bold response by the Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd (KTDA), the agricultural collective that manages the tea value chain for Kenya's 550,000 smallholder tea farmers, the same fate would have befallen them.   The KDTA embarked on, and successfully implemented a bold technology-driven transformation, from leaf collection, processing, logistics, input supply, payments and credit facilities for the farmers overhaul transformed the value chain that included end-to-end automation.

I recently gave the keynote address at the Self Help Africa's annual 'Africa's Change Makers Ball' in Boston, USA, 11th May 2018. During this I highlighted how small-scale agriculture should be considered globally competitive farming in its own right, and why we should recognize its potential to become a pathway to sustainable development.

The KTDA is the first case study I used to show this, and here's why: significant improvements followed the transformation. Real-time data saw perishable green leaves being rerouted to the factory with excess capacity rather than being discarded as waste; 'ghost-growers' were eliminated, farmer registration period was dramatically reduced from six months to three days, procurement for factory equipment was reduced from eight to an average of three months; fertiliser was

delivered on time, energy consumption was optimised and electricity bills reduced by over 30%.

The impact on small-scale farmers was immense. Monthly incomes increased by over 40%. With the Tea Agency consistently paying on the 26th of the month, every month, tea farmers could educate their children, pay for healthcare services, create employment and most importantly, they could feed themselves.

The results of this digital transformation propelled KTDA to unprecedented heights for the continent, becoming the first African organisation recognised by the global 'CIO100' Awards in 2009. This is a global accolade that recognises digital transformation initiatives which lead to both profitability and have a significant social impact.

The transformation enabled Kenya to consolidate its position as the worlds' leading exporter of black teas with a 23% market share, with the KTDA affiliated smallholders account for 80 percent of the share. At the core of this competitiveness, is the fact that Kenya's smallholders produce better quality tea than plantations— indeed in Kenya, smallholder teas commands a 25 percent price premium over plantation teas, and as high as 60 percent for the top quality smallholder teas. Unsurprisingly, the small-scale tea-growing areas in Kenya have the lowest incidents of poverty in the country.

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My second case study was Frigoken, a global leader for premium hand-arranged and processed fresh produce – French beans in particular. Frigoken's premium products are sourced from 70,000 small-scale outgrowers, mainly women who grow export vegetables on plots averaging an eight of an acre. Frigoken provides them with extension services that enable them to meet the exacting quality and international food safety standards, quality inputs at fair prices, and guaranteed market for their products. The technical support provided also helps the farmers to raise their overall productivity thus contributing to food security as well. Like our smallholder tea farmers, Frigoken's contract farmers compete on quality that

can only be achieved through meticulous, labour intensive husbandry that cannot be achieved at scale.

Abandoning one's own journey to take on that of another's is rarely a brilliant idea. For decades, African governments have neglected smallholder agriculture in an elusive quest for rapid industrialization. In the sixties and seventies, they pursued import substitution which sought to replicate European industrialization. It was disastrous. Since the early 90s, we have been trying to copy the Asian Tigers export-led industrialization. It is not working.

Africa is still predominantly agrarian society. There has been much talk of a crisis of rural-urban migration over the years, but 85 percent of Sub-Sahara African people are still living in the rural areas. Agriculture is the largest economic sector in every country accounting for between 20 and 40 percent of GDP. Smallholder farmers account for 75 percent of agricultural production.

Africa will transform and prosper its own way, the African Lions way, not the European or Asian Tiger way.

Africa holds 40 percent of the world's unused and underutilized arable land. As many parts of the world face ecological limits of industrial agriculture, Africa is well placed to respond to the global imperative for ecologically sustainable agriculture. Our continent's small-scale agricultural sector is a priceless pearl—good for the people, and good for the planet. Organisations such as Self Help Africa can assist with replicating and up-scaling the models used by the KTDA and Frigoken. Doing this will ensure high quality standards and consistent supplies that can meet the needs of the global markets while maximising returns for the small-scale farmers.

Africa will transform and prosper its own way, the African Lions way, not the European or Asian Tiger way. For now, I do not see masses of African smallholder farmers giving up their *shambas* for sweatshops. I believe that transforming smallholder agriculture is more than a solution for poverty, it is our ticket to prosperity.

MOVING BOUNDARIES: Building bridges in a Kardashian world

We live in a world where our certainties, including lines in the sand, the imagination of our boundaries, are crumbling. We are in a season where one of the most significant struggles is that of giving a name to the realities of our now. You know the landscape through which our metaphorical boundaries intend to creep: the rise and re-entrenchment of global tribalism—euphemised as alt-right (isn't that the new non-word being bandied about?), nationalism, Brexit, regionalism, partisanship, supremacy, tribalism, and its evil sister, the extensive, thorough, strategic demonisation of "the other". Naturally, history repeatedly tells us how this will end – a human frenzy that accelerates into an unstoppable, diabolic rage that will result in some horrendous mass bloodletting that will lead survivors to another round of shame, guilt, regret, outrage and the promise (again) of "oh no, never again".

Here is a world where an unrepentant sound-bitey demagogue has taken the seat of authority in the world's most powerful nation, his pointing finger just a breath away from an Armageddon nuclear holocaust button. He got there through a democratic process, a free and fair election fairy tale. In this we can read how the boundaries of "civilisational" paradigms now reveal themselves. This, friends, is supposed to be the apex of democracy, the great adventure our nations are walking towards.

Watching The Donald gloat and heckle his way across the United States to the roaring approval of enraptured masses beggars one's previous notions about America. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Adolf Hitler would have been impressed. For an African person from Africa, the scenes unfolding are uncomfortably familiar. As much as I enjoy (yes, I admit, it is petty) the discomfort of a few American acquaintances struggling to embrace the consequences of choosing that orange-hued leader of their free world, I am forced to contend with a Trump-led earth. (Mind you, there are also Teresa May and Marie le Pen on the sidelines.)

What the American election process points to is the reality of our limits. It indicates how dogmatic insincerity couched under political correctness and glossy branding will collapse under the pressure of the actual choices of the human heart. The fact that a tribal supremacist wins precisely because he is a tribal supremacist implies that there are far more hidden worlds within the imagined, idealised America, and indeed within our world and within the African continent. The questions that traverse the heart find answers one way or another, whether we want to hear the truth or not, even if, in the USA's case, the truthful answer is Mr. Donald Trump.

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Let us gesture to some of the questions that may be lurking within these present boundaries of the human heart. None of these questions are ever likely to be answered because to do so would demand that the myths and brands by which we insist on defining our worlds would have to be dismantled. Few are ready to do this. Here are some of those questions:

Would there have been an immigration surge and an ISIS if the United States had not moved boundaries, defied international protocol, manufactured lies to invade and destroy Iraq and Afghanistan and then continued blithely with the annihilation of Libya? Why is there such a massive build-up of war tools right now in so many corners of the world, including Eastern Europe? Is the world preparing for a gigantic-scale war? Why is Russia being turned into a global pariah using the same format that was created to justify the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria (which failed)? To what purpose? Who benefits the most from the wars in the world? Since all weapons carry serial numbers and if the United Nations is truly desirous of ending wars, why has the UN not been able to sanction the sources of these borderless weapons? Is it because the countries that manufacture these weapons are the UN's main funders?

Instead of confronting such questions, what we as a human race prefer to do is to bury these questions with our hysterical laughter at the antics of the gruesome Kardashians, who have been turned into a signal icon for human regeneration,

aspiration and forgetfulness. We prefer Pollyanna-ish and Orwellian newspeak, with Tinker Bell descriptions, such as "collateral damage", to disguise and deny the reality of our fears, discontent, terror and confusion. Meanwhile, the earth is reeling. If it is not from angry persons plotting doomsday scenarios, then it is a climate woundedness that sees a never-before-experienced scenario of the melting of the North and South Poles. The seas are rising.

As a response to such existential global uncertainty, the UN, in its wisdom, appointed Wonder Woman – the pneumatic-bosomed illusory white female caricature with a wasp's waist who wears the American flag as underwear – as the honorary Goodwill Ambassador for something called the Empowerment of Women and Girls. It was a solemn ceremony. When this happened, the world should have realised that our world was truly and royally...buggered (if I may use this most satisfyingly descriptive Anglo-Saxon expression).

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We are living in the eye of the storm of that popularised curse/blessing wrongly attributed to China: *May you live in interesting times*. The closest Cantonese expression refers to a clown in and of current time. Clowns. Rather apt. Still, the forces of nature, space, time and whatever else seem to have unleashed a whirlwind that is driving the world as flotsam and jetsam. We feel it, we see it, we read the signs, but do not dare to construct a lexicon for this.

In a season of such terrifying flux, borders are a moot point. Frontiers will have to be re-imagined and probably called something else. The human person will also have to reconsider who or what it is. Pope Francis has dared to call this time as that of a piecemeal World War III. We freak out. Yet the possibility that an apocalypse has erupted beneath our living room couches while we keep up with the Kardashians is real.

Boundaries are already in movement; the future is in a state of uncertainty. You have already witnessed (the edited versions of) millions of humans escaping historical homes out of existential distress; they walk deserts, they cross boundaries, crash through frontiers, tear down electric wire fences and sail

across wild seas in rubber dinghies seeking safety, hope and a home. The last mass movement of this kind – human journeys into harbours that throw up gates against them – was during World War II. But they keep moving. To what? Where? Transcending boundaries? You have seen the pictures of some of our Africans who have sought to leave for the imagined nirvana of elsewhere now turning the Mediterranean Sea into a cemetery. Meanwhile the African Union, among other African institutions, sustain their impeccable record for profound silences about matters that truly matter to their citizens.

There are other boundary movements that slip off the radar. I am not sure why this is the case, considering that these are bigger than any other migrations taking place in the world right now. I refer to the massive Chinese influx into Africa—official figures are one million, unofficial figures double that – persons now spread throughout the African continent. Mandarin is now a factor of African social and linguistic realities. The blend of cultures and the fruits of such a union through Sino-African children is more apparent now. I ask you then, is the next African decade a Chinese one? If you want to explore African boundaries, look to China. (I am being facetious.)

Great resource finds on our continent, coupled with an awareness of a lack of these resources in other parts of the world, have also increased the populations of persons of Caucasian descent living in Africa. The numbers are always disputed and minimised (the International Organisation for Migration has no figures for current European migration into Africa) because this sort of human movement does not subscribe to a favoured mythology. The figures for these are also in excess of a million, with Angola and Mozambique (in the time of the European economic crisis) receiving together over 700,000 young European economic migrants who settled there to start new lives. Migrant crisis, anyone?

Back to this season of wordlessness.

We feel, see, and hide from what we are most uneasy about. We prefer to draw a line across what does not conform to our delusion or brand of the world. We are silent before the unceasing bloodletting. We skip past the news of the slaughters in Uganda, Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and entire communities living within the Amazon. We ignore the water wars in the US and the soul-destruction in detention camps worldwide, including that generated by Australia's own Faustian pact with Nauru, and more significantly, in the

Auschwitz-like American concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay – that grotesque giant stain on the human conscience that many of us who proclaim, study and articulate human rights choose to ignore.

How is this even possible?

What is the reality of lines drawn out in a world where the best resources available are dedicated to renewing, reinventing and valorising tools of human violence and destruction to which we have acceded power, and now, with reference to drone warfare, handed over a moral impetus to? A boundary-less machine can be directed to choose whether a human being anywhere in the world lives or dies. Is this the pinnacle of civilisation?

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For a long time, the greatest threat to civilisation was imagined as an invasion from a powerful galactic force: aliens. Yet all this time the alien was us – a strange race that both cannibalises and worships itself. The only ones capable of and willing to and particularly invested in destroying the earth in a cataclysm is us.... And we are willing to do so for the most spurious of reasons: to prove the primacy of our pitiful ideologies so that we can be emperors of a swamp.

Exceptional? *Ha!*

The world's latest atavistic impulse is one that is imbued by a virulent Islamophobia. It is unbelievable and unconscionable that the same world that not too long ago learned that an abhorrent depiction and dehumanisation of a peoples could lead to the slaughter of the human soul, the bestial behaviour of human beings and the destruction of the core of human decency can now regurgitate that evil to visit it anew upon others.

If 45 per cent of our African population is linked to Islamic mores, how can we allow this repugnant paradigm to take root unquestioned by our individual and collective sensibilities? Africans, with your endless silences as still as yoghurt, do you even comprehend what this means for your cultures and identities? What happens to being and belonging when by virtue of your facing Mecca in prayer

you become defined as a "terrorist-in-waiting" by a culture and paradigm that prefers and perpetuates a most idiotic and ignorant lens to explain away an actual human and existential crisis, the primary purpose of which is the sustenance of a lucrative war and suffering ecosystem?

You and I have experienced the progressive and strategic framing of this horrible lie until it has acquired the semblance of truth—a post-truth that becomes a post-reality reality. And in this matter, not once have I heard an African reframing an African reactiveness. Not once. Africans, your boundaries of existence are receding and you are blind, deaf, dumb and stupid to it. Your governments have even designated your own soldiers to blow up a portion of your own population and to hold them in suspicion because they proclaim "Allahu Akbar".

The consequences of such extremes of human foolishness manifest in weird new cultural practices. Allow me to be regale you with the tale of a rather senior World Bank official who upon arriving in Johannesburg – her first visit to Africa – showed up surrounded by six, giant, heavily- armed and helmeted security guards who looked like pumped-up black beetles on steroids. The guards had been hired to protect her from the violence of her vivid imagination. I would have done anything to enter into her senses as her plane door opened to a view of the South African city. She proceeded to painstakingly sustain her delusions even as she trip-tropped, trip-tropped all over Sandton Mall like billy goat gruff, needing to justify the expenses of a psychosis created by a cultural commitment to wallow in profound benightedness. What is the language for these new modes of human strangeness?

