

TOWARDS AN AFRICOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND AFRICAN REGENERATION

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Introduction

African scholars must pursue knowledge production that can renovate African culture, defend the African peoples dignity and civilisational achievements and contribute afresh to a new global agenda that can push us out of the crisis of modernity as promoted by the European Enlightenment. Such knowledge must be relevant to the current needs of the masses, which they can use to bring about a social transformation out of their present plight. We cannot just talk about the production of 'knowledge for its own sake' without interrogating its purpose. There cannot be such a thing as the advancement of science for its own sake. Those who pursue 'science for its own sake' find that their knowledge is used for purposes, which they may never have intended it for. Eurocentric knowledge is not produced just for its own sake. Its purpose throughout the ages has been to enable them to 'know the natives' in order to take control of their territories, including human and material resources [Said, 1978] for their benefit. Such control of knowledge was used to exploit the non-European peoples, colonise them both mentally and geo-strategically, as well as subordinate the rest of the world to their designs and interests.

The issue of an African Renaissance, which has been advanced politically, especially by President Mbeki, cannot just be viewed as an event in the politics of the African political elites, although that may be their purpose. It has to be taken up, problematised, interrogated, and given meaning that goes beyond the intentions of its authors and involve the masses of the African people in it if it has the potentiality to mobilise. It can be used as an occasion for beginning the journey of African psychological, social, cultural as well as the political liberation. It can also be used as a mobilisation statement and the basis for articulating an African agenda for knowledge production that is not just relevant to African conditions, but also sets an agenda for the reclaiming of African originality of knowledge and wisdom, which set the rest of human society on the road of civilisation.

The attempt made to establish the Centre of African Renaissance Studies-CARS must be seen as just one example of such attempts. But for this attempt to succeed it has to begin by challenging the dominant Eurocentric world outlook, philosophies and epistemologies, which still defiantly continue to disorganise the African continent turning it into a backyard of imperialist exploitation and plunder. The Eurocentric knowledge of us, which we call 'scientific knowledge', still dominates the psychology of the African political, economic and academic elites and through religion, the African masses as well. This means that as we go about carrying out the task of rediscovering Africa's past as scholars, we have already to begin to promatise the very basis of such 'studies', not because of their specific importance in the scholarship of South Africa, but in the context of creating the basis for an innovative epistemology and methodology in which such 'studies' can be pursued. We already have experiences of "African studies," which end in propagating and promoting Eurocentric ideological prejudices in the investigate "African problems."

In its promotion brochure, the Centre for African Renaissance describes CARS as "a unique interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research, teaching and publication graduate academic institution ... with a focus on African renaissance studies." The brochure then goes on to give thematic programmes to give an "indication" of its activities and to act as a guide to its research and publications. These thematic programmes can be found in any syllabi and curricular of many African studies

programmes of most African and some western Universities. These CARS thematic programmes are actually modules “requisite for all taught and research programmes.” They are designed to introduce the learners to “African renaissance paradigm” and interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches. So the issue of epistemology and methodology is already predetermined.

In the Call for Papers for this first International Conference on the African Renaissance Studies, there is a conceptual framework given of the CARS. Here it is stated “African Renaissance is a vision and mission for change and development that is premised on the understanding that the future of Africa and Africans in Africa and the Diaspora lies in fundamental process of renewal, re-invention and rebirth.” It is further stated that these required changes “need to occur in people’s mindset and world outlook, which in turn require changes in material conditions as well as in the institutions and processes of intellectual, political, economic and cultural governance.”

The Call for Papers also notes that as an inseparable part of the world and the world system, the African transformation also requires a “quest for fundamental changes in the historically constituted global order.” In its mission CARS publications seeks to make a contribution involving the African Diaspora to the production and promotion of Afro-centric scholarship as represented in recent collaborative initiatives, which demonstrate the resurgent historical impulses within African academics, scholars and intellectuals to contribute to the deepening of “Afro-centric critical knowledge production, reflection, and usage and to encourage interdisciplinary scholarship.”

The Call for Papers also realises the “shortcoming” with the concept “interdisciplinarity.” However, this ‘shortcoming’ is seen as “only being conceived to be possible within the social sciences and humanities, including law.” CARS therefore propose that inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity approaches not only be concerned within the traditional social sciences and humanities, including law, but also in their connectivity with the natural sciences, physical and mathematical sciences.” If this was achieved, it would be a great revolutionary change for which Cheick Anta Diop called when he referred to the “crisis of reason” that had been brought about by the contribution of microphysics [Diop, 1981: 370-75]. But this is perhaps more than the Call for Papers has in mind. So CARS can be referred to as an interdisciplinary institution whose objective is to pursue “African renaissance studies.”

It should be clear from the above that the concept “African renaissance” is taken for granted. It is talked of a requisite for African “renewal, re-invention and rebirth.” Moreover CARS, while talking of an “African renaissance paradigm” is silent as to what this actually means. In our view, such a paradigm should be clearly articulated as the defining core of its vision. There is reference to the methodologies of “inter-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity” approaches but these are not problematised with the exception of “inter-disciplinarity,” which is only problematised in its lack of connectivity to natural sciences. From this it follows that, with all their problems within the western academic methodologies, “inter-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity” are swallowed “hook, line and sinker” to be the “paradigm for “African renaissance studies.” This to me is problematic and needs to be further interrogated.

The Problem

What is critically important is for us to realise that Africa and its peoples have been subjected to a process of disorganisation, fragmentation and disintegration of their historical-cultural and civilisational achievements for the last three thousand years. These achievements, in many cases, have been appropriated by other peoples and turned around on their heads against the African people [James, 1954]. In the process, the African civilisation has been raped; plundered, despoiled and dehistorised [Diop, 1974, [France, 1991]]. If the expression “African renaissance” has to mean anything all to the African masses, it has, as pointed out above, be able to mobilise African people psychologically, spiritually, and politically in order for the African continent to engage in a process of “recovery,” “re-awakening” and/or “rebirth,” that can break us out of the Eurocentric intellectual jails in which Africans find themselves caught and imprisoned. Such reawakening must enable us to go beyond all the limitations that Africans have been subjected to throughout these three thousand centuries.

The process of re-awakening and recovery has to be one of a historical deconstruction, *consciousness raising* and restatement not in the way the post-modernists and post-structuralist have argued, but by Africans tracing the origins and achievements of their civilisations with a view to developing new epistemologies of knowledge production based on African lived experiences in their global implications. The process must delve into the implications of this centuries old burden of domination that continues to bedevil the African personality and then on the basis of *self-understanding*, to organise ourselves to move forward in history. This must result from the knowledge we shall have formulated, which is based on our historical and cultural experiences throughout our history.