This, our amputation from both reality and humanity, are the consequences of an investment in an unsustainable idea of the world and its humanity. It is a gross alienation from what should bond, bind and build. You speak of boundaries and bridges, tell me, what types of structures have you called forth to overcome a refusal to experience, even in difference, the humanity of another? What kind of boundaries are you proposing to transcend the now embedded human fear of other humans? We are pleased to invest in propaganda infrastructure to peddle disinformation. We define phrases like "collateral damage" to sanitise and conceal the reality of millions of wilful, innocent murders and the destruction of hospitals and homes for which there are no Nuremberg trials.

Donald Trump appointed the head of the Pentagon a man, who if the principles of

Nuremberg were to be applied, should be hanging at the end of noose, until dead. But this man is to oversee the largest war arsenal in the history of humanity under the leadership of an erratic being. Behold your world.

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With this in mind, what does it mean for you and me to be a human being now? Even with enhanced consciousness of the cosmos and the universe, why are some more still more human than others? Nothing speaks so much to this than the visa application process to which most Africans are subjected. Name of grandmother? Bank account details? Are these people insane?

Even with new revelations shared with us by those seekers, in say, the world of quantum physics or cosmology, why is the prevalent operating mythology still epitomised by the vacuous Kardashians? Why do we prefer that? Even with what we have heard about the awesome wonders of human possibility, why is the inclination that of a willingness to be hypnotised into forgetting reality, to persist in the visiting of such gross wounds on an already suffering world today?

It is no secret that "human rights" are enforced by one set of people and directed at select others. Interpretations vary, of course. They do not stand a chance when confronted by the phrase "extraordinary renditions". In October 2016, a woman-crushing, human-beheading, Yemen- invading Saudi Arabia was voted into the UN Human Rights Council to replace the newly designated pariah of the Occident, Russia. All I will say about that is that it is only a matter of time before the collective human soul gets weary of its own hypocrisy and calls a time out. Wither your boundaries now? To you who live in these extraordinarily conflictual times, what language have you created to match its demands? What does "boundary" actually mean for a time such as this?

Language is a road map and a blueprint, a provider of impetus, a prophetic vessel. Yet we seem to be either too paralysed or far too implicated to be able to generate an intimately truthful lexicon that might transfigure this present, or at least allow us all to cross out of our present limits. Without language how do we intend to enter the depths of our present reality in order to even understand it?

The Kardashians are a colourful and hypnotic screen that shield us from reality. They are not alone. The latest poster child for our condition is poor Boris Johnson, the British Foreign Secretary. In October 2016, he declared that "Africa (the country) could do with some British values" so that the country Africa might join the league of humanity as structured by the vacuum of his imagination. I emphasise this, for in the delusional man's version of the story of English incursions into other lives and cultures, there are no shadow, no demons, no hollows, no genocides, really no messy bits. His eternal soundtrack is Elgar's Pomp and Circumstances No 1 in D minor.

He no doubt keeps up with the Kardashians.

Against this backdrop, now let me touch on aspects of my literary life. I am a citizen of an imagined space called Kenya, whose frontiers were created by an English cartographer when Kenya, the colony, was a British project. What changed in 1963, the day those who became "Kenyans" call independence day? I stated in a different forum how my experiences of the nation only assert to me that the infrastructure and edifices of the colonial state established after the genocidal invasion designed in 1884-5 in Berlin (purists get irritated when I persist in referring to this as the First World War) are still intact. The colour of the skins of the taskmasters may have changed but everything else progresses as it has for over a hundred and fifty years. For example, there is no day that trains stop taking Congo's mineral resources towards the sea to the waiting ships of many foreign nations; not once have these trains stopped moving, even in the throes of serious bloodletting. Remarkable, isn't it?

The people who receive the money are in former colonial capitals, while we waste time and energy asserting... what? Independence? From what?

I live in an Africa experiencing a second-wave invasion – a massive resource grab enabled by our amoral leaders who are mortgaging bounteous landscapes and signing up to massive unpayable loans with strangers. It is likely that within fifty years the great underclass on the continent will be, again, Africans themselves, newly bankrupted vassals of a new set of foreign masters deliberately invited in under our bemused gaze. It is said that history repeats itself especially when lessons first offered remain unacknowledged, unlearned and unresolved. The problem is not with the stranger. It is with us.

Anyway, given this, what moves storytellers of Africa? I don't know about the others, but I shall tell you something of my own compulsion to search dimly lit places of the world and my continent; to live and then walk through the valleys of peoples' shadows in order to try to make sense of the time in which I find myself; our framing, our place, our future in the face of so much.

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I love the gift of being human and sharing life. I love humanity. I love ideas that challenge, invite, inspire and grow life. I also wonder about, worry and want to fix life's fragile and broken places, because something of this time inhabits me and sheds pieces of its ghosts upon my own story. I have a very Catholic urge to name demons, and stare at faces of the enemies without and within before seeking, as part of a collective, to exorcise these. I love the earth. It is a privilege to be here. I love the continent of my heritage. I love my country. The bigger arc of my literary life is a love story that craves a "happily ever after".

So I roam the disciplines, a bit like a pickpocket. I eavesdrop into the thinking from everywhere; silos bore me. I work with words like a mechanic tinkering with leaky places in a marvellous machine. I am a bit of a pathologist, diagnosing a corpse for its cause of death, imagining that I might prevent a similar fate for myself and for what I love. I have wondered why post-colonial Africa became stunned and inarticulate about its world and stopped writing itself into the world with pens of fire. I try to witness those silences. I want the silences to give up ghosts and names so that I can write them as stories and offer them to light, and then with them find the treasure of peace.

My works also interrogate the notion of the nation. I do not believe it exists. In this post-truth world does that even matter, given the reality of the march of super companies and the fetishisation of money? More seriously, I also often wonder if a nation like Kenya and its people suffer a grievous moral injury in their core and memory. Do societies experience collective post- traumatic stress that is

not yet framed in a socio-political lexicon? Some of the frameworks of Holocaust studies profoundly resonate with me as they explain much of Africans' secret angst, all the things of shame, guilt and grief that remain unspoken.

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My book *Dust* set me on that path when, after Kenya's descent into hell in 2007-8, I needed to kick open painted-over tombs where we had nurtured our demons. It led me to wonder if ancestral trauma caused by a violence inflicted on the humanity of another lives out its irresolution by haunting succeeding generations. For most African nations, a horrible war was consolidated in 1885 in Berlin, and imposed itself upon them. It has never really stopped, despite the theatre of changing flags.

How do you move when all your energies are expended in circling, hiding and avoiding a grievous and existence-questioning wound? Do we imagine that the resonance of horror embedded in memory simply fades away? What do you imagine was and is the state of the soul of a man of old Africa experiencing the crushing deceptions and the betrayal of his hospitality by strangers? Who watches his known world disappear and experiences the total powerlessness and betrayal-by-silence of once favoured deities? I see no archiving about this by our people. This absence, I imagine, damages all parties. We have held no memorials for the destroyed. We use our boundaries to shield us from the past and its unrequited ghosts – people who are our brothers, mothers, fathers, ancestors, accusers. There is no "long ago" in the consequences of human deeds.

As a world and as a continent we have never grieved our excesses or our losses of self, families, community, worldview, gods, goods, stories, time, spaces, lands, archetypes and imagination in word, deed and thought. I posit that these live out their lack of resolution to the present. Is it from these too that we seek to escape through our boundaries? What does the now mean to a continent that was massively defeated in an undeclared brutal and genocidal war; a place where defeated men and women could do nothing when their wives, husbands, parents, lovers, sons, and daughters were seized, raped, sodomised, brutalised, mutilated and hunted in their presence?

Linked to this was the economics woven into intricate trade networks. Global

monsoon networks reached into the continent's own heart before reaching into China and Azerbaijan where an African diaspora has long existed. There was the trans-Saharan trade, the southern circuit that moved gold, ivory, gemstones to the coast. The space that is Africa has largely been made up of a people and culture in and of movement as a path to wealth, adventure, humanity and encounter.

What is the impact and implications of such losses of economic wherewithal that offered so many African cultures an access to the world on their own terms? These cultures were violently taken over way by assorted European trading companies that are the parents of the conglomerates we are familiar with today, who own, manage and control the resources of a continent that keep the world afloat. We do not talk often about this; if the conversations occur, I have not been a party to them. The responsibility for this lack of questioning rests squarely at our assorted African doors.

I wonder why in most cases, after fifty years of supposed independence, it is easier and cheaper for me travel to Paris and live there for two months than it is for me to travel to Ouagadougou from Nairobi. Why? We are a people who seem to have not only lost agency over our resources, but have also lost the endless scope of their actual and imagined existence in the basic of ways. For example, most Africans today have no idea that coffee is not all about Starbucks or Colombia and that the coffee culture – its identification and its use and consumption as a beverage, medicine and ritual substance – was originally, intrinsically and creatively African (Ethiopian, to be precise). Again, when I define the African milieu as encompassing all our seas and discuss African maritime imaginaries, many gawk at me as if I am speaking to them in hieroglyphics.

What bothers me the most as an artist is our wilful African unknowing, our wilful constraints – boundaries – to imagining, thinking, hearing and seeing. Are we then to move from ignorance to ignorance, a floating people disconnected from our own humus and unable to speak of it, not only to the world, but more painfully, to ourselves? A people whose story is limited, constrained framed and only retold by others, a story so small that ours becomes an existential battle of making our lives miniscule enough to enter into the categories created in order to not again suffer a brutal fate worse than death. Hovering above our psychic heads is the real fear of a return to the diabolic violence that can be unleashed at the whims of one culture that for the most part—apart from the Germans – has

declined to examine its conscience and review its consciousness of life and humanity in the face of its impulse to atrocities and the denial of these.

I do worry about a post-independence Africa that lost its voice so much so that it is inarticulate before the realities of Libya, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia, Colombia Ukraine, Brexit or Trump. Only bystanders, or victims of fate, have nothing to say about their destiny. Only the long-dead have a right to such silence. How do we proceed to traverse into the present and future through the unknown territories of our being where there are neither bridge builders nor bridges?

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There is a phrase we popularised in Kenya during election 2013: ***"Accept and Move On."*** Moving on. It was assumed that the diabolic violence of the post-election violence of 2007-2008 could be commanded into silence. But the violence and its ghosts keep interfering with our present and feeding from it; we have known no psychological peace. We are caught in a death-roll of a putrefying form of corruption; we are consuming ourselves and are subject to a disgusting inner corrosion that emanates from a refusal to give a name to our horrors. You who speak of movement and boundaries, do you ever imagine that one of the keys to the future is buried in our many darknesses that require courage and humility to excavate in order to extract roots embedded in the past? Given that movement points to two directions, do we dare step into deep truth-telling in order to repopulate the present with what will set the future free?

Now, on a more optimistic note. The African continent plays host to the youngest of the world's populations. It is called the youth bulge, or the demographic dividend. This lot looks at the world through other eyes. They host each other in their rooms. They travel fearlessly. They set up online literary platforms like Jalada.com—look it up – that think beyond boundaries and have, for example, translated a story by Ngugi wa Thiong'o into over a hundred languages, including Urdu. They code. They regenerate vocabularies. They milk sacred cows. They live,

for the most part, an expansive imagination that has no lexicon attached to it yet.

The influx of new souls and cultures into a continent that thrives on variety is a great portent in more ways than it is challenging. Unlike the popularised consensus – not necessarily articulated by Africans themselves – I can also read the influx of the Chinese people into Africa through hopeful lenses. Cultural renewal through the intermingling and exchange of people has always been a force of transformation in the world. These combined forces – the youth and migrants – present an atypical movement impetus on the continent that perhaps promises a transformative idea of place that just may be able to bear the weight of this agitated world and guide it, maybe, into a more wholesome future.

This essay is adapted from a keynote address by the author at the 39th AFSSAP conference in Perth, Australia, on the theme "Africa: Moving the Boundaries" in December 2016.

The Burden of Memory in a Borderless World

After a twenty-five year absence, I returned to Somalia in the summer of 2016. I didn't go back to the cosmopolitan city of Mogadishu where I grew up (now perceived as one of the world's most dangerous cities) but to the federal state of [Puntland](), where I had been officially invited to attend the Garowe Book Fair. The Garowe Book Fair is one of three literary festivals that take place in Somalia; the others are held in Hargeisa and Mogadishu.

In the weeks prior to my impending return, I was racked with doubts and faced complex dilemmas. My return provoked in me an irritating feeling of inadequacy. Was I ready to go back to a place I didn't really know, to come to terms with Somalia being even more splintered now nearly 60 years after independence?

The days leading up to my departure saw me frantically scouring the shopping streets in Moleenbek, Brussels, where I live, in an (aborted) attempt to buy

clothes suited for the occasion. My return to Somalia triggered a series of questions, questions that Somalis in the diaspora often grapple with. Was it really necessary to "disguise" myself to go back? Couldn't I just get off the plane decently dressed, like one did before, instead of being fully veiled?

Despite my enthusiasm, I couldn't help wondering about the significance of going to Puntland, where I had not once set foot during my 18 years of living in Somalia. I prepared myself to take stock of the country's fragmentation that had occurred in a mere quarter century – a fragmentation that flies in the face of the unifying vision of Pan-Africanism.

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Pan-Africanism emerged as a movement seeking to unite the continent over and beyond myopic particularisms and national criteria while respecting the cultural traditions of the black populations. Today a new African humanism is needed. Africa continues to be viewed through the external eyes of others who cast the continent as permanently inferior. Africans need to look at themselves differently, through the lens of their own thought processes.

Europe relates to Africa in fundamentally quantitative terms, and this must be overcome. Human life includes facets that cannot be measured by economic performance indicators, facets such as the social, cultural, ecological and environmental spheres.

As illustrated by Edward Said, the colonial enterprise was not just driven by military and economic mechanisms, but was founded on a complex cognitive construct with accompanying violence that was as epistemic as it was physical. The anti-colonial struggle was both material and mental warfare. Put differently, the resistance to colonialism and the ineluctable corollary of nationalism were, in truth, forced to play out according to terms defined by the West. Consequently, one can deduce that the independence of African nations did not signal an end to European penetration of the African mind.

My own country serves as an example. At its foundation on July 1, 1960, the

Somali territory was home to only a part of its nationals, unlike the majority of African nations, in whose territories were to be found varying ethnic and linguistic groups who were indigenous to those territories. Indeed, the borders mapped out by foreign powers led to the splitting of what is known as 'Greater Somalia' into five parts: Djibouti, the Ogaden in Ethiopia, the North Eastern District of Kenya, Somaliland and southern Somalia (with only the latter two reunited at independence).

Broadly speaking, the nationalist project sought not only to win for Somalia a place alongside other modern nations, but also nourished the aim of establishing a distinct Somali national identity: a shared identity, drawing on the past to pave the way to a modern future. Given the limited level of literacy among the population at large, the theme of national identity was driven principally via theatre and popular songs.

Both prior and subsequent to independence, there were numerous theatrical plays supporting the causes of nationalism and Pan-Somalism. Pan-Somalism had long been relatively significant throughout the land and, ironically, this significance led to Somalia being isolated from the Pan-African movements in the newly-born neighbouring nations.

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Nevertheless, Cabdullahi Qarshi, the famed singer-songwriter and oud-player, could not be stopped from naming a song after the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba, and penned the following lyrics after his assassination:

Lumuumba ma noola mana dhimanee/
Labada midna ha u malayninayee/
Muqiisa la waaye mooyaanee/
Inuu maqanyahay ha moodinayee.

Lumumba is neither dead nor alive/
Don't believe either of them/
It's only his presence that has come to be lacking/
Don't believe that he is absent.

The [Company](#) frequently toured the continent, and even the obligatory national military service led to encounters spilling beyond the country's borders. The singer '[Faaduma Ali 'Nakruumah'](#) told me during an interview that she had earned her nickname during her time spent at the military training centre in Xalane. One of the instructors at the centre was so impressed with Faaduma's brilliant prowess that he told her that if she were to carry on like that, she would become as important as Kwame Nkrumah, the president of Ghana (where he had just been) and a key player in the emergence of Pan-Africanism. Her friends soon took to making fun of her, suggesting that the real reason the instructor had put her at par with Nkrumah was, in fact, her very dark skin. A day later, when the instructor called her Nkrumah in front of all the other young women, who broke into laughter, Faaduma burst into tears. In due course, Nkrumah became her theatrical nickname too.

Examples of plays supporting Pan-Somalism included the 1954 production Cartan iyo Ceebla (Artan and Ebla) by Xuseyn Aw Faarax and Cali Sugulle's 1963 piece, Indhasaracaad (Help). In both plays the protagonists are personifications of Somali territory, of African nations and of the European nations involved. The latter focuses on the [insurrection](#) of the Somalis in the North Eastern District of Kenya shortly after independence.

The federal state of Puntland was founded in 1998, after a civil war that ran for seven years. The violence that was inflicted on civilians in the name of clan membership played havoc with the distribution of the populace throughout Somali territory. Garowe oozes with stories of people fleeing Mogadishu to find shelter in their "ancestral" land. But can somewhere you've never been before be considered your home?

One of my objectives during my time in Puntland was to accumulate and recount tales of the civil war. This was not in order to perpetuate the trauma, but to facilitate reconciliation. [According to Achille Mbembe](#), the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission taught the whole world a crucial lesson by showing the importance of casting off the conditions of victimhood in order to reclaim a more human dialogue and create a new society. In contemporary South Africa, memory is undoubtedly seen in terms of a painful past, but a past which is heavy with potential for a future of hope. The past is a starting point for the forging of a different future based on the precondition of recognising the suffering inflicted on victims as part of the pursuit of truth and forgiveness.

Similarly, Rwanda has shown just how closely memory, history, truth and reconciliation are bound up together.

> *Garowe oozes with stories of people fleeing Mogadishu to find shelter in their "ancestral" land. But can somewhere you've never been before be considered your home?*

A victim of slavery and then of colonialism, our continent has repeatedly had to face the moral burden of memory and the weight of the wrongs and violence that were perpetrated. Today, it is even more urgent that the impasse be overcome, that religious dogma and the concomitant cultural, economic and political colonialism, in new clothes, do not come to dominate our mentality.

During our conversations, the Algerian writer and playwright, Hajar Bali, was at pains to stress that both French and Arabic were local, yet not necessarily autochthonous languages in her country. [As the Martinican writer, philosopher and literary critic Édouard Glissant makes clear](), identity is not an immutable entity, but continually takes shape spontaneously during interactions with others. A tried and tested model is often more alluring than lengthy research with an uncertain outcome. Nevertheless, no future is possible unless Africans start to address the evolution of the present by and for themselves. We can longer continue limiting our existence to the reflection of others' dreams.

From its outset, Pan-Africanism posited the existence of a bond of common solidarity and a shared identity held by Africans and blacks in the diaspora. The existence of this bond would not appear to have been borne out considering the history of the last century. In the words of Felwine Sarr, the economist, philosopher and writer, we are in the throes of a profound relational crisis. We no longer conceive of social relations as a fertile, sacred space for reciprocal enrichment. Relationships have become the locus of unpitying efforts to remove, lump together and overrun; they have become the archetypal locus of exploitation. The creation of a truly human society is the biggest challenge facing our time.

Today Africa is more than ever connected to the rest of the world. Our era of digital communication technology is a time of robust connections between people, heralding major opportunities for interaction and empathy. All the same, many individuals living in our continent have no guarantee of peace, safety or the

conditions for a decent existence. Our times are troubled by manifold crises, both economic and environmental, ranging from nationalism and violent religious extremism to increased social inequality, along with dehumanising structural conditions.

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The African continent is, however, blessed with an incredible opportunity in that it has not entirely swallowed the rationalistic and mechanistic European model, which never ceases to consider development in teleological terms, as though every nation should be following the self-same steps, adhering to an established order or sequence.

Culture, in its artistic, literary, musical and scientific manifestations, proves to be a fundamental resource, capable of sounding the breadth and depth of reality. The main art form is that of living together, constructing a space where society takes shape and provides its own definition of a sense of community.

Starting with the day-to-day behaviour inherent in social relations and physical labour, it is human instinct to establish a body of moral codes and ethical interactions within a community. Is it possible to throw off the spectre of the nation, to be local in order to consider the world as one?

To further quote Glissant, the one who guards the border is without imagination, given that crossing the border suggests a richer imagination of the future and for the humanity to come. Those who cross borders, be they geographical, symbolic, moral or material, encounter a great deal of suffering, but the future is theirs for the taking.

LESSONS FROM WAKANDA: Pan-Africanism as the antidote to robotisation

In May 2013, the African Union launched Agenda 2063, a blueprint for an integrated, emancipated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. There was a renewed commitment to work for the full unification of Africa, with a common currency from one common bank of issue, a continental communication system, a common foreign policy and a common defence system featuring the African high command.

Five years later, Hollywood came out with a fictional story of a bountiful, independent African state called Wakanda in the film *Black Panther*. Wakanda was described as the most scientifically and technologically advanced civilisation in the world — not to mention the wealthiest.

It is not a coincidence that there is a straight line between the aspirations of the Global African Family, as expressed in Agenda 2063, and the depiction of a technologically advanced Africa. From the era of the writings of C. L. R James on the majesty of the Haitian Revolution to the current struggle for the dignity of black lives, the liberation and unification of Africa has always been presented as the basis for Pan-Africanism.

Examining the meaning of Pan-Africanism in the current context of massive technological change requires a new language and a new orientation – an orientation that breaks away from the stultifying concepts embraced by a class of leaders who have no loyalty to Africa and who seek to turn citizens into tribal nanobots without a spiritual core.

We are reminded that in this era of artificial intelligence (AI) the future of humanity is the struggle between humans that control machines and machines that control humans. The late Stephen Hawkins observed that artificial intelligence can be the worst event in the history of civilisation. He [remarked](#) that "unless we learn how to prepare for, and avoid, the potential risks, AI could be the worst event in the history of our civilisation. It brings dangers, like powerful autonomous weapons, or new ways for the few to oppress the many. It could bring great disruption to our economy."

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The exact meaning of life and the future of life forms are now new issues for humans in the era of synthetic life and technological singularity. In 2010, the human genome scientist J. Craig Venter reported that he had taken another step in his quest to create synthetic life, by synthesising an entire bacterial genome and using it to take over a cell. Scientists called this breakthrough a defining moment in the history of biology and biotechnology but the bioethical questions about who will have control over life brings back the debates on technological singularity when concerned citizens objected to those scientists who believed that they could play God. Pan-Africanist and those who want peace throughout the world have genuine reasons for paying attention to these scientific breakthroughs.

In this essay, I am reaching out to the youth of Africa to turn Wakanda from fiction to reality. Ta-Nehisi Coates, who wrote the book *Between the World and Me* for his son, has gone on to be one of the writers for the comic strip *The Black Panther*. In this way he was seeking to inspire his son that there was a future beyond the prison-military-financial-information complex and the hacking of the human brain by the technology corporations. This is important for all youth, but especially youth in East Africa, where the psychological warfare thrust of Empire has intensified efforts to shape the thoughts, feelings and actions of people. For example, we now know from the recent hearings in the US Congress and from the global activities of Cambridge Analytica, that there are technology firms that are programming people, literally hacking into the brains of the youth. Empire and its local allies are seeking to formalise this brain hacking in Africa into a university town in Kenya called Konza Technological City. Was it an accident that Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook visited Kenya and Nigeria?

Early phase of Pan-Africanism and opposition to being treated like robots

The first Pan-Africanists were opposed to the robotics of yesterday when the forms of enslavement on the plantations in the Americas treated Africans like

"machines to make money". The book by Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism,* has documented this phase of the dehumanisation of the African person. This book elaborated on how Africans were treated like machines to enable American society to accumulate immense amounts of wealth to become the preeminent industrial power that it is today. The availability of cheap land and the shortage of labour led to a ruthless system of exploitation called the "pushing system" that enslaved people and which Baptist aptly describes as "innovation in violence".

It was the vibrant Pan-Africanism at the grassroots that precipitated the rebellions against that form of robotisation. Bonds had been forged on the slave ships where that conception of freedom transcended the individual. It was then that the consciousness was cemented that no black person could be free until Africa was liberated. Herein lay the origins of the modern Pan-African movement. In the throes of the independence struggles, Kwame Nkrumah understood that the liberation of individual states was not enough; Africa had to be united to escape external economic domination.

Africa had been partitioned at the 1885 Berlin Conference on the grounds that Africans could not rule themselves and that they were heathens who needed to be civilised. Walter Rodney, in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* argued that technological changes were turned to imperial purposes. Whether it was transportation technology, communications technology, military technology or the latest digital advances, human inventions changed the world and transformed life on Earth while at the same time transforming the power relations between societies. From partitioning, colonial plunder, apartheid and occupation, there were many borders instituted in Africa, including racial, ethnic, religious, territorial and sexual borders.

This partitioning and domination was executed through superior military technology (especially the Maxim gun) and by creating divisions. The small intelligentsia in the Global African Family were the main spokespersons for the ideas of African dignity and self-determination. At the popular level, the opposition to domination took cultural and religious forms, such as the rise of the Rastafari and Kimbango movements, Mourides and other social movements, such as the Garvey movement. African Scholars such as W.E. B DuBois convened international meetings that were called Pan-African Congresses that sought to bring together those with the agenda to liberate Africa from colonialism and to

end [lynching and segregation in the United States](). There were five congresses between 1900 and 1945. The 1945 meeting brought together leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Amy Jacques Garvey, George Padmore, W.E.B. Dubois, Jomo Kenyatta and Ras Makonnen.

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Pan-Africanism from below was manifest in the consciousness of the ordinary Africans on both sides of the Atlantic. This brand of Pan-Africanism inspired the largest mass movement of the century on both sides of the Atlantic in the form of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garveyism took root in the United States where the ideas of African vindication and redemption found a fertile base in a society that was struggling against the Ku Klux Klan and those extremist groups that made lynching a Saturday night outing. The UNIA had branches in all parts of the world, with its newspaper, the *Negro World*, acting as the voice of the Pan-African movement in the period of the Harlem Renaissance. The ambitious projects for the liberation of Africa excited ordinary workers and sufferers and branches of the UNIA were to be found in the USA, the Caribbean, South America, Europe and Africa. At its height, the UNIA had more than two million members. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was among the most prominent Pan-African activist thinkers and leaders who called on Africans to unite so that they could be free.

In the current period when white racism is growing in Europe and North America, especially with the election of Donald Trump in the USA and the emergence of racist and neo-Nazi groups all across Europe, it is worth remembering that the present currency wars, trade wars and actual interventions of the last Depression had also paved the way for the global imperialist 1939-1945 war. The rise of fascism internationally, (in particular, the coming to power of General Franco, Benito Mussolini, Antonio Salazar and Adolph Hitler) and the idea of white superiority posed a major challenge for all of humanity.

The Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 was another moment when the Pan-African consciousness of Africans rose to become a force in international politics. The failure of the League of Nations to respond to the military atrocities of the Italians had led Africans to warn of the dangers of fascism and world war. In this sense, the global Pan-African movement was a major inspiration for those fighting against fascism in Spain, Portugal, Germany and Italy.