The problem we have to face as scholars is, therefore, not one of finding the appropriate “method,” “technique,” or even of “paradigms.” It is at the very core the problem, about the reconstruction of our understanding of ourselves as Africans and how our relationships with the rest of humanity has led us where we are in the context of a global historical process. It is a hermeneutical problem of self-understanding in which we have to position ourselves as authentic human beings who have made a contribution to human civilisation, and justifiably so since Africa is the Homeland of the World Cradle of Humankind. In a word, it is a hermeneutic task in which we have to foreground ourselves in the context of reconstructing our historical consciousness. It is at the core also a philosophical and epistemological question that African Renaissance “studies” must first resolve before we can talk of “method” whether “inter-multi-or trans-disciplinary” approaches. In short, the content of the ‘studies’ must first be determined and articulated before we can engage in their study.

The methodologies and paradigms that CARS propagates must also be interrogated for they arise within a certain cultural-time-based Eurocentric scholarship, whether “scientific,” “humanistic” or not. When we copy ‘systems’ or ‘disciplines’ developed elsewhere, while at the same time talking about the need for ‘renewal’ and ‘rebirth,’ it is important to recall what Michel Foucault, the French historian of science when he stated:

“The first thing to be observed is that the human sciences did not inherit a certain domain, already outlined, perhaps surveyed as a whole, but allowed to lie fallow, which it was then their task to elaborate with positive methods and with concepts that had at last

become scientific; ...The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, anything like man; ... they appeared when man constituted himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known. There can be no doubts, certainly, that the historical emergence of each one of the human sciences was occasioned by a problem, a requirement, an obstacle of a theoretical or practical order: the new norms imposed by industrial society upon individuals were certainly necessary before psychology, slowly, in the course of the nineteenth century, could constitute itself as a science; and the threats that, since the French Revolution, have weighed so heavily on the social balances, and even on the equilibrium established by the bourgeoisie, were no doubt also necessary before a reflection of the sociological type could appear. But though these differences may well explain why it was in fact in such and such a determined set of circumstances and in answer to such and such a precise question that these sciences were articulated, nevertheless, their intrinsic possibility, the simple fact that man, whether in isolation or as a group, and for the first time since human beings have existed and have lived together in societies, should have become the object of science-that cannot be considered or treated as a phenomenon of opinion: it is an event in the order of knowledge" [Foucault, 1972: 344-5].

We also find ourselves at the point where the question is posed (of an African regeneration), to which an answer must be found of an appropriate science to answer to such question. *How can an African regeneration be brought about in such a way that the energies of the African people can be unleashed for their social transformation based on relevant knowledge?* In this paper we shall try to address the question raised here, but in a broader way by first dealing with the issue of the scientificity of studying and generally investigating historical phenomena in which the African achievements can be given proper recognition for without such recognition, Africans cannot have the self-confidence to carry out the task of knowledge production necessary for their social transformation and "claim the 21st century."

This proposed epistemology is not necessarily African-centric or Afrocentric. It is a universal scientific epistemology that goes beyond Eurocentricism, or other ethnocentrisms. It recognises all sources of knowledge as valid within their historical, cultural or social contexts and seeks to engage them into a dialogue that can lead to better knowledge for all. It recognises peoples' traditions as a fundamental pillar in the creation of such cross-cultural understandings in which the Africans can stand out as having been the fore-bearers of much of what is called Greek or European heritage [Assmann, 1996:64] as fact of history that ought to be recognised, because from this fact alone, it can be shown that cross-cultural interactions has been a fact of historical reality.

Indeed, as Cheikh Anta Diop has pointed out, in so far as the African-Egyptian civilisation is the "distant mother" of western cultures and sciences, most ideas we may call foreign or European are often nothing but "mixed up, reversed, modified, elaborated images of the creations of our African ancestors." These ideas include religious ideas as well as philosophic and scientific ideas. Concepts that appear in Judaism, Christianity, Islam- all have their origin in the African past. Also modern philosophic and scientific ideas such as dialectics, the theory of being, the exact sciences, arithmetic, geometry, mechanical engineering, astronomy, medicine, literature, architecture, the arts, etc, all have a common origin in the development of knowledge in Africa. So the universality of knowledge is not just philosophical, it is real with its base in Africa.

It is a scientific epistemology that aims at enabling us to revisit our understanding of the way humanity emerged from *homo sapiens sapiens*, to state of the unconscious and how from this we became conscious in the process of creating our world of self-awareness from the **Cradle of Mankind**, able to create the first organised political state in history and to become “the sovereign species of the planet” [Ki-Zerbo, 1989]. The paper will provisionally call this scientific approach **africology**, which will encompass the philosophical, epistemological and methodological issues, all seen as part of the process of creating an African self-understanding, which is necessary if Africa is to emerge as a proud member of the global society to which it belongs. The idea is to bring about a situation in which her achievements are recognised and for these achievements to be seen as the building blocks of the human heritage, which we share with others.

What African renaissance must mean to us.

The concept “African renaissance,” as understood in South Africa, seems to be connected with the search for identity and for the current African leadership trying to find new ways of positioning itself in the twenty-first century by re-imagining and re-inventing itself along certain ideological and philosophical lines. In the case of South Africa, the idea is to bring about the interaction between established domestic and global business interests in the country in line with the new government policy of fitting South Africa within globalisation [Kornegay & Landsberg, 1998: 3].

To be sure, in its Mbekian conception and current usage, the concept ‘African renaissance’ and its formulation is said to have originated, on the one hand, in Mbeki’s “*I am an African*” seminal speech which was delivered on the occasion of the adoption of the new South African Constitution in May, 1996 and; on the other, as a response of the African National Congress’-ANC’s leadership to the demand by the ANC members during the 50th National Conference in 1997, that the concept be elaborated to cover its economic and foreign policy which was to form “part of a broader African Renaissance, spearheaded by popular movements in many countries on the (African) continent.” Kornegay and Landsberg have argued that from a national identity-forming perspective, the “*I am an African*” speech should, in their view, “be considered as the intellectual foundation for the articulation of an African renaissance” [Ibid: 4-5].

Following these two events, an African Renaissance conference was organised in Johannesburg in September, 1998 with the support of the President’s Office and this resulted in the launching of the African Renaissance Institute in Botswana formed for the purpose of coordinating national chapters in different parts of the African continent. This movement is supposed to spearhead the “reawakening of the African continent” and people. In further consolidation of this move, the ANC South African Chapter of the African Renaissance was established to champion the ideas of the movement. These developments demonstrate that the South African leadership, at least in the person of Thabo Mbeki and his colleagues, have attempted to capture the continental ideological leading role in a new time.