The idea of Ethiopianism, a variant of Pan-Africanism, had been widely held among Christianised Africans during the 19th century. Taking the biblical references to Ethiopia to be the basis for the rallying point around the independence of Africa, Ethiopianism represented a manifestation of spiritual and cultural autonomy for Pan-Africanists. In this period of fascism and war, Pan-African scholars, such as W.E B DuBois, George Padmore, C.L. R. James and Aime Cesaire, articulated the ideas of liberation and redemption. In the French-speaking territories, the idea of Negritude was another variant of Pan-Africanism.

The goals of liberation and emancipation at that moment were associated with the capture of state power and ending colonial rule. However, at the end of apartheid, the question of emancipation was understood to mean much more that seeking the "political kingdom". African women from the grassroots are acting as a force to assert the humanity of African peoples and to redefine the culture of emancipation and liberation. It is, therefore, not by accident that transgender women are at the forefront of the struggles for black lives while the more backward men seek to kidnap African women and return them to enslavement a la Boko Haram.

Women at the grassroots are calling on intellectuals to grasp the fact that the culture of capitalism is wrapped in the attendant class and gendered structures along with racial and sexual oppression. Long before the prominence of the #Me Too Movement, black women were at the forefront of the fight for the integrity of the body. They had demanded that they will No Longer Be Controlled, Manipulated, or Abused

More significantly, these women are transcending the individualistic, racial and masculinist conceptions of Pan-Africanism and African unity. It is for this reason that the Pan-African revolutionary Micere Mugo proclaimed that Pan-Africanism was about the lived experience of the grassroots. She observed that "though not cited in intellectual discourses that have so far come to be the literary cannon on

Pan-Africanism, in their activism, as well as participation, women were and have always been the heart of Pan-Africanism's essence, or if you like, substance. Ordinary people, or the masses, including the majority of African women, have been the key keepers or carriers of this essence."

Ubuntu confronts individualism, ethnic manipulation and private accumulation

The current convergence of multiple crises (economic, religious, environmental, technological and political) coincides with an increasing politicisation of ethnicity and regionalism. Liberal philosophies of governance have created the neoliberal nightmare where oligarchs and dynasties maintain political and economic power while dividing the mass of producers into "tribal", regional and religious groups.

The philosophical basis for Pan-African liberation challenges the "ideology of tribalism" and the the materialistic conception of life, along with the masculinisation of the political spaces. In South Africa, for instance, the process of enrichment of a few has been accompanied by the politicisation of ethnicity. Leaders who benefitted from Pan-African solidarity during the struggle against apartheid are now promoting ethnic identification while supporting xenophobia against other Africans.

Currently, the yardstick of profit has become the only viable measure of the good life, while the commitment to Pan-African solidarity and opposition to imperialism are viewed by many politicians and their publics as either a hindrance to the goals of a market-driven society or alibis for gross theft and corresponding conspicuous consumption. Leaders beg for aid while stealing billions and lodging the loot in foreign bank accounts. They starve schools and hospitals of laboratories while purchasing outdated military equipment. At the level of communications technology and computer security, they are completely reliant on the enemies of Africa.

The crude materialism of Western "modernity" emanated from an understanding of the world where "rational" man was entrusted with the divine mission to rule non-whites because of the "will of God". War and conquest were justified in linear terms of progress, from savagery to civilisation. Material goods, industrialisation, technological innovation and factories were presented as manifestations of God's blessings for Europe and North America. Hence the spectacle of the religious

spaces becoming the meeting place for deals and political campaigns.

The definition of human was determined by the extent to which these humans believed that human worth was based on accumulation of material wealth, wealth that was the basis for "progress". Humans who did not internalise this understanding of the accumulation of wealth (a form of accumulation that took perverse forms when it matured into the capitalist mode of production) were considered backward and primitive. On the eugenic scale of Western modernity, Africans are still considered backward and primitive.

Western European approaches to life were considered "scientific" and hence objective and neutral. Classical liberalism emerged in a period when new forms of property in Europe replaced feudal ideas of privilege. Enlightenment thinking about property rights, the oppression of women, domination over nature, domination over non-whites and the universal right to domination became the legitimating idea for modes of economic organisation that engendered a tremendous boost in the production of goods. This unprecedented production of goods was worshipped to the point where commodity fetishism was like a new religion. It was in the spirit of this religion that religious institutions participated in the slave trade and the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth and military power. Today, commodity fetishism is exhibited by so-called "prosperity churches" whose evangelical mission is to make people believe that becoming rich is the Christian thing to do, and that material things are a blessing from Jesus. This religion also guides the new digital companies that are involved in psychological warfare against humans.

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Spirituality and commodities [were conflated](#) to lay the basis for a robotic society where cloning and bioengineered creatures (cyborgs) are the promise of the future. This is the future of the bioeconomy where synthetic life will be

engineered in laboratories and scientists assign themselves the right to patent life forms. AI is now being refined in Silicon Valley to ensure the dominance of white supremacists in the international political system

According to a study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) more than a decade ago, in the bioeconomy industrial production moves from the use of fossil and mineral resources (coal, petroleum and natural gas) toward living biological raw materials, primarily biomass plant matter, such as woodchips, agricultural plants and algae. The bioeconomy is associated with wider application of modern biotechnologies in areas such as agriculture, medicine and industry. It was the late Calestous Juma who argued that African progressive scientists hold the key to ensuring that Africa leapfrogs the old forms of industrialisation in this the era of the digital revolution. Juma had noted that it is not necessary to build new paths of industrialisation in the bioeconomy based on past production of primary products; as the bioeconomy matures, the convergence of nanotechnology, information technology, biotechnology, robotics and cognitive sciences will provide a new basis for the post –industrial society.

African languages hold some of the key signposts of the refinement of cognitive technologies that are part of the assemblage of converting technologies (nanotechnology, information technology, biotechnology and robotics). For a short moment, the National Science Foundation of the USA and its scientists in California had mooted a project called the Human Cognome project to harness the understanding of cognitive psychology. According to the scientists who were promoting this enterprise, the [Human Cognome Project](#) had planned to span various scientific fields, including neuroscience, cognitive science, artificial intelligence and psychology. Africa as the fountain of homo sapiens was a key area of interest as were the early African languages.

In conjunction with this project was the Human Genographic project. Sponsored by the IBM Corporation and the National Geographic Society, its [stated objective](#) was to analyse more than 100,000 DNA samples collected from indigenous peoples. Given that the African peoples of East Africa count as the most original peoples of the human species, the peoples of East Africa were of particular interest for this Human Genographic project. Bioanthropologists were deployed to tap into the African knowledge of the oldest peoples of the planet who are still alive in East Africa.

There is now an effort to reverse-engineer the human brain by studying both its structure and function in order to fully understand mental processes, also known as cognition. The Human Genographic project has many parallels to [the Human Genome Project](). A better understanding of the cognome can illuminate how the brain perceives and responds to the environment, thereby augmenting artificial intelligence technology. It also has many important implications for the study of disease progression by observing changes in cognition to localised damage. A map of the cognome promises to increase mechanistic understandings of the brain. To further this research, bioanthropologists have tapped into the cell lines of the Hadza, the Iraqw, the Maasai, the Samburu, Sandawe, Shilook, Nuer, Turkana Dinka and San Peoples. These peoples are being studied to learn how to maximise AI capabilities to programme robots.

Pan-African unity and the quantum leap

The integration between the cognitive skills of Africans and the new thrust for a different kind of economic organisation will form the foundation for the qualitative leap in the new mode of economic organisation that will envelop Africa in the short and medium terms.

The world has changed dramatically during the past fifty years of the Pan-African project, presenting more complex possibilities for social and economic transformation. Wakanda gave one indication of what is possible when African knowledge systems, along with the principles of social collectivism, are unleashed for the good of society. One could see that the Wakanda people's understanding of their links to their ancestors and to their totems prevented the complete robotisation of their society.

One can also see this in the movie trilogy *The Matrix*, where African oracles were able to separate real humans from cyborgs. It was less than twenty years ago when these science fiction images from Hollywood promised a future where information technologies would reign supreme and shape the lives and affairs of societies, including the lives and the very existence of individuals. Neoliberal futurists, such as Ray Kurzweil, who wrote the book *[The Singularity is Near]()*, saw this as the era when humans would transcend biology. Kurzweil actual gave the date of 2045 when this new era of singularity would begin.

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Bill Joy, in his now famous article in *Wired* magazine, "*Why the Future Doesn't Need Us*", warned of the dangers of the converging technologies. He argued that the new computer technologies provide a much greater danger to humanity than any technology before has ever presented. Stephen Hawkins sounded the same warning when he noted that the era of artificial intelligence could be "the worst event in the history of civilisation."

The African spirit, cognitive skills and ideation system provide a powerful antidote to the projections of the era of singularity. Organised within a transformed educational system where fractal mathematics are taught with fractal optimism, the transformation of Africa would break the distinction between the fiction and reality of Wakanda.

Students in the struggle for the decolonisation of knowledge are at the forefront of the Pan- African project to use African languages in higher education. The Kenyan writers Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been at the forefront of the promotion of the decolonisation of the medium of education. Ngugi has been resolute in his assertion that the decolonisation of the mind is the contemporary form of Pan-Africanism and the future relies on Africans empowering themselves with African culture, language and knowledge. This author has not only endorsed the importance of African languages, but also the tremendous possibilities that await technological change when African institutions of higher learning embrace fractal geometry and seek to link this knowledge of African fractals to the curriculum.

Few political pundits took seriously the comment made by Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook in 2016 that "Africa will build the future". The efforts of Zuckerberg and Facebook to launch a special satellite for Third World countries designed to bring web connectivity to areas of the world with limited Internet access may seem altruistic, but forward planners in Silicon Valley already understand the dynamic socio-economic changes that will occur when African innovators move to new ventures beyond mobile money. Chris Msando, the computer expert and

electoral official who was murdered prior to the Kenya's elections last year, pointed to a future where computer savvy Africans would work to ensure real democratic processes. The same infrastructure of Cambridge Analytica that is now known for brain hacking collaborated in Africa with the same forces that eliminated Msando.

In this changing socio-economic environment of the digital present, where information is controlled to shape perceptions, the African people at home and abroad are faced with new powerful economic forces that are reshaping the global landscape, reconfiguring existing organisations/ institutions and creating new ones. In the midst of this change, the institutions of the US military and finance, along with the other NATO powers, promote worn-out ideas that label African people and societies as failing and failed societies. The US President exceeded this academic discourse by labelling African states as "shithole" countries at a time when the US Africa Command was extending its operations in Africa in the so-called War on Terror. In order not to be displaced by the USA, the government of France has intensified its activities in Africa, especially now that the Sahel has been involved in a duplicitous war against terrorists even while manipulating groups such as the Tuaregs after the [NATO invasion and destruction of Libya](#).

It is in countries such as Niger and Mali where there is the explicit elaboration of US and French military operations to counter what is deemed to be Chinese influence in Africa. The removal of Mamadou Tandja from the presidency of Niger in 2010 was directly linked to his overtures to China. The emergence of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) formation has intensified the mischief of France and the European Union, complicating the old rivalries between North America and Europe in Africa. As recent as 2013, the Senate of France outlined a 500-page document to spell out France's military strategy in the area that was determined to be "Europe's neighbourhood", which includes the zone "from the Sahel to Mauritania to the Horn of Africa and other regions in Africa".

President Sarkozy had been most explicit in the need to topple the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in order to promote the military influence of France in Africa. The destruction of Libya and the psychological warfare against Africans in the form of the war against terror are new aspects of the military management of the international system. It was not by accident that NATO intervened in Libya

because that country had committed itself to anchoring an African currency. But as the mythical Wakanda state alerted many, there are umbilical cords that link the youth in Africa to the youth in Brazil, the USA and Europe.

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African unification, peace and investments in humans

What has been downplayed in the forecasts and projections about international realignments has been the role of militarism and warfare in the re-division of the world. Wars and rumours of war in the Persian Gulf and in the Korean peninsula now dominate the international news. War speeds up the processes of transformation and regression.

In the past, such re-divisions have been violent. From 1885 to the present the militarisation of society, there has been a negative integration of Africa into the international system. The promise of the era of using artificial intelligence for mass surveillance and US drone warfare has now become a reality. Africans will have to be vigilant to ensure that the present warfare in Yemen and Syria, along with the tussles between Saudi Arabia and Iran, does not engulf Africa and Africans.

Forward planning by Western military strategists for a confrontation with China in Africa brings to the fore the preoccupation with peace and reconstruction as one of the central pillars of African unification. For this reason, the African Union has called for the silencing of guns by 2020. It should also have added the demilitarisation of digital technologies.

It was fifty years ago when the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. admonished peace activists to rise above robotisation. In the speech "*Beyond Vietnam*" he said, "I'm convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the

shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered… A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Ubuntu reparative justice and the escape from spiritual death

Currently the African people are caught in a revolutionary moment, a moment when political institutions and the law are all caught in the tumult. Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt are examples of societies that exhibit manifestations of this tumult, witnessed by massive social resistance from below, seismic shifts in economic relations, political alliances and military relations and transitional power swings.

Old formulas for political legitimation no longer suborn the mass of sufferers. Instead the people are seeking to unearth a radical Pan-African vision of the future, and that is a vision of a shared humanity where all the citizens of the planet are able to live in peace. This vision is grounded in the moral ethic of sharing and social collectivism that is enshrined in the philosophy of Ubuntu.

This philosophy is one of the antidotes to spiritual death. It is the revolutionary philosophy that celebrates reparations, forgiveness, love and reconciliation. The Caribbean Pan-Africanists are reminding the youth in Africa that there can be no struggle for Pan-African freedom without reparative justice.

Currently, the policy makers at the African Union are designating those in the Global African Family (called diaspora) outside of the continent as constituting a sixth region. However, they envisage collaboration in the form of capturing billions of dollars in remittances. Yet African leaders are silent when African-American youth, such as Trayvon Martin, are shot to death, but these leaders will travel to Paris to march with French leaders when a few French citizens die in extremist attacks.

The Caribbean Reparations Commission, as a frontline Pan-African formation, is calling on African youth to understand the demands of reparations so that there is an end to the constant babble on sustainable development goals (SDGs). Imperial institutions fear the Agenda 2063, so every week there are meetings so that

African policy makers are focused on 2030 instead of working to realise the long-term goals of Pan-African collaboration.

As far back as the period of the struggles for independence, the peoples of Africa called on Africa to speak with one voice. In the book *Africa Must Unite*, Nkrumah wrote: "A United States of Africa must strengthen our influence on the international scene, as all Africa will speak with one voice...We must stand firmly together against the imperialist forces...We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from the very positive dangers of returning colonialism in disguised forms." Nkrumah saw that even in the moment of independence, freedom could not be guaranteed unless the African people were united.

As they remind themselves about the struggles against robotisation in the 21st century, Pan- Africanists are also conscious of the reality that the goal of decolonisation is not complete. There are still the outstanding issues of Western Sahara, Diego Garcia, sections of the Comoros, the islands of Puerto Rico, Martinique, Guadeloupe as well as the other colonial outposts in the Caribbean. The discussions on Pan-Africanism and liberation are seeking to bring back that energy and spirit in a moment of crisis so that the technological revolution and the solar revolution can be harnessed for the well-being of the majority and a changed world economy instead of for the profitability of companies such as Space X, Facebook, Google and Amazon.

The revitalisation of Africans at home and abroad

The revitalisation of Pan-African confidence has been underlined by four interconnected processes:

1. The military defeat of the apartheid army at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988
2. The release of Nelson Mandela, unbanning of the liberation movements and the independence of Namibia.
3. The holding of the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001 and the declaration that slavery constituted a crime against humanity.
4. The formation of the African Union and the elaboration of the plans for Agenda 2063.

The major limitation of this revitalisation process is the fact that those

intellectuals schooled in Eurocentric ideas are still at the helm of political power. Youth rose up in Egypt and Tunisia to make a break with their repressive leaders, but imperialism supported the militarists while those who constituted the majority at the African Union refused to pay their dues and proposed Western neoliberal views of development in the so called New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Global warming, the drying up of Lake Chad, Ebola and Western cyber control over Africa dictate that our youth must think beyond petty differences based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, race or sexual orientation. Aspiring politicians exploit the insecurities generated by structural adjustment to create the scare of millions of illegal immigrants moving across borders. Even while making declarations at the African Union and energetically supporting NEPAD, politicians in many parts of Africa (especially South Africa) whip up xenophobia and hinder the free movement of persons by creating restrictive immigration policies and immigration procedures that violate the basic human rights of those Africans who believe that Africa is for the Africans. Thus, even at the moment when the Continental Free Trade Area treaty was signed in March 2018 to create the world's largest single market, the leadership continue to ship their money to foreign bank accounts and hinder the creation of a common currency in Africa. This is why the talk about Pan-African economic relations lags behind the reality that forty years ago there was a common currency in East Africa.

> *We need to clarify the differences between the project of unity as inscribed within the present political leadership and the thoroughgoing push for freedom from those who crave a new vision of citizenship. We will agree with Nkrumah that Africa needs a new kind of citizen. Our task is to draw from the positive memories while outlining the challenges in the present period.*

This author has identified key areas of transformation with a focus on the democratisation of access to water resources and the re-engineering of the African landscape to unify the African people. It is a transformation where the working people "who have eyes and ears" will choose to look back in order to look forward. Looking back draws on the memories of transformative moments of African liberation and draws inspiration from these moments. The moment of Haiti's independence as well as the rapid decolonisation period between 1956 and 1965 were two such moments when the explosive spread of the culture of

independence temporarily silenced those who wanted to colonise Africa for another one hundred years. Kwame Nkrumah was the leader of Ghana at that transformative moment. We need to clarify the differences between the project of unity as inscribed within the present political leadership and the thoroughgoing push for freedom from those who crave a new vision of citizenship. We will agree with Nkrumah that Africa needs a new kind of citizen. Our task is to draw from the positive memories while outlining the challenges in the present period.

Bob Marley, the cultural leader, was a notable Pan-African spokesperson of 20th century who wanted to transcend racial divisions with a universal message of African unity, love, peace and human emancipation. His call for emancipation from mental slavery remains a message to the youth who are now exposed to the brain-hacking of the digital companies controlled by billionaire Africans and non-Africans alike.

PAN-AFRICANISM: An idea whose time will never come?

First, an "ancient" African fable.

A chicken foraging somewhere in Africa's bush came across a pawpaw tree that had grown diagonally instead of straight up. A ripe pawpaw was hanging at the end, which the bird could not quite reach, and so decided to walk up the inclined trunk instead.

As it perched on the end of the tree pecking away, a fox entered the small clearing, looked up, and saw what was going on. "Be generous. Share," said the fox. "Why are you eating all by yourself? Knock it down so we can eat it together."

I may be just a bird, but I am no fool," replied the busy hen. "Clearly the meal you intend is me. Since when did foxes eat fruit?"

"I see. You must not have been at the meeting, then," the fox observed.

"What meeting?" the hen asked. The fox went on to explain to her how a large meeting of the forest's animals had taken place recently where they had come to an agreement to no longer eat each other. Instead, they would cooperate to gather and eat fruit.

After securing a sufficient number of *haki ya mungu*s from the fox, the hen knocked the pawpaw to the ground and fluttered down after it.

> *In the end, of the African Union's 55 member states, 44 were present and signed up to the removal of trade barriers, 43 signed the launch declaration, and just 27 agreed to lifting barriers to the movement of people.*

As the two stood side by side eating, a lion appeared, and began to approach them. The fox screamed, and immediately took to his heels.

"Where are you going?" asked the hen.

"Don't you see the lion?" yelled the fleeing fox. "Run for your life!"

"But what about the agreement?" asked the puzzled hen as the big cat drew up beside her.

"You don't understand," the fox shouted over his shoulder. "That lion was not at the meeting either!"

(Actually, this fable not that old: it was probably made up during the wrangling over delegate credentials at the 1978 Moshi Peace Conference of anti-General Idi Amin forces. The dysfunctional tree was a metaphor for Uganda's condition.)

The just-concluded African Union Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) summit in Kigali once again brought to the fore political Africa's favourite topic: Pan-Africanism and it possibilities. To many, this is the Holy Grail of African liberationism, the ultimate destination and logical conclusion of the exertions of previous decades, but building on centuries before that.

The outcomes of the summit are triumphantly declared to have been to finally take a first concrete step on the long journey to the political and economic integration of the continent. Three things required consensus: to agree in principle that such an initiative was required now; to agree to the removal of

nearly all customs barriers to intra-African trade; and to agree to the removal of selective immigration barriers to intra-African travel by Africans.

Beneath the excitement, there remained many difficult details that could potentially become obstacles: not every African country was present in Kigali; of those present, not everyone signed up to all three elements of the treaty; among those that did, each element of the protocols must now be subjected to discussion and ratification in the parliaments and cabinets of the participating countries. Among the "faint-hearted" were the continent's two economic power houses (such as they are): South Africa and Nigeria. South Africa, represented by its new president, Cyril Ramaphosa, said that even initialing the treaty required consultations back home first. As for Nigeria, tales exist of a dramatic literal U-turn as the presidential convoy to the airport had to return to Abuja to hear more concerns from the business community.

Such dictators recognised the strategic value in running their countries like personal fiefdoms with a disorganised, impoverished populace. The last thing they needed was a genuine move towards greater sharing of those resources, and the mutual accountability that this could entail, as could become the case under any Pan-African arrangement.

None of the heads of state of Rwanda's immediate neighbours were present either. In the end, of the African Union's 55 member states, 44 were present and signed up to the removal of trade barriers, 43 signed the launch declaration, and just 27 agreed to lifting barriers to the movement of people.

"We [Africans] are the kind of horses that are very thirsty. When brought to the well, some of us drink, others have excuses…We should stop enjoying problems. Especially when we have the answers," the summit's host, Rwandan president (and current African Union chairperson) Paul Kagame reportedly said.

So, as a result of the elephant in the room being the issue of the lions not in the room, the renewed path to African unity will be remembered partly for being launched with a snide remark from the host.

But what exactly is Pan-Africanism? And to what extent is any of this actually new, or a departure from previous attempts?

A history of hopes

We need not retrace the path to this moment in detail. The aspiration for one big country, or at least a "United States of Africa" has always been part of Africa's post-colonial political lexicon. Where leaders of the past differed was on the question of the best route to getting there. Famously, Ghana's independence icon Kwame Nkrumah called for it to be implemented straight away. Among his contemporaries were those with another school of thought, calling for a phased process. Neither happened, of course, and, for the Pan-Africanists at least, the continent remained a halfway house of former colonies within inconvenient colonial borders. No longer a girl, not yet a woman (to paraphrase American philosopher-singer Britney Spears).

This is not to say there was no *de facto* unity, at least on certain issues. Far from it. The AU's forerunner, the Organisation of African Unity – which, with its early decision to uphold the colonial era borders, emerged as the physical expression of the "phased process" approach – became the forum where a number of key initiatives demonstrating a determination for united action among the continent's leaders could be seen. The better-known among these was the decades-long campaigns against the stubborn colonial stain that held on in Southern and Western Africa, in the Portuguese colonies, as well as in the die-hard white settler "nationalism" isolated in the South. This included everything from diplomatic and political protests to sanctions and material support, including military training for Southern African nationalists.

Regional trade blocs were established in West, East and Southern Africa. Some states went further by actually intervening in regional conflicts. However, many more conflicts simply overran and made farcical any pretence towards mutual African respect. Key cases in point are the 1967-1970 civil war in Nigeria, which still poisons the politics of that country, the still ongoing Saharawi stalemate in Western Sahara against Morocco and Ethiopia's four-sided wars from the early 1960s until 1990.

A key question then, now and in the proposed future is always going to be: What does the ordinary African get out of these arrangements?

"The most striking and frightening characteristic of all African governments is this: that without an exception, all of them are dictatorships, and practice such

ruthless discriminations as to make the South African apartheid look tame.....I leave it to political scientists to explore and analyse this strange situation whereby independence means the replacement of foreign rule by native dictatorship," wrote the legendary Ugandan poet Okot p'BItek in a 1968 article that may well have jeopardised his career, but certainly ruined his standing with the powers-that-were.

By way of an excuse, one could argue that these severely hampered aspirations, and the poet's mockery of them, were the result of three things:

First, Cold War geopolitics overshadowed Africa's entire post-independence period. There were intractable wars like the 1977-1978 Somalia versus Ethiopia conflict over the Ogaden region, which saw the Soviet Union first back Somalia against Emperor Haile Selassie's forces, and then dramatically change sides when the "socialist" dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam deposed the Emperor. In Angola, an even more obvious proxy war was fought for nearly two decades between the superpowers, as Jonas Savimbi's UNITA dueled with the MPLA government. In all these cases, interventions led to a prolongation of conflict, the entrenchment of authoritarian cultures and a sapping and stagnation of social and cultural energies.

> *Even Tanzania's Julius Nyerere was obliged to remark that "there is no national economy at all!" when recounting the practical difficulties of establishing a fair trade regime after independence.*

Second, there was global plunder – perhaps the whole point of the Cold War. This gave rise to opulent kleptocracies, such as Marshal Mobutu's in Congo and Bedel Bokassa's in the Central African Republic, as well as to pseudo-socialist regimes, such as Macius Nguema's in Equatorial Guinea, in which impunity reigned as long as the backing superpower obtained the resources it craved. Such dictators recognised the strategic value in running their countries like personal fiefdoms with a disorganised, impoverished populace. The last thing they needed was a genuine move towards greater sharing of those resources, and the mutual accountability that this could entail, as could become the case under any Pan-African arrangement.

Third was the corpus of local interests, both formal and informal, legitimate and not, that naturally have built up in the interstices of whatever passes for

"national" economies in each of our countries. For example, much as General Idi Amin took the historic blame (or at least most of it) for the collapse of the original East African Community, credible stories linger about how the road haulage businesses of local oligarchs in the region were certainly not hurt by the hobbling of the East African Railways system, and may even have encouraged it.

"The elites in each of these states really make money off gatekeeping – levying taxes off imports/exports and granting licences or concessions within defined areas. Belief in free and open markets is only skin deep," tweeted Daudi Mpanga, a distinguished lawyer with extensive experience in corporate and political representation across East and Southern Africa, in a comment on AfCFTA.

But beyond the usual gatekeeping, there are genuine native business interests. For example, corporate interests entering Nigeria have to acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of the situation there and enter into accommodative arrangements with the well-established local business class. One corporation alone was able to post of $750 million in after-tax profits in 2007/8 out of this country-specific process. It is no coincidence that Nigeria was the one country where entrenched queries on AfCFTA have come from her business community.

What then is Pan-Africanism? And to what extent is any of AfCFTA actually new, or a departure from previous attempts at it?

Unity between what and whom, and over what?

If the idea is to unite African states, does this not really mean just amalgamating the interests of the various elites that run these states? If so, given the generally adversarial relationship such elites tend to have with their general populations (Exhibit A: virtually any general election on the continent), would this not result in a continent-wide elite conspiracy against the ordinary African?