Thus the current usage of the concept is **Janus**-headed. On the one hand, it reflects the mainstream political elite concern in South Africa for an African national identity against the background of an alienating apartheid system, which tried to depict South Africa as being part of the European continent socially, politically and culturally. At the same time, it also expresses this political elite’s concern with its role in the age of

globalisation and their relations with the corporate sector, which was being strengthened by the forces of economic globalisation process ideologically.

On the face of it, the deployment of this concept was also aimed at adopting the Africanist ideological stance in view of the fact that the ANC as a “non-racial” organisation had tried to depict pan-Africanism, which was advocated by the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania-PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement-BCM of Steve Biko, as ‘reactionary.’ This ‘non-racial’ political stance was especially addressed to the white moderate-to-liberal constituency and the South African Communist Party’s-SACP political line, given the fact that both formed part of the democratic alliance against apartheid. Even the Africanist faction within the ANC had long been on the defensive for pursuing what was conceived to be a racial approach in the struggle against apartheid.

According to Kornegay and Landsberg, the commencement of the transition to a new political dispensation in the country and the broader global backdrop to this transition was bound to create the circumstances for “the reversal in the fortunes of Africanism.” This was because the ANC government was battling to come to terms with the pressing development imperatives of its ‘core constituency’: an emerging and impatient black bourgeoisie both within and outside of the ANC, and a mass constituency of organised labour represented by the Congress of South African Trade Unions-COSATU as well as the working and unemployed poor in the urban and rural areas of the country:

“The resulting emergence of an affirmative action and empowerment agenda in response to these objective realities has eroded ‘non-racialism’, a concept that, in any case, begs for fresh definition” [Ibid: 4].

The collapse of the USSR and socialism as a global alternative to global capitalism, and the resurgence of nationalism in the post-Cold War world throughout the world, also demanded that something more than non-racialism and a facile ‘rainbow nation’ was required to motivate a new sense of national identity on the road to ‘nation building’. This is why Mbeki in his “*I am an African*” speech” tried to demonstrate that non-racialism and Africanism, which were hitherto considered rival political ideologies and tendencies, were not incompatible after all! Nevertheless, the Africanist constituencies, both within the ANC and those outside it, continued to view this combination as a convenient cover for the maintenance of white and Indian privileges over the mass of the African people, but a new world in which a few black bourgeoisie would be “empowered” to join the privileged.

Although the political-identity and corporate elements of the concept are interlinked in this ambivalence, nevertheless, the two can also be separated because the operationalisation of the mainstream attempts of placing the African economies within the global economy has the implication of marginalisation of the African masses which, its own turn, inevitably collides with the general purposes and objectives of a popular ‘African renaissance.’ These objectives, according to Kwesi K. Prah, must “define its grounding in historical and cultural terms which are emancipatory for mass society, and which in the object does not contradict or deny the rights of other peoples” [Prah, 1998: 83]. These two elements in the conception and operationalisation of the African renaissance must be born in mind.

This is why it is possible to see how Mbeki's understanding of the 'African renaissance' was challenged by other interpretations within the African renaissance conference of 1998. In the presentation by Prof. Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane, Magubane shows the other side of how different forces conceived of an African renaissance. He refers to Dr Pixley Isaka ka Seme' Oration at the Columbian University in 1905, where he studied law. Seme entered the University's oratory contest and chose as his topic: "The Regeneration of Africa." In his oration, Dr Seme referred to himself, like Mbeki, that: "I am an African." His main thesis was that all 'the races of mankind' were composed of free and unique individuals and therefore any attempt to compare them on the basis of "equality" could never be satisfactory [Magubane, 1999:31-2]. He envisaged an Africa, which was free and able to renew itself on the basis of its achievements. Dr Pixley became one of the first line of leaders in the ANC.

The rebellion of the African masses-both in the Diaspora against enslavement and against European colonialism-were in fact the reflection of the struggle for an African recovery and regeneration. This is why throughout this period; attempts were made by African intellectuals to assert African identity and achievements. These were part of the process of the struggle for an African "renaissance." This struggle appeared in both political and cultural forms. In its literary form, the struggle took on a Universalist approach with the aim of "rehabilitating the image of the black man wherever he was-an expression of black personality." This movement was in the Diaspora called the Harlem Renaissance in the United States of America, which was the predecessor of the negritude movement in France [Masolo, 1994:10]. According to Masolo, the renaissance movement gave negritude both its form and its content. The form was poetry and the content was pluralism:

"This value of pluralism was built around the an ontology that accepted diversity or otherness without hierarchical judgement of human worth on the basis of racial and cultural characteristics. Theories of racial pluralism as an ontological constitution of humanity were a commonplace of western thought in the mid-nineteenth century. Black thinkers, however found it a liberalising concept [Ibid: 11].

Masolo quotes W. E. B. Du Bois who, like Pixie Seme, referred to each race as striving, "in its own way, to develop for civilisation its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life, for which we all long, that 'one far off Divine event.'" All this was within the struggle to identify Africans as a 'race' in an attempt to fend off European-American racism against the black people developed by Rufus Perry in his book: *The Cushite or the Descendants of Ham* (1893), in which 'race pride', according to Masolo, "held ontological status. Black, yellow, and white races were separate and equal types... and each type a constitutive component of being [Ibid]. But the point made by Du Bois still remains valid even if the idea of 'race' was far too fetched.

It is this "own way," its "particular message" which Africa developed "for civilisation" that must be at the core of an African regeneration and reawakening, which African scholarship must seek to identify. Such a scholarly task will require more than "African studies" or "African renaissance studies" as presently constituted to get to the core of message. It will require scholars to develop new scientific epistemologies and methodologies that get to the core of that message and that negate Eurocentric

methodologies that have in-built prejudiced concepts and underlying philosophies to that African “own way.” This task does not however need Africans to develop their own “centricism” to achieve it because this African original message is itself universal as it emerges with the word (logos) in the Cradle.