As for the idea of bringing African economies together (of which veteran journalist Charles Onyango-Obbo cited the statistics approvingly: "African Continental Free Trade Area signed in Kigali will consolidate a market of 1.2 billion people & GDP of $2.5 trillion. Still 8 times smaller than USA's GDP of $19.3 trillion [China's $14.2 trillion), but it's just what the doctor ordered!"), the question must be asked: Whose economies exactly are these?

A key pillar of the post-Cold War economic arrangements on countries with

commend economies (typically, most of sub-Saharan Africa) was the World Bank conditionality that governments should surrender control over their central banks, which would be responsible for directing monetary policy. In practice, this means that on matters of "macro-economic stability" (a treasured goal), issues like currency pricing and supply are not determinable by the native government.

Long before that, there were already huge hurdles in place.

Many of the states created by France in West Africa serve as a particular case in point. Despite five decades of formal independence, they remain – by law, policy and sometimes armed force – wedded to the French economy and banking system through their regional currency zone know as African Financial Community (CFA) that was created in 1945.

A hugely under-reported detail of Uganda's economic "Africanisation" policy under General Amin (better known as the mass expulsion of non-citizen Asians) was the reaction of the (mainly foreign) banks. Their agents crisscrossed the cities and towns, slapping foreclosure notices on many Asian-owned buildings to the effect that, as default was inevitable, the buildings became the property of the banks.

The idea of substantial "independent" Asian capital itself turned out to be partly a myth. Apart from debt to local banks, much of the loan capital coming from India, for example, was from banks themselves in quiet debt to Western banks.

Even Tanzania's Julius Nyerere was obliged to remark that "there is no national economy at all!" when recounting the practical difficulties of establishing a fair trade regime after independence.

Then there is the issue of nativity, or origin. What will be defined as an "African" trading company, eligible to take advantage of the new free trade area? These are matters all trading blocs get concerned with. Companies in the United States domestic airline industry must be majority-owned by Americans, for example.

It was the "opening up" rules imposed by the European Union that enabled some European companies and China to domesticate themselves in places like Senegal and proceed to decimate the local fishing industry. If AfCFTA is to be fully implemented, the implication is that such a disaster would no longer be confined

to the borders of the country concerned.

But taken as a whole, one can already see the armies of youthful hawkers flooding the traffic jams of the average African city who are part of a vast cheap distribution system for goods sent from China and elsewhere.

With better intra-continental communications (road, rail, air and electronic) no doubt some of our people will be able to use their celebrated "resilience" and "ingenuity" to see opportunities in these changes and make a new living from them. However, there is no guarantee that the larger free trade area will not simply become a bigger playground for the usual predatory economic forces from outside the continent.

Many of the states created by France in West Africa serve as a particular case in point. Despite five decades of formal independence, they remain – by law, policy and sometimes armed force – wedded to the French economy and banking system through their regional currency zone know as African Financial Community (CFA) that was created in 1945. France reportedly sits on the boards of two central banks in the region where it holds veto powers. Who then will the rest of Africa be integrating with: the West African states or the economic interests of France as hosted by those states?

Options

These are not new questions. And they all come down to what one understands Pan-Africanism to be. There are four basic options.

Cultural Pan-Africanism

It is not a widely acknowledged fact that most of Africa's best and most audacious thinkers have come from the enforced diaspora. Marcus Garvey remained the most effective and far-reaching organiser of people of African descent globally, despite never having set foot in Africa. His thinking and work remain the kernel of all Pan-Africanist thought. There have been and remain many others: John Clarke, Marimba Ani (Dona Richards), Jacob Carruthers and John G. Jackson, to name a few.

In his fifteen years of research, the Afro-Caribbean writer Chancellor Williams concluded that the Africa of the 18th and 19th centuries was a product of a

preceding collapse of a unified African civilisation centered on a Greater Egypt taking in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the Sudans, which left its people scattered, and somewhat disoriented, for nearly two thousand years before the rise of the then emerging European colonial project for which they became easy prey. He argues for the reconstitution of a Pan-Africanism premised on the reconstruction of those scattered cultures and a recognition of their underlying cultural unity. This basically means first doing away with the organisational logic of the current states, whether amalgamated or not.

Statist Pan-Africanism

This could also be termed Nkrumahist after its best-known active advocate. It was the vision of that cadre of nationalists of the late colonial period whose brand of nationalism took control of the colonial units at independence. It is completely premised on the notion of using these states as a primary building block of uniting the Africans into a new, modern identity and then propel them rapidly towards industrialisation and "development".

> *To try and unite Africa while being hosted by a regime installed by Western interests will only lead to complicated intellectual gymnastics, such as presenting Uganda's invasion and occupation of eastern DRC as an act of Pan-African solidarity.*

This approach has pitfalls, as was exemplified by the 1990s Uganda-based Pan-African initiative under the management of the late Tajudeen Abdulraheem. To try and unite Africa while being hosted by a regime installed by Western interests will only lead to complicated intellectual gymnastics, such as presenting Uganda's invasion and occupation of eastern DRC as an act of Pan-African solidarity.

Corporate Pan-Africanism

The 19th century European powers had already brought together vast areas of the continent into spaces ultimately answerable to one political and one economic authority. Between them, France and Britain created most of the countries that now wish to be part of AfCFTA. Many of the countries they founded started life as trading companies, and corporate profit-making has remained the essence of their utility to the West.

Ironically, there is little essential organisational difference between that model and the Nkrumahists: bring the Africans together under a new culture. In fact, the absence of the imperial overlord has worked to make these states more effective in cutting Africans off from one another, as the AfCFTA acknowledges in aspiration.

Even Tanzania's one-language policy, so beloved of post-colonial state Pan-Africanists, started life with the then German colonisers, who thought that communicating in a multitude of languages was inefficient but did not believe that the African mind could master the supposed complexities of the German language.

The above-mentioned CFA zone, which brings together the economies of fourteen states in West and Central Africa that are answerable to France, is the living example of how "unity" does not necessarily mean being "united" and of why political independence does not necessarily lead to economic independence.

Peoples' Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism from below. This, of course, means rejecting the colonial model and its offspring. It requires the development of linkages between peoples through their own knowledge, institutions and methods – linkages that are not mediated by the former colonial states. It is centred on the idea of bringing native knowledge (which is available free in the community) into the question of enhancing people's lives through sustainable production, healthcare and teaching. It envisages interaction on a largely horizontal, community-to-community basis. For example, a fishing co-op in Nyanza should be able to carry out trade in dried fish in as far as Botswana without having it mediated through various ministries of health, trade and immigration because it holds the knowledge on how to preserve fish in ways perhaps not recognisable to the modern state.

Unfettered movement may end up meaning that citizens of poor African states simply decamp to those few states and cities where life is simply better.

As did Chancellor Williams, the late Professor Nabudere saw these modern states as a liability. Being heavily indebted, culturally Eurocentric, and having their key areas of policy dictated from abroad, he believed that these states were at best an

irrelevance to this vision of Pan-Africanism and at worst a real obstacle, whether they manage to continue existing or not.

The need to do something

Africa's challenges are stark, and real: water, food, security, conflict. Writing in the *East African*, Moses Gahigi provides details on the critical issues: youth unemployment and poverty, which are only set to grow: "According to the African Development Bank, about 13 million young people enter the labour market every year — the number is expected to reach 30 million annually by 2030 — yet only three million (about 33 per cent) are in salaried employment. The rest are either underemployed or in vulnerable employment — a situation some analysts have called 'a ticking time bomb' that is likely to go off if the situation is not reversed."

Which brings us to the last point: goals and strategy.

Cue Osibisa

That excellent Ghanaian band of the 1970s once sang: "...*Heaven knows where are going, we know we are; but we'll get there, heaven knows how we'll get there, we know we will.*"

Is the purpose of Pan-Africanism to further integrate Africa into the global system or to make a break from it? There will have to be a lot more explaining about what a physically united Africa will or should do. Will it strive to leverage public debt, cheap labour and natural resources, as China has done, to become a global purveyor of loans and cheap goods? If so, does this not in fact mean merging the various foreign economies that the African states are merely hosting on behalf of (and under orders from) the Western-led global economic system? If that is the case, how does it improve Africa's situation beyond being a mere appendage or extension of the global system?

Does this not also mean that we simply give the Africans the right to migrate to go and be poor somewhere else? Unfettered movement may end up meaning that citizens of poor African states simply decamp to those few states and cities where life is simply better. This is a reason why countries like Cuba and China have strict controls on the internal movement of their populations. Migrant workers in China are expected to return to their villages of origin once the contract is done. This seems to be a concern among those member states whose economies are

doing somewhat better than the rest. They featured heavily among those countries less keen on signing the protocol on the free movement of people.

However, should our economic position indeed consolidate and improve, will it not ramp up our consumption, and add to the physical burden of the planet? For example, China's prosperity has created a daily demand for fish from thirty million Chinese. This has contributed heavily to the ruin of fishing waters – and fishing communities – off the West African coast.

My own paranoid (my friends would say) suspicion is this simply allows for the creation of megacities into which the poor can be herded so as to free up the countryside for huge mechanised agribusiness transformations.

But, as the chicken's fate showed, when you are being told there was a big meeting where all your concerns were answered, be sure to get each and every detail.

RETURNING THE GAZE: Representing poverty and precarity in a post-colonial world

To a greater power and a better nature you, free, are subject, and these create the mind in you that the heavens have not in their charge.
Therefore, if the world around you goes astray, in you is the cause and in you let it be sought.

~ Marco the Lombard's counsel, from Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Novelist Pankaj Mishra, referring to "the history of modernisation", observes how despite pretentions to rationality and order described by the American originators of the term in the 1950s and 1960s, modernisation's history *"is largely one of carnage and bedlam"* that disproportionately afflicts a targeted, "othered",

dehumanised, inferiorised population invariably classified as poor, who by implication are also made responsible for the pathetic state in which they find themselves.

A polarisation of conscience means that little solidarity can be extended to those who suffer the greatest burden of the consequences of the worst of human impulses and choices. Do we imagine that the gaze infected by the paradigm in which it thrives can refocus its witnessing lens from a place of profound empathy for and with humanity, and see itself in the suffering of the other?

There is nothing objective in the human gaze. We know this. Yet we collude with this post-Enlightenment, neoliberal hubristic production system that even proposes its own transcendence and omniscience— and does so while denying or erasing the reality of the shared experience of suffering so that it can lay claim to transcendent objectivity. How can a corrupted witness purport to offer a truthful testament to human experience? How unbiased is the evidence (images, stories) that such a witness brings forth?

Humanity now thrashes about in a chasm of the absence of a real vocabulary of beingness today, while at the same time, makes excuses for a parasitic ideological structure that requires the stories of others' vulnerabilities in order to shore up itself and its peculiar myths. An obsessive and pornographic preoccupation with the wounds of others serves two key purposes: one, it enables the observers to feel, what is that imbecilic word...*superior*, and two, it helps the observers to avoid engaging with their own internal contradictions and pathologies, it buries their fears.

Against such a backdrop, what does our own articulation of post-coloniality, social development, vulnerability and poverty actually mean here and now? What does "representation" become when forged through an epistemological structure that fragments the world so that it can elevate itself as the "universal" and the standard by which the human race measures its progress. In referring to this dilemma, the thinker Santiago Castro-Gomes calls it the problem of the "hubris of point zero".

This is the epistemology that, despite its, yes, many virtues, treasures, and achievements on behalf of its select, could also declare those on the right of the screen as virtuous and righteous in their actions against those on the left, who are

consistently classified as soulless, valueless, ungovernable and unmournable savages, barbarians, terrorists and heathens— not entirely human and, therefore, exploitable and dispensable. The mostly Euro-American collective societal imagination, in particular, was co-opted into this belief. The paradigm deliberately enlisted science and academia to develop a literature and theory to absolve itself from this, its public evil. The desecrated bodies on the left of the screen are rendered undignified and nameless even in their ancestral homes—and there are no plaques to commemorate their histories, achievements, their existence – while museums are built to enshrine the so-called exploits of those on the right.

An obsessive and pornographic preoccupation with the wounds of others serves two key purposes: one, it enables the observers to feel, what is that imbecilic word…superior, and two, it helps the observers to avoid engaging with their own internal contradictions and pathologies, it buries their fears.

What we see and hear now has a history and a template. Given this, what then should a person do with an array of stories and images embedded in a diminished, diminishing and disordered framing of life, that from its origins, and despite the evidence of its horrid impulses, has never been forensically interrogated?

In a 1999 *New York Times* article, Nigerian author Wole Soyinka reminded us how *"the great philosophical minds of Europe, like Hume, Hegel and Kant, bent their prodigious talents to separating the species into those with rights and those with none, founded on the convenient theory that some people were human and others less so. The Encyclopedists of France, products of the so-called Age of Reason, remain the most prolific codifiers of the human (and other) species on an ambitiously comprehensive scale, and their scholarly industry conferred a scientific benediction on a purely commercial project that saw millions of souls dragged across the ocean to serve as beasts of burden. Religion and commerce … were reinforced by the authority of new scientific theories to divide humanity into higher and lower manifestations of the species. The dichotomy of the world was complete."*

I am compelled to ask how truthfully a person of this epoch can speak to precarity, poverty or marginalisation without making incisions into the profound moral and existential vacuum that are their sources and causes, which the human collective treats with amnesia. We are enduring a season of an unprecedented

crisis of being and vision – and the devastation of lives we see and label as "precarious" are symptomatic of this.