The essence of the Harlem Renaissance was a resistance against enslavement and colonisation of Africa, which date back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was a clash between a violent, racist, expansionist imperialism Europe on the one hand, and a peaceful, resistant and rejectionist Africa on the other. These two formed a thesis and antithesis vis-à-vis the other [Ibid: 11]. Marcus Garvey became a focus of this resistance, when he formed a movement of the masses and declared himself the president of the newly created empire of the “United States of Africa,” yet to be realised, but a legitimate programme that the Organisation of African Unity (and now the African Union) seek to actualise. In this sense, both Garvey and Blyden who coined the concept “African Personality” were the real founders of the Harlem Renaissance movement and Pan-Africanism. As we shall see later, this movement became the cornerstone of an African Philosophy that sought to regain Egyptian-Africa’s claim to a European philosophy later emulated by Europe.

Thus the essence of the call for an *African renaissance* is a call for a continued *African resistance* to western domination and exploitation of Africans in the process of Africa restating its original message and its own way that was at the same time universal. Magubane’s paper at the African Renaissance conference in Johannesburg was directed at amplifying this important point. In his paper, he recalls that the word “Renaissance” in the European context was first used to describe, according to Shorter Oxford Dictionary, the “revival of arts and letters under the influence of the ancient models in the 14th-16th centuries.” The noun ‘renaissance’ means ‘rebirth and/or renewal,’ which meant the awakening of Europe from its ‘dark, trance-like period’ of the Middle Ages. According to him, it was called “rebirth” because Europe in the fifteenth century, after a long period of interruption, believed it could resume the civilisation of the Greco-Romans and hence the concept ‘middle’ signified a separation between the new Europe and its Dark period.

It was a renaissance in which the “fascination with Egypt” was central to the new imagination” of European renewal [Assmann, 1996: 426-27]. Those who glorify the European renaissance less emphasize this point about the African achievement as a spur to their “birth of civilisation.” Although scholars run to the Greco-Roman heritage as Europe’s heritage, few realise its sources, which the African message carried to them through its hieroglyphic writing and artwork as well as its pyramids [Rice, 1997: 201]. Michael Rice argues: “without an awareness of Egyptian architecture and many of its decorative elements, the (European) Renaissance is hardly thinkable.” He further argues that the decipherment of the hieroglyphic “became something of a passion amongst scholars who believed that all manner of mysteries and wisdom were connected in their beautiful and innocent shapes.” Michael Rice observes:

“The single most important element which alerted the imaginations of artists and philosophers in the Renaissance and later Europe was the system of writing which had evolved in the (Nile) Valley in the latter centuries of the forth and early centuries of the third millennia. Egyptian hieroglyphs were quiet other than any form of epigraphy known to the world of late antiquity: the heirs of the world, the intellectuals who came towards the light in more generous times, which followed the Middle Ages, responded to their

mystery with delight and the excitement of being on the verge of an entirely new dimension of human experience [Ibid: 197-8].

Rice continues that even though Egypt had come to an end as an independent, self-governing nation, “the gods of Egypt never died.” They continued “to exercise their sway over the minds of men.” Cults of Isis and Osiris, of the composite cults of Serapis, of Horus, Anubis and Ptah, “spread to the lands of which Egyptians themselves probably had no knowledge.” Indeed, it was these divinities that contributed to the formulation of the Christian archetypes that formed the body of Christian belief [Ibid: 197].

In his paper, Magubane demonstrated how Europe had in the same period lifted itself on the basis of the slave trade in Africans and the plunder initiated by the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Columbus of non-European peoples. He adds that this was also the period in which the theory of Ham was reworked to justify slavery and ‘African inferiority.’ We also know from Martin Bernal [1987] that it was in this period that the self-confident Europe decided to “down-grade” Egypt and “upgrade Asian” after it had established total control over the entire known world. He quotes Nelson Mandela, then president of South Africa in his speech to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, which he delivered on 11 March 1997 entitled: “Renewal and Renaissance-Towards a New World Order” in which he stated:

“The voyages of Da Gama and his contemporaries were strands in the grand tapestry of the Western European Renaissance. The expansion of European influence and domination over virtually the entire planet was a central aspect of European ambition in that period of European history. Thus was the foundation of a world economic system forged [Ibid: 20].

Magubane adds: “In other words, the European Renaissance was not simply the freedom of spirit and body for European men, but a new freedom to destroy freedom for the rest of humanity. It was the freedom for the mercantilist bourgeoisie to loot, plunder and steal from the rest of the world. In the process, the African people were “down-graded” as well not human beings, but chattels valued as so much horsepower [Ibid: 20]. Thus post-renaissance Europe saw the African as a chattel for sale in an age they called “Age of Enlightenment.” The development of European philosophy centred on the hiding and obscuring of European criminality against humanity and cannot be referred to as a humanistic achievement in the annals of human history. Moreover, the concession of political independence to Africa by Europe was a strategy to continue the inhuman plunder and exploitation of African resources and its people-including its knowledge systems. It was never intended, just like today’s economic globalisation, to end domination and exploitation and establish a truly humanistic world order. Therefore, we are in full agreement with the following conclusions of Magubane:

“To remember all this to ponder the nature of Western civilization ushered by the Renaissance and celebrated by Enlightenment philosophers. Unless we remember this, we shall understand very little of the contemporary world. How can we forget that European capitalists appropriated everything in Africa they could lay their greedy hands on – the continent’s able-bodied labour, which they systematically drained away for their own purposes for the better part of 500 years, and, in the imperial period, Africa’s natural and human resources, which they still control? Who can forget the looted cultural resources of Africa, like the treasures of Egypt and Ife bronze sculptures, now scattered

in their museums and priceless collections? Even worse, they stole our history and our humanity by propagating their racist ideas. The destruction of the humanity of the African, the European belief in white supremacy, was more degraded than anything else. Nothing is more injurious to human relationships than for one group of people to have absolute power over others, as the white world had over Africa and its people” [Ibid: 31].

But not everything is lost and hence the need for us to be clear when we talk about African renaissance and for Africa to recover its memory. How can Africa be inspired by a renaissance that was partly inspired by ancient Africa and turned into a robbers’ paradise. How can we, in the contest of the same paradigm call it a ‘renewal’ and a ‘reawakening” unless we do not know what this historical injustice has done to us? Unlike the European Renaissance that drew on borrowed on Greco-Roman classicism that itself had drawn from an African heritage in order to get out of their darkness, Africa must foremost recover the memory of its own heritage and message. It is this “African Regeneration” that Dr Pixie Seme called for that we must follow. But Dr Seme was clear what he meant by such the ‘African regeneration.’

In his oration, Dr Seme had asked his audience not to compare Africa to Europe or any other civilisation because he understood Africa to be unique in its own achievements. It was not because of any fear that such a comparison with Europe might bring humiliation to Africa. The reason, he argued, was simply that a common standard to measure the achievements of each ‘race’ or civilisation was impossible, hence for Africa to highlight its own achievements without fear or favour. He had continued:

“Come with me to the ancient capital of Egypt, Thebes, the city of the hundred gates. The grandeur of its venerable ruins and gigantic proportions of its architecture reduces to insignificance the boasted monuments of other nations. The Pyramids of Egypt are structures to which the world presents nothing comparable. The mighty monuments seem to look with disdain on every other work of human art and to vie with nature herself. All the glory of Egypt belongs to Africa and her people. These moments are indestructible memories of their great and original genius [Ibid: 32].

Thus it is this original genius of the African people, which they had built up in the Cradle of Humankind that we must inform African scholar’s search for an African universal paradigm. It is this Check Anta Diop has consistently been reminding us to do for according to him:

“The return to Egypt in all domains is the necessary condition to reconcile African civilisations with history, in order to build a corpus of modern human sciences, in order to renovate African culture. Far from being delectation over the past, looking toward ancient Egypt is the best way to conceive and build our cultural future. Egypt will play within a re-thought and renewed African culture the same role as Greek and Latin antiquities within western culture” [Diop, 1981: 3].

The task for African scholarship is therefore, not the fascination with Egypt and its Pyramids as the Europeans did, but as Diop correctly pointed out, it is in order “to build a corpus of modern sciences and in order to renovate African culture.” Africa’s achievements in Egypt constitute what Michael Rice, following Carl Gustav Jung, has called Egypt’s Legacy of the archetypes of western civilisation, which sprung from the Nile Valley peoples’ “collective consciousness.” Jung was the first to observe through

his studies of analytical psychology that the collective unconscious built in Egyptian archetypes was common to all humankind, in all times, everywhere in the world. He added:

“The acknowledgement of the common psychic inheritance of (hu)mankind is deeply exciting for it allows us to begin to comprehend the motivations of the series of mythically-based belief systems which have bemused our unfortunate species, blessed and cursed, in equal measure, as it sometimes seems, with the faculty of consciousness . If this principle be accepted, namely that is possible to begin to understand the psychological imperatives which have driven humankind as a whole through its history, then it follows that the same principle, can with advantage be applied to the study of history, the record of human sciences and the acts of men considered collectively [Rice, 1997: xi-ii].

Rice adds that Egypt was truly a *pristine society*, which developed into a large-scale, centrally directed, coherent political structure, which existed over a significant span of history. It was hierarchic and thus firmly rooted in the human past, for human societies derive ultimately from the primate group, its pristine nature is revealed by its role in defining the *archetypes* and giving them expression:

“The two thousand years during which Egypt flourished, to an extent unequalled by any other ancient society, imprinted a series of *ideas* of what a complex society should be. These ideas became the dominant model on which other societies in the ancient world based their own experience consciously or not. Eventually, the same archetypes which streamed out of the Egyptian unconscious rose similarly from the unconscious of other peoples in all parts of the world, whether they knew it or not, were themselves on the threshold of complex hierarchical societies [Ibid: xiii].

Thus, Egypt became the vessel through which the archetypes passed and “streamed” to the rest of the world. Jung himself argues that instinct that exists in all humans is anything but blind and indefinite impulse, since it proves to be attuned and adapted to definite external situations. It is this latter circumstance that gives it its specific irreducible form. Just as instinct is original and hereditary, so too, its form is age-old, that is to say *archetypal*. In that case, the instinct is older and more conservative than the body’s form. He adds:

“These biological considerations naturally apply also to *Homo sapiens*, who still remains within the framework of general biology despite the possession of consciousness, will and reason. The fact that our conscious activity is rooted in instinct and derives from it its dynamism as well the basic features of its ideational forms has the same significance for human psychology as for all other members of the animal kingdom. *Human knowledge consists essentially in the constant adaptation of the primordial patterns of ideas that were given us as priori*. These need certain modifications, because, in their original form, they are suited to an archaic mode of life but not to the demands of a specifically differentiated environment. *If the flow of instinctive dynamism into our life is to be maintained, as is absolutely necessary for our existence, then it is imperative that we remodel these archetypal forms into ideas which are adequate to the challenge of the present*” [Jung, 1968: 69-70].

Thus, the tracing of African achievements throughout history and the discovery of the primordial patterns of ideas that were given to us a priori as we moved from the unconscious to the conscious state, do still provide us the basis for reconstituting human

knowledge in the way Africans have survived with them. A regeneration of Africa lies in the tracing of human knowledge as built up by Africans from the Cradle of Humankind, interrogating the way it was interpreted in other societies and expunging it of Eurocentric prejudices and racist notions so that we can have true and usable knowledge that can emancipate Africa from the clutches of European encirclement and enslavement.

The Cradle and the World.

Dr. Louis Leakey's archaeological discoveries in East Africa dispelled any doubts about the Cradle of Humanity being located in the Great Rift Valleys of East Africa. It is here that humanity originates fully as *sapiens sapiens*, despite attempts to assert the contrary by scientists who are ideologically driven by race theories [Diop, 1981: 25-68]. Even before Leakey made the historic discoveries, the Greeks had long recognised the originality of the people in the Nile Valley. Writing in the first century BC, Diodorus of Sicily had observed that the Nubian or Ethiopian people whom he visited seemed to be the first "to emerge from the bowels of the earth and begin to live." He also observed that most of the practices adopted by the Egyptians were of Nubian or Ethiopian origin and, especially, "the college of priests," which were "almost in all respects identical in the two nations" [Quoted in Obenga, 1995: 73-4].

An outstanding British historian on Africa, Roland Oliver, with this in mind stated what most scholars have increasingly come to accept:

"It seems that we all belong, ultimately, to Africa. Almost certainly, the Garden of Eden, in which our ancestors grew gradually apart from their near relatives in the animal kingdom, lay in the highland interior of East Africa, where equatorial forest belt is broken by mountains and high savannah parklands running south from Ethiopia to the Cape. At the heart of this region lies the Great Rift Valley, its floor strewn with spectacular lakes, its sides rising steeply to the high plateaux surmounted by the blue cones of a thousand volcanic peaks" [Oliver, 1991: 1].

Roland Oliver adds that the recent findings of molecular biology had revealed that the planet was not merely first colonised from Africa: it was also "largely recolonised by the first fully sapient men spreading out, again from Africa, to the rest of the world, within the last 25,000 years. He observes that if this new knowledge were to spread and pondered over by the next generation of scientists across the whole spectrum of intellectual disciplines, "the outside world will learn to think of Africa with more respect and that Africans themselves will face their fellows with a new confidence" [Ibid: 252]. Oliver concludes that should this "hypothesis" become established, then "a major revision of the existing literature of prehistory would become necessary, but the resulting modifications of generally received opinion should be less far-reaching than for the other continents" [Ibid: 26].

But this respect and confidence as well as the major revisions of literature on the prehistory of humankind (but also of the history of the world) will not come on their own. This effort will require a new crop of African scholars themselves not just to be proud of the fact that the Cradle of Humankind was located in the Great Rift Valley of East Africa, but also to follow this up by demonstrating themselves as Cheick Anta Diop and those who have followed him have done: that the civilisational achievements of Egypt were achievements of those of the African people and that those achievements were later to

become archetypes that ‘streamed’ from the Cradle to the rest of humankind in the rest of the world. Such new discoveries will reveal that the achievements of early humankind in the Cradle were in fact to become the common heritage of the whole world, showing their universal character.

But what is it that we are talking about here? We are talking about the need for a mental/psychological revolution involving the understanding of ourselves historically and in the present. The records are there for us to interpret and apply to our situation. The restatement of the fact that Africa was the Cradle of Humankind will not of itself mean much unless we can demonstrate that it was from here that the original ideas that formed human knowledge and wisdom were created and to highlight those ideas that were crucial to human existence, but which have been used for purposes of greed and self-glorification in the modern world. More importantly, research in this area should lead to the creation of a new philosophy “that can reconcile man with himself” [Diop, 1981: 361].

Carl Gustav Jung, referred to above, was convinced of the originality of humanity in African when in 1925 he made his first trip to Africa starting with East Africa, in the course of his studies. For him, the only way to understand humanity was to see it from its originality face to face “with men of the other epoch” and who seemed to have put their imprint on Egypt. He was not impressed by the so-called “Asiatic elements” in the Egyptian civilisation nor the attempt to look at Egypt from the West, from the direction of Europe and Greece “but from the south” [Rice, 1990: 254-6]. Among the archetypes that Jung saw “streaming out of Egypt” to the rest of humanity were the divine kingship, the ‘Great Individual,’ the festival of renewal, the Gods, the Divine Animals, the symbolism in early Egypt, the symbolism of the Tomb, the evolution of the burial customs, the Temple, the ancient Egyptian psyche and experiences of the species, the pyramids and the texts in the Temples as “psychoanalytical primers.’

Jung noted that the most important achievement of the Egyptian-Africans was the knowledge they were able to assemble as they moved from the unconscious to the conscious. This is description of the emergence of Homo sapiens sapiens as they moved from the Cradle of East Africa northwards, eastwards and westwards. This description is about how the universe was formed as humankind became conscious and aware of self and how humankind begun to engage in different kinds of activities that made them human. In this way, the first Africans built up their first civilisation in the Nile Valley and established the first political society that lasted several millennia.

Some of these achievements, which were later challenged by the invading forces were restated in the first African renaissance recorded in the Memphite Theology by the Pharaoh Shabaka of the Cushite (Nubian and Ethiopian) dynasties who tried to recapture Egypt’s old glory and reassert it. This was done in 716 BC in a document also called the Memphite Manifesto. In the Manifesto Shabaka, made an attempt to discover and reinvent the past glory and preserve it. He tried to remodel Egypt from the past after disruptions of several centuries by outsiders.

The subject of the text was Memphis, its mythic and political significance “as the location where the creation emerged from the primal waters and the seminal locus of pharaoh kingship” [Assmann, 1996: 346]. The creator-god, Atum is referred to in the Manifesto as “the Universe” and is depicted in the text as “unfolding in the world” and at the same time “creating it.” In this way, the Egyptian cosmologies depicted in a combined way both an account of the birth of the world with a report on the emergence

of consciousness and the idea political rule. The elevation of Memphis to the royal capital of a reunified Egypt was, according to Assmann, a “feat of cultural renewal,” which provided the impetus for the ensuing renaissance.

The Memphite text also gives an account of how knowledge was created from *the word* and language. Assmann calls this an “anthropological discourse” which begins with how Atum created knowledge through the “seed” and “hands” of Amun and how sub-gods emerged in pairs referred to in the text. These creations are also referred to as the “teeth” and “lips,” which are said to have formed the frame for the “tongue” that in turn created everything by *naming* them:

That the eye sees, the ear hear,
and the nose breathes air is in order to make a report to the heart.
This it is that makes all knowledge originate.
The tongue, it is that repeats what is thought by the heart.

Assmann observes that the process of creation is here conceived in bodily terms, “Phallus” and “hand” –the traditional physical symbols of creativity-are represented as “teeth” and “lips.” The genuine creative organs are heart and tongue. He adds that since the Egyptians made no distinction between “body” and “mind/spirit,” knowledge and language, originate in the heart on the basis of the perceptions reported to it by the eyes and the ears: “The knowledge formed in the heart is communicated by the tongue,” but the ear also hears, which creates a basis for communication in language-the basis of knowledge creation [Ibid: 352].

The text then relates how all the gods were “born,” how divine speech recorded in the hieroglyphs originated “from which it was thought out by the heart and commanded by the tongue.” With this all trades and all arts were carried out with the action of the arms and the walking of the legs, the movement of all limbs in accordance with the instructions of those words that were thought up by the heart and uttered by the tongue and thereby providing all things. Assmann points out that this is the most elaborate Egyptian account of creation by the Word, which differs from the biblical account in two ways.

The first is the role of the heart that is the planned conception of creation- an idea absent from the Bible. The second is the role of script, the hieroglyphs mentioned on two occasions in the text. He adds that these two points are closely related: “For what the heart thinks up are not the names of things but their ‘concepts’ and their ‘forms.’ Hieroglyphic script is a rendering of the forms and relates to the concepts ‘thought up’ by the heart and given outward and visible form by hieroglyphic script” [Ibid: 353]. We shall see below how true this understanding the process of language is to the African oral literature and how this can help us to clear the confusion that Plato and Aristotle brought to the concept *logos* or the word.

God Ptah is depicted in the text as the artist and craftsman, who endow things their ‘design’, their immutable forms and which are depicted by the written signs. Here is introduced another god-Thoth-who now becomes the god of the ‘tongue,’ but also of the god of hieroglyphic script. According to the text, Thoth is able to transform the thoughts of the heart into spoken and written language. In this, creation is at the same time an act of the articulation-conceptually, iconically, phonetically of the world. The

written signs originate at the same time as the things they stand for and the names they bear. The totality of all creation is encompassed in the term “all things and all hieroglyphs.” The hieroglyphs are the Forms of the things that constitute the totality of the real world. Thus Toth, the god of the script, does not have to invent words like Plato tried to do in imitation of the Egyptian philosophy, but to find what is in the structure of things. He records “all the things that exist: what Ptah created” [Ibid: 354].