Reality, they say, is relational, not representational. I retreat once more to Marco the Lombard's counsel from Dante's *Divine Comedy* for guidance:

> *To a greater power and a better nature you, free, are subject, and these create the mind in you*
> *that the heavens have not in their charge.*
> *Therefore, if the world around you goes astray, in you is the cause and in you let it be sought.*

Do we really have the adequate tools of analysis that will lead us into an immersive experience of the realities to which we refer? We live a lie-laden *un*-reality where communities of the most resource-rich territories of the world are interpenetrated by the most devastating forms of poverty while those of the resource-consuming lands are lauded as the most advanced, the wealthiest, the best, when the questions that should be asked are: *How does the world's wealth get to be transferred, from where, by whom, for whom and at what price? Who sets the rates? To what obscene extent are precarity, marginalisation and poverty in themselves a profitable by-product of a way of being in the world? How are these accepted by-products of an accepted global industrial ideology? Will we explore poverty in its multiple designs and constructions in Bretton Wood cults, in the numerous multinational boardrooms, and in all those resource-hunting, territory-scouring Trojan horses that first appear as non-governmentals and then collude with emasculated, lobotomised post-colonial governors masquerading as leaders of so many nations?*

We find ourselves entangled in and by a culture that, for example, *knowing* there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, still allowed its privileged liars, those contemporary high priests of baal, a gateway to create and launch a grotesque unending war fifteen years ago that has since devoured an ancient civilisation and pushed our earth into the cusp of a human-caused apocalypse. This alleged "war on terror", an abominable act, co-opted forty other nations, all of which fly the banner of democracy and human rights, and who have wilfully and continuously committed atrocities before slithering away to reconstruct a narrative of righteousness by evolving new euphemisms that deny the horror that their choices have visited upon millions and millions of innocents.

I am compelled to ask how truthfully a person of this epoch can speak to precarity, poverty or marginalisation without making incisions into the profound moral and existential vacuum that are their sources and causes, which the human collective treats with amnesia.

The abomination is today visited on Yemen for no real reason other than Saudi Arabia, this paradigm's favourite pimp, wishes to test its war chops and spread its particular version of self-rightousness. Saudi Arabia is spending trillions of dollars on weapons sold to it by nations, that offer themselves as 'paragons of human values' weapons that are sometimes procured through second or third parties. Money gratefully received without question. Later, when the images of devastating Yemeni starvation hits your Christmas screens, some scrawny Englishman will compose a *"Do they know it's Christmas?"* dirge so that we can all send our one pound to help the poor, the starving and the helpless. Meanwhile, it is Christmas every day in our weapon-manufacturing communities; the war in Yemen is a ceaseless bounty.

I ask you, are there any stories today, any images of the full Yemeni reality? Of course not. We will neither reveal the images of the generals overseeing the devastation of an already weak land, nor will we show what bullets and grenades do to human bodies. Why should the truth of what sustains our economies and guarantees our lifestyles interfere with the pleasure of our morning cappuccino? But God help the ones who emerge from the inferno of our making. They become our revenants. Their bodies and haunted lives are fingers pointing at us, which without a single word, mock our presumed innocence.

Here is our world now, this massive entangled bruise of traumatised, alienated, marginalised, terrorised, impoverished hundreds of millions, a world offering itself to the possibility of self-annihilation as entertainment.

This epistemological framing by which we live has won for its adherents entire territories that are relabelled as, *for example,* the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and then elevated as "universal" beacons of high human values that also confirm the hegemonic paradigm's transcendent delusions, those mythologies that are adorned with titles such as "civilisation", "democracy", "scientific", "advancement", "philanthropy" and "human rights", so many gilded fig leaves positioned to conceal the wound and its questions, which may include:

What is the origin of this nation?

How did the current governance structure evolve? Who and how many had to die to invent this "country"? How did they die?

Who atones? Who does not atone?

This dominant system, including its knowledge systems, generates and reinforces a malignant Military Industrial Complex upon which entire economies depend. And it seduces us with amnesia. Forget! it suggests. In exchange we may frolic carefreely amidst the flowers of Orwellian doublespeak – *collateral damage*, for example, a euphemism for lies, transference, prevarications, perception management, propaganda, erasure and rewriting and rebranding of horrors. Meanwhile, in a world of abundance, how is it even possible that eight men from the same cultural paradigm have gained control of 80 per cent of the earth's wealth? Is this the culmination of the so-called Age of Reason?

Today we accuse Kim-Jong-Un of impoverishing North Koreans, but do we also reflect on the meaning (today) of the American war in Korea (1950-3)? The wilful carpet bombing of a country by one set of humans until everything is rubble, as the generals casually cited that 20 per cent (a conservative estimate) population death rate? Why do we act shocked when grieving, starving, devastated, traumatised people turn their backs on a world that turned its backs on them? And we suddenly have something to say about...*what?*

Please don't get me wrong; I am not excusing insanity. What I ask is if the prevailing global paradigm and its tributaries—-modernism, post-modernism, post-post-modernism...with their penchant for laundering their darkness – are what can gainfully articulate the dimensions, meaning and language of profound human suffering. In the end, after we have described, or gazed upon, the poverty-stricken, the marginalised, the oppressed, the dehumanised, in whatever forms these take, *what actually changes for the common good as a consequence*?

A different point.

We neither see nor imagine the same thing when we say "poverty" or "precarity", do we? Despite our preferred assumptions, there is no uber-state of poverty or precarity that is the universal template. Yet so very rarely do we allow an exploration of the varieties of consciousness that imbue human seeing,

recognising, describing and attending; or the reality of philosophical and cultural divergences.

> *This alleged "war on terror", an abominable act, co-opted forty other nations, all of which fly the banner of democracy and human rights, and who have wilfully and continuously committed atrocities before slithering away to reconstruct a narrative of righteousness by evolving new euphemisms that deny the horror that their choices visited upon millions of innocents.*

To some, poverty is an asset in a world where shareholder profit is the Holy Grail, where consumption is the measure of nirvana. So valuable it is that should the economies of certain nations decline, wars must be manufactured. As long as weapons can be sold and jobs created, a necessary magic happens—these economies are rich and stable again and can hold themselves up as beacons of world development and order, right? But the blood-price that designated scapegoats have paid remain obscured and untold.

Precarity does, however, explain how humanity has turned vampire to humanity, feeding on its own lifeblood, its harrowing collective gaze always turned outward and elsewhere. Precarity (or what some might refer to as precariousness, which is a less enduring/permanent condition) – a word that was apparently coined by the Catholic monk and anarcho-communist Léonce Crenier (1888-1963) – has been defined as "the *politically induced* condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks...becoming exposed to injury, violence and death". Precarity is a condition that is often associated with neoliberal capitalism and its perverted logic of blaming the victim for his or her suffering, rather than examining the skewed power and economic relations that might have contributed to that suffering – a logic that relies on scapegoating to absolve the inflicter of suffering from any blame.

What the scapegoater's target (the poor, the starving, the helpless, the victims) may have to give up is the power to name themselves. If they survive the struggle, they will be doomed to be spoken for, depicted, analysed and approached with the delicious frisson of Freud's **unheimlich —** the uncanny**.** But sometimes, sometimes, it is true, that the monstered being growls back using the tools and technology of the paradigm against itself.

We, the inhabitants of this earth, are caught up in the matrix of a dark drama that

services our fears, our violence, our silences, our looking away, and in some cases, our approval. This grotesque dance is justified with epic headers: Age of Discovery, War on Terror, Humanitarian Interventions. Weapons of Mass Destruction. Mother of All Bombs. Later, imagine our surprise when survivors from such expeditions flee their homes seeking refuge and peace in our midst. Having even been robbed of their names, we are now able to label them poor, marginalised, migrants, refugees, precarious, as if what befell them happened through their own fault. We negotiate encounters so that their suffering is kept as far away from our lives as possible.

Their courageous odyssey, their spirit and strength in the face of overwhelming intimate losses are rarely voiced, lest they expose our cowardice. Their desperation is often criminalised, as if it is infectious. We may safely look at their drowned bodies on television, but having seen enough of these, no longer notice them. We engineer them into concentration camps in Turkey, Lebanon, Kenya, Uganda, Jordan, Greece and Libya. Meanwhile, we neglect to act on the reality that we know that their powerless bodies are minute by minute being brutalised, experimented with and traded. Their organs are being auctioned, their children are being raped, their women are being violated, their men are emasculated, humanity is being brutalised by humanity using its most insidious weapons: *human absence* and *human silence*.

To some, poverty is an asset in a world where shareholder profit is the Holy Grail, where consumption is the measure of nirvana. So valuable it is that should the economies of certain nations decline, wars must be manufactured.

In April last year, the American military dropped what they christened the "Mother of All Bombs" over the Achin district in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, a public display of the same casual evil that created the Nagasaki and Hiroshima slaughter, a prelude of what is to come, perhaps? There is still to this day a terrible silence over the actual number of Afghani casualties, which have already been pre-stigmatised as ISIS, not to speak of the devastation of the landscape and environment. There are no independent verifications, no counter-checks, no accountability, no display of bodies other than those of living American soldiers standing in caves that are still intact and whose locations cannot be verified.

So, when a surge of humans in deep distress whose environment has been poisoned and shattered will flee Afghanistan trying to find new homes, will they be returned to the source? Will we try and find the reason for their fleeing and hold to account the responsible nation? Of course not. That would require what seems to have been leached out of the human collective: a will to truth and courage. Indifference has been made cool. "Post-truth" has been invented. When the desperate immigrant carrying his remaining child peers through a fence, won't we line our words and images to articulate a preferred trope that reinforces our framing of poverty, powerlessness, and precarity regarding him and his country?

Shall I go on?

Weeks before the bombing and Donald Trump's foray into Syria, American soldiers and their Saudi friends were implicated in the mass slaughter of a boat filled with innocent people escaping Yemen. After the announcement of the mistake, nothing. There was also the horrible and mistaken slaughter of innocents in Mosul involving the so-called coalition forces. After the initial alarm, nothing. You who study representation, have you heard anything more of these crimes against the earth, decency, morality and humanity that sink without a trace, without a second bleep? The silence, though, does make it simpler to rationalise the sacrifice of humans to tomahawk missiles while the enabler eats chocolate cake—or was it vanilla?

It is to specific and targeted realms of anguish that we send our image capturers and story makers. The consistency of the ideology calls for the permitted symbols of doomed desires: the sacrificeable, the pitied and – despite the pathos – the unmournable body (preferably in a particular melanin shade and from a particular culture). This paradigm allows the media to use and expose them as the poor, the less fortunate, the marginalised, the victims. So the advantaged—and that is the adjective always used – might make meaning by pressing a forefinger on the donate button and dispatch two euros fifty to support one of a hundred thousand non-governmentals who promise the miracle of turning coins into medicine and water for the ones, who, fortunately, are not us. These days it is accompanied with a hashtag. But no questions.

So what do we have to show, we humans speaking about poverty and precarious lives lived in ineffable margins? What do we have to show that amplifies our

abysmal and wilful <u>unknowing</u> of the actual and inner lives of those whose histories we choose to condense into a single, transient thumbprint, captured, edited, and distributed by a thinned-out imagination? In the academy's retelling of precarity, poverty and their representation, what room exists for a multidimensionality and multiperspectivity that breathes fresh knowledge and insight that might actually transfigure our humanity?

Let us change track and look at some art, okay?

The cover image of *Job's Friends* by Lenny Caccio is inspired by the biblical Book of Job. It features three friends – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite – who show up to supposedly console a terribly afflicted Job. Encountering the extreme suffering and wounded spirit and body of their friend, they first choose to sit in shock. After a suitable interlude, now accustomed to the spectacle of suffering, they proceed to diagnose the disease from a safe space that does not require them to touch Job. They also evolve a branding plan in which they excuse everything but Job, who is somehow made responsible for his fate. They offer a scholarly treatise on meaning, suffering and Job's responsibility. They wonder why Job is not more like them, they who are favoured by God. If he were, such suffering would not be his fate. Nay indeed, since they know the mind of God, actually, in a way, this makes them, like God...if not God Himself.

> *Meanwhile, we neglect to act on the reality that we know that their powerless bodies are minute by minute being brutalised, experimented with and traded. Their organs are being auctioned, their children are being raped, their women are being violated, their men are emasculated, humanity is being brutalised by humanity using its most insidious weapons: human absence and human silence.*

Suddenly, certain of their transcendence, they authoritatively proceed to make decisions for Job. They go on and on until Job became a scientific and social development project. They discuss the alleviation of Job's poverty, precarity and disease. Dear Job is sucked into the eye of the cyclone of stupidity and is compelled to reclaim a semblance of humanity by trying to explain the inexplicability of his existential harrowing.

In the eyes of the three idiots, Job, the scapegoat, must not be perceived as innocent, for through this judgment he is designated as the carrier of the

pathologies and terrors that afflict the human journey; upon him rests the entire mystery of human suffering. Now Job is the heathen. The savage. The pagan. The terrorist. The infidel. The Third World hordes…or was it swarms (David Cameron). The extreme other from whom our lives are detached, whose suffering is alien to our righteous ease. Behold this, the detached collective observing human suffering, not as witnesses, but as judges and gossips. They fail to see that Job is a mirror and witness to the reality of life. These idiots *(yes, I am judging them)* look and look and turn blind.

It does end rather well, with a *schadenfreude* twist. The mysterious Source of Existence in whose name much was suggested by the trio shows up from out of the whirlwind, the storm, the chaos, and is in a very bad mood. He stormily affirms and underlines the truth of human unknowing before the immensity of life. Some paraphrased bullet points from within the storm: *You are not the authors of nature or life. You are all subject to the mystery of suffering, pain, death, and the unknowing*. In other words, as a millennial friend once put it to me, you know shit about life.