According to Gadamer, Plato separates the name from the thing in order to create the “Idea” for the thing to be understood on its own. This is because the word was understood primarily as a name. We see that this was also the case with the Egyptians, except that for them the word and the name stood for real entities expressed in form. For the Greeks, on the other hand, the name did not represent a true being. This belief in the word (*logos*) and doubt about it, constituted the problem that the Greek Enlightenment saw as the relationship between the word and thing. Thereby the word changed from presenting the thing to substituting for it. The name that is given and can be altered raised doubt about the truth of the word.

This is how dialectics was also brought in from the Egyptians by Plato to deal with the problem they had created for themselves in denying that the word/name was capable of producing truth. Thought in this case became dependent on itself and the ideas it produces were equally independent. Hence it is not the word that opened the way to truth, but the ideas that could be created and dialectically related in form. Thus, unlike the Egyptians, for the Greeks, the word (*logos*) is a stream that flows from thought and sounds through the mouth. Language is peripheral to the process and that is why at a later stage, the word is represented by a sign to which meaning is attributed. Gadamer observes:

“It must be admitted that every development of scientific terminology, however, confined its use may be, constitutes a phase of this process. For what is a technical term? A world whose meaning is univocally defined, inasmuch as it signifies a defined concept. A technical term is always somewhat artificial insofar as either the word itself is artificially formed or – as is more frequent – a word already in use has the variety and breadth of its meanings excised and assigned only one particular conceptual meaning, in contrast to the living meaning of the words in spoken language [Gadamer, 1989: 414-15].

For the Egyptians, the sign represented by hieroglyphs are, as we saw above, merely forms of the things that constitute the totality of the real world. The hieroglyphs represented the real world. Thus we can see that we are coming to the point where we must see that the restoration of the original philosophical and cosmological framework, which the Egyptian-Africans attached to the world and its power of creation of the Universe. The word and its resulting in language, and its attribution to god Toth as the recorder of the knowledge created through them becomes essential for comprehending the world of the African linguistic world. Here language emerges as the living reality that is created by the beingness of Africans with meaning that springs from their culturally and historically constructed out of their ontological being. What we have to do is to construct a science of Africology, which can help us recover this originality of the African Universe and thought.

The Science of Africology and the African Universe

The construction of the science of Africology therefore flows directly from the need for Africans to redefine their world, which can enable them to advance their self-

understanding and the world around them based on their cosmologies. The issue of creating knowledge that promotes African self-understanding and a knowledge that can promote their transformation is not just an issue of methodologies. As we have seen, the objective of imperialism was to capture the upper ground of knowing the natives in order to control their thinking and self-understanding. The objective was to reduce them to something “other” than their “self,” or the masters. Many of the academic disciplines were especially created to understand the natives for that purpose.

Edward Said, the late Palestinian scholar, pointed out that *Orientalism*, which was the first “discipline” invented by the Europeans in order to know the Orient, was also intended to act as a source of European civilisation and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of “its deepest and most recurring images of the other.” In addition, the Orient helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience. The Orient became an integral part of the European *material* civilisation and culture because Europe was able to gain strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. In short, knowledge about the Orient was about power over the Orientals [Said, 1995: 1-5].

The pursuit of African emancipation and liberation has been accompanied by attempts by Africans to redefine themselves through Pan-Africanism and nationalism. In scholarship, outstanding scholars have sought to lay the ground for a scholarship that can ground Africa on its own terms. In some cases, they have even adopted the enemy’s tools of knowing us in order to turn them to our advantage. Such creations as “African Studies” were one such attempt, although today it is dominated by “Africanists” of all kinds, many of them hostile to African aspirations. The brothers and sisters in the Diaspora have gone further to create Afrocentric approaches to research and teaching.

Molefe Kete Asante, in particular has gone the farthest in developing *Afrocentricism and Afrocentricity* as a philosophy and methodology of self-understanding. The idea emerged out of the experiences of African Americans in their struggle for an African identity. It was said to be a combination of philosophy, science, history, and mythology to give African Americans the clearest perspective on their existence. Asante defined Afrocentricity as “the belief in the centrality of Africans in post modern history,” adding: “It is our history, our mythology, our creative motifs, and our ethos exemplifying our collective will.” Elsewhere, he refers to Afrocentricity as a liberating ideology and as a science and method that seeks to change the way we refer to our history and ourselves. He distinguished Afrocentricity from Africanity, arguing that being black did not in itself make someone Afrocentric. The rejection of European particularism, which they represented as universal, was the first stage “of our coming intellectual struggle” [Asante, 1996: 6-7, 102, 104, 105].

In his book, Asante also refers to Afrology as the “Afrocentric study of concepts, issues, and behaviours with the particular bases in the African world, Diasporan and continental. Afrology is said to encompass such areas as African studies, Black studies, and Afrikan-American studies, which are referred to as essentially Afrological studies. The method of Afrology is said to be the “crystallization of the notions and methods of black oriented social scientists and humanists.” What these scholars have studied, explained, analysed and promulgated in papers, lectures and private conversations “has taken shape, which is one with substance, as a new, creative discipline squarely resting on the foundations of our African past.” Afrological logic is claimed to be a singular

academic achievement, which has made conceptualisation of black perspectives and attitudes, thereby suggesting a new methodology” [Ibid: 58-9].

Thus the search for a new African-based science that is adequate to the task of emancipatory knowledge of the Africans is already on the agenda. Thus Cheick Anta Diop in his dissatisfaction with the Eurocentric research about Africa under the discipline of Egyptology accused those engaged in it as being “guilty of a deliberate falsification of the history of humanity,” which had reinforced the theoretical bases of imperialist ideology in the name of “scientific objectivity.” Based on the work he had undertaken in his book: *Civilisation or Barbarism*, he called for the creation of an “African Egyptology” that “alone will allow us to move for good beyond the frustrating and destructive theories of obscurantist or agnostic historians who, lacking solid information acquired right from the source, seek to save face by proceeding with a hypothetical dosage of influences as if they were dividing an apple.” He added:

“Only the implying such a scientific discipline in Black Africa would, one day, lead to the grasping of the richness and the novelty of the cultural conscience that we want to awaken, its quality, its depth, its creative power” [Diop, 1981: 6].

Diop demonstrates the scientificity of his methodological approach in the study he undertook and finally called for new human sciences by pointing out Africa’s contribution to humanity in sciences and in philosophy throughout history by exposing what the Greek philosophers claimed to be their discoveries to have been adopted from the Egyptian African sources, which they did not acknowledge. In this same frame of mind, Diop called for a research that would produce a new philosophy that reconciles man with himself. The objective of Afrikology is to follow up on this call by Diop and on the efforts made by Afrocentricity.

Afrikology must proceed from the proposition that it is a true philosophy of knowledge and wisdom based on African cosmogonies because it is **Afri-** in that it is inspired by the ideas originally produced from the Cradle of Humankind located in Africa. **It is not Afrikology because it is African** but it is **Afri-**because it emanates from the source of the Universal system of knowledge in Africa. The product is therefore not relativistic to Africa but universalistic with its base in Africa. It is **-(co)logy** because it is based on **logos**-the word from which the Universe arose. From the word emerged consciousness and from consciousness emerged humanity who produced language from the word.

From this logos, the word, and the signs of the hieroglyphs, the African Egyptians were able to develop knowledge in all directions and branches, which the Greeks and Romans later learnt from by acknowledging its attribution to the authorship of the Egyptian god Thoth whom they called Herms Trismegistus, who became a composite god of the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Thus the Egyptian god Toth became a civilising influence on the Greeks and the rest of the world [Fowden, 1986: 2, 22]. Hence, Afrikology that bases itself on this cosmogony is universalistic.

Afrikology draws its scientificity and uniqueness from the fact that it is based on an all-embracing philosophy of humankind originating in Egypt and updated by the lived experiences of all humanity, who still continue to draw on its deep-rooted wisdom. It is based on a philosophy that is conscious of itself, conscious of its own existence as thought, and which although originally based in *myth* was able to separate itself from

myth to *concept* within its own development. We have seen this evolution above with emergence of logos with the gods Atum and Ptah, who articulated the emergence of concept from the mythical word. Cheikh Anta Diop has argued that the African philosophical universe had achieved these two requirements, before any human group of people, including the Greeks. According to him, vis-à-vis Black Africa, Egypt played the same role that Greco-Latin civilisation played vis-à-vis the rest of Europe. He emphasises:

“We can build a body of disciplines in the humanities only by legitimising and systematising the return to Egypt: in the course of this account, we will see that only the Egyptian facts allow us to find, here and there, the common denominator of the remnants of thought, a connection between the African cosmogonies in the process of fossilization” [Diop, 1981: 309].

In this direction, Diop gives what he regards as a fundamental beginning point drawn from “the Cradle” of classical philosophy in Egypt in building new human sciences: “This manner of presenting the facts, by respecting the chronology of their genesis and their true historical connections, is the most scientific way of retracing the evolution of philosophic thought and of characterising its African variant” [Ibid: 309-10].

With this approach he begins by pointing to Egyptian cosmogony as attested to by the Texts of the Pyramid from 2600 BC, “even when Greece did not exist in history yet and when the Chinese and Hindu philosophies were meaningless.” Under this cosmogony he distinguishes three great systems of thought that in Egypt had explained the origin of the Universe: the *Hermopolitan* system, the *Heliopolitan* system, and the *Memphite* system to which he added the *Theban* system.” Diop summarises, the doctrines that emanate from the four cosmogonies as follows:

“According to these systems, the universe was not created *ex nihilo*, on a given day; but there has always existed an uncreated matter, without a beginning or an end (the *apeiron*, without limit and without determination, of Anaximander, Hesiod, etc.); this chaotic matter was, in origin, the equivalent of non-being, because of the sole fact that it was unorganised: thus, non-being is not, here, the equivalent of nothingness, from which would rise, no one knows how, the matter that would be the substance of the universe. This chaotic matter contained at archetypal state (Plato) all the essence of the body of the future beings that, one day, would be called into existence: sky, stars, earth, air, fire animals, plants, human beings, etc. This primordial matter, the *nous* or the “primordial waters” was elevated to the level of divinity (called Nun in Egyptian cosmogony). Thus, from the start, each principal of explanation of the universe is doubled by a divinity, and as philosophical thought developed in Egypt, and more particularly in Greece (materialistic school), the latter replaced the former” [Ibid: 310].

It is here that primitive matter also contained the law of transformation (of becoming), the law of the evolution of matter through time, equally considered as divinity-*khepera*. It is this law of becoming that, acting on matter through time, was able to actualise the archetypes, the essences, the beings which were therefore already created in potentiality, before being was created in actuality. Therefore, carried by its own evolutionary movement, eternal matter, uncreated, “by dint of going through the stages of organisation, ends up by becoming self-aware” [Ibid: 311].

Thus, for the Egyptian cosmogony, humanity first emerges from the unconscious to the conscious from the primordial Nun, the God Ra, and the *demiurge* that the Greeks

through Plato, without this historical experience, saw as the creation. Thus uncreated eternal matter is materialistic, excludes nothingness and contains within itself the principle of evolution as an intrinsic property and hence the importance of duality and the dialectic in African thinking, which also explains beingness of the *ba* and *ka* which are the bodies corporeal soul as their double and the immortal principle wherein the dead person's spirit rejoins the divinity in heaven:

“Thus was founded, on the ontological level, the being's immortality (three thousand years before the birth of the revealed religion). Each person possesses a portion of the divinity that fills the cosmos and renders it intelligible to the spirit. Perhaps it is on these grounds that the Egyptian cosmogony makes God say ‘that he made man in his own image’ [Ibid: 311].

What Diop says here is a matter of cardinal importance for African worldview that must be at the base of any epistemology of knowledge production and use. It has also implications for the methodologies we adopt in attempting to access knowledge and wisdom. The ‘methodological’ approach has to be hermeneutical for what is at issue here is not just “knowledge” that science claims to be able to produce through ‘reason’, but a whole way of looking at the world that involves the relation between temporal and spiritual world. This of necessity requires the deployment of a dialectical interface of the dualities of existence in the world and the realities within it.

Jung observed this way in which Africans viewed the world when he visited the continent in 1925 in the course of his studies. He observed that the tension that existed in the figure of the Egyptian king lay in the fact that he was seen as “the self” and at the same time “the individual of the Egyptian people.” This tension represented a balance of opposites in the belief systems, which manifested itself in the suggestion that the placenta of the king at birth was also the king's twin. Michael Rice ponders on this issue and adds that:

“The suggestion that the placenta represents the king's twin provides, ..., the explanation for its place in the line of royal standards borne before the Early