The three self-appointed dunderheads get their knuckles thoroughly rapped by a God who makes them dependent on Job for a dramatic gesture of forgiveness and sacrifice that will release them from the hell their presumptuous babblings have driven them into, thus demonstrating another useful point: *You need one another other in order to get yourselves out of your self-created hell*.

Back to earth.

On January 24, 2017, a 22-year-old human being, a man named Pateh Sabally, either jumped into or slipped into Venice's Grand Canal. Witnessing this were about two hundred men and women. They were cited as cursing, mocking and abusing him as he flailed and cried.

> *What did Pateh see? What did he experience as he started to die? To know that the last human gaze Pateh experienced was the gaze of hatred is such a weight on a sensitive human conscience. What looks out of the gaze of this mob in Venice, finding satisfaction in the slow death of an ebony-bodied stranger in a canal?*

A dying man entered the doorway of death with the sound of over two hundred

apparently "sane" human beings mocking his life, urging him to annihilation, amused by his suffering. What did Pateh see? What did he experience as he started to die? To know that the last human gaze Pateh experienced was the gaze of hatred is such a weight on a sensitive human conscience. What looks out of the gaze of this mob in Venice, finding satisfaction in the slow death of an ebony-bodied stranger in a canal? And death and dying are such a private, intimate happening, even among creatures. So, what has become of a people and their interior values who seek and find intense porno-visual satisfaction in the death of a stranger? What turns these people into a howling beast, a mob that has lost access to the grammar of life? What is in the gaze of the human in the canal looking at his audience?

We have been here before, haven't we?

I was surprised, and then not surprised, that the horror did not generate greater contemplation in the media or in societal reflections and that the only images published were those of the drowning Pateh, with the mob offered as a faceless mass without a shape that melts into the day when invited to account for their manner of witnessing. I am struck by the length of time that the mob spent observing, archiving, recording and commenting on Pateh's dying, and the eerie idea of profound satisfaction in the experience. The mob is so preoccupied with their perception of Pateh's otherness, his immigrant-being, that nothing of his humanity penetrates their gaze. What is this epistemology of life that makes of human beings a thing that finds pleasure in the dying and death of a man? Why has it not been hacked to pieces yet? Unless, of course, its diminished conceptualisation of who a human being is has its worshippers. In this event, who in our epistemological structuring would be the subject of our reflections on poverty, precarity and pity? Pateh or his mob?

Second case: On September 8, 2015, a woman who had veiled her face, protecting herself from the contagion of encounter, filmed the flow of human sufferers crossing into her country, Hungary. She would at some point drop her camera to focus on extending her foot to kick two children and their father, a former Syrian football coach, Osama Abdul Mohsen, who carrying one son, stumbled to the ground. It is not possible to list the many ways that this man, travelling without his wife, was humiliated. A man has lost his home through no fault of his own, has lost his country, is compelled to impoverishment, and struggles with life in ways that not many in the world can. He traverses unknown worlds, deserts, storms,

wars, water, death, displaying the noblest human spirit and its will to live and hope.

This human seeks refuge among other humans, strangers. Reduced to scrambling across a man-caused frontier, he runs in the direction of a camerawoman, who is masked to preserve herself from the diseases he purportedly carries. Let us think carefully about the gesture as she pauses her filming and puts out a leg to trip a man carrying his son, who flails and falls. That fall, friends, is a wounded gong in the deepest soul. A warning. This episode is enshrined as the Petra László incident. It travelled as a cold slithering shiver across the world. In our house in Nairobi, when we saw it, no one could speak. But it was recognised for what it was.

I am struck by the blank in the place where people have absented themselves from, or even worse, have become so paralysed by human uncertainty that they do not know how to be hospitable to and receive, perhaps through an embrace, the wounded among and within them.

My own gaze stays on the camerawoman Petra László. I want to meet her. I have questions to ask. What drives a human being to this place of cruelty? I have traced her narrative of defence. Her first explanation: "I just snapped." The second: "The man lied." The third: "I am in danger." The fourth: "I shall sue Facebook, I shall sue the witnesses." It goes on.

The discomfort for us is this, the reason for our unspeaking witnessing: Here is the public revelation of the disintegration of humanity, the evidence of the wound. And no, this is not about privilege. Petra is a mirror, you see. Here also is my emptiness. Here is my terror of the mysteriousness of another. Here is a symbol of my impoverished humanity. Here is the sign of the unspoken wound that tears through my own soul, that if unattended for much longer will turn septic and evil—for here precisely is what I do not wish to be.

So who are these people? And why does society and popular media collude in an act of amnesia and erasure, not of the dead or suffering, but of the agents who amplify the suffering of others? It is not labelled as anything, is it? There is no name offered for this precarious condition. Why? There is the gaze. But what is heard? What is told and repeated? What gets muted so that an image can be explained differently?

In August 2016, police in Rome received a phone call from a stranger asking them to investigate a situation. An 84-year old woman and her 94-year old husband were in their apartment. They had been wailing so loudly for a good part of the day and their cries were now disturbing their neighbours. When the police entered the house, they found an elderly couple who were so overwhelmed by an existential loneliness, who having watched the news were horrified by the state of the world, that all they could do was wail, and wail, and wail. The media story slides quickly to the part where the police cook pasta for them. But I am interested in the spaces of silence and absences of neighbours, of family, of community. I am interested in the gaps occupied by this profound human keening, the sensitivity of a man and woman who feel the wounds of the world so profoundly.

But I am mostly struck by the communal unhearing and unseeing and unfeeling and unregarding. The story is not only about the police and pasta, but also about the meaning of that human cry, and the reactions of those who heard it. I am struck by the blank in the place where people have absented themselves from, or even worse, have become so paralysed by human uncertainty that they do not know how to be hospitable to and receive, perhaps through an embrace, the wounded among and within them. Yet here are the kind of people who would press the contribute button on the computer to send one euro to pay for a borehole in Timbuktu.

The worst of these are the leaders of nations whose people are compelled to flee to find life elsewhere, despite the wealth and treasures of home. Each of these leaders, through their incompetence, cowardice and collusion, are culpable and accountable for the extremes of suffering experienced by their people.

What has happened? Do you know? I don't. But does our lexicon for poverty and precarity encompass this, the marginalisation of persons from themselves? The meaning of lives no longer at ease with embracing, holding, comforting, or mourning each other?

For the Bretton Woods and United Nations indices on global well-being, this scene scores high on the wealth index. It shows evidence of the consumption of pasta. Poverty or precarity, under the dominant paradigm does not figure, does

it?

There is an adjunct to this that often skips our global headlines: The state of the elderly in European and American societies, evidenced in excessive winter mortalities, is a reality that is carefully left out of developmental indices and global conversations about precarity. Yet the paradigm to which our world has pledged its visioning will implode before it admits that its mythology is erasing the top end of its generations. It would be cynical to imagine, I guess, that the wild reaping of a generation judged as no longer productive is a desired outcome for a worldview obsessed with human usefulness, wouldn't it?

What I am trying to say, perhaps not too eloquently, is that perhaps, primarily, for me, this conversation we are having about 'precarity' is about humanity and its choices, this is an examination of a communal consciences in an attempt to see a way to engage that is transformative to our humanity and its dignity.

Allow me to make brief references to two key aspects in the global value chain of the misery economy that have a role in informing our constructions and perceptions of poverty and precarity:

First, the matter of forced philanthropy, one of the studios and markets for the representational images of poverty and devastation that social development paradigms offer. The business of imposed philanthropy is a fascinating study of human delusion to omniscience, the exercise of power through the mask of pity and the subversion of genuine human compassion for the purposes of profit and personal glory. It too has a history that reaches deep in the roots of the alleged Age of Discovery that I do not need to go into now. Its patterns are the same. The designated beneficiaries are always rendered choiceless, voiceless and nameless and subject to the character profile the philanthropist imposes upon them. Their most intimate lives are exposed to an irresistible gaze. The philanthropists have the power to speak for and represent an entire people and their experience. It is like the ventriloquist who seeks dummies into which he can throw his voice and reiterate his agenda.

Deus ex machina. I will not names.

Caught up in a devastating existential struggle, the targets rarely fight this denudation of their humanity—because, admittedly, some coins to alleviate immediate suffering are made available. Those who object to this business model

are often labelled as out of touch, people who are denying or manufacturing reality. For the patron society must always reaffirm its intrinsic goodness. Its people are good. Its intentions are good. And the vulnerable are a blank canvas upon which stories can be repackaged. And if the images are from the imagined African milieu, I promise you a fly on the face shot, even if it has to be photo-shopped in. But this imposed philanthropy serves its most potent purpose: it offers the paradigm a messiah, or many messiahs.

We lament the body of Aylan but immediately censor our awareness about the link between his sea-washed body and that of the CEO of the weapon-making factory that supplied the manufactured rebels with the guns and bombs that destroyed the Kurdi family life in Kobani, Syria.

An overview of this ecology of suffering would be dishonest if it did not refer, at least once, to the role played by the useful idiots, those too-numerous colonial (they pretend to be "post-independent") governments – those impotent venal agents of collaborative coloniality, betrayers of hopes, repellant homeguards. The worst of these are the leaders of nations whose people are compelled to flee to find life elsewhere, despite the wealth and treasures of home. Each of these leaders, through their incompetence, cowardice and collusion, are culpable and accountable for the extremes of suffering experienced by their people. Entangled in a grammar of violence and oppression, they have woven their individual lives into a life-destroying global economic paradigm at the expense of a vision for the world and their own people; they create new demons and excel in the creation and sustenance of a hell that destroys even the future of their land and generations of people. They engineer displacement, and do so in the name of social development. Yet their governments spend twenty times the resources allotted to national development to buy weapons abroad for incompetent armies trained to turn their weapons inward. These caretakers of disaster have nothing to say about a reality that has turned their people's bodies into the most tradeable and the most disposable, mere containers for other people's organs. (Many of their people now lie on the bed of the Mediterranean as undersea ghosts.) What a wreckage. What an abysmal poverty of spirit and imagination.

Is there a repository of more profound ideas, values, and words that can engender transformative human relationships so that we do not have to bear the burden of human anguish and injustice alone?

We lament the body of Aylan but immediately censor our awareness about the link between his sea-washed body and that of the CEO of the weapon-making factory that supplied the manufactured rebels with the guns and bombs that destroyed the Kurdi family life in Kobani, Syria. In the representation of poverty, precarity and alienation, where are the images and stories of the weapon factories and the military or prison industrial complexes? We side-eye bodies that have drowned attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea but block our ears to the reality of a multi-billion-dollar human trafficking/slavery network owned by an amoral global elite for whom business has never been better, certainly in the supply of human organs that had been a problem before but is no longer an issue in most of the world now.

How can one enter the soul of this theme without a life-giving mythology of presence so that when we speak of human poverty and precarity we do so justly, and in a way that shelters all that is shamed, broken, unjust, flawed, deaf, blind, lost, wounded or sad? What framework do we have that can call out the normalisation of unmitigated evil and our human dalliance with a violence that excuses itself and erases the voices of the most vulnerable?

Is there a way to interrogate the entrenchment of a seemingly omnipotent economic complex that mocks humanity by calling itself not only humanitarian but also just? What do we do with processes and ideologies with which we cohabit that glorify hatred, injustice, fear and violence that turn others into bogeymen? What ideologies of being exist that are capable or brave enough to hold perpetrator predatory systems and cultures accountable for their wilful desecration of life and meaning? Is there a repository of more profound ideas, values, and words that can engender transformative human relationships so that we do not have to bear the burden of human anguish and injustice alone?

Paraphrasing Mignolo, it must be possible for our humanity to imagine "institutions at the service of life rather than life at the service of institutions." There has to be a way of being and seeing that deepens the witness's gaze, a daring to first love—yes, I said it, love – and, therefore, make representation a true gift, a grace of human encounter, of human discovery, dignity, enchantment and knowing.

This essay is adapted from a speech by the author at the Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien / Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies (GAPS) Annual Conference on the theme, '**Representing Poverty and Precarity in a Postcolonial World', held from** May 25 – 27, 2017 – at the University of Bonn, Germany.

Author's preamble:

The ideas this essay puts forward are mined from many disciplinary spaces and are especially energised by proposals from thinkers like Enrique Dussel, W.D. Mignolo, Santiago Castro-Gomes, Arturo Escobar, among others, who dare to interrogate the reality of the extended and always-morphing life-cycle of **coloniality** *existing in a dominant historical framework that informs the state of the world today. My intention is to exhume a few sacred graves, particularly those masked in silences. This is a basic exploration of, to borrow from Dussel,* "**negated alterities".**

I want to now confess to you that writing this was a struggle for so many reasons, some not too clear. For one, what really is an adequate analytical framework through which to enter a thorough exploration of the contemporary iconography of profound human suffering? In considering this question, I was forced to recoil before the dominant post-Enlightenment, modernistic ideology and paradigm that fakes its break with its myriad pasts, while embedding and consolidating its humanity-displacing values and intentions To pretend that the paradigm—modernism, post-modernism, post-colonial, neo-liberal, whatever – is not also a violence-based, suffering-denying, scarcity-inducing, wound-causing, human-dividing, difference-criminalising, consumption-adoring, crisis-creating, self-aggrandising, disordered belief system, with its prosperity gospel, slaughtering priests, elaborate infrastructure, instruments, and institutions that favour a pre-selected few would be ingenuous of me.

In which case, how then does one truly speak about **representation**, *for example, within the framework of this overarching epistemological ecology? How does one address its systemic propensity for blood-letting, dependency on the commodification of life, a habit that is soothed by an instinct to euphemise atrocities that include presiding over a protocol that governs which images and narratives are allowed, sought, desired, derived, edited, distributed, sold and pre-explained? This essay is my attempt to deconstruct the representations and*

present a life- and human-affirming mirror to those doing the gazing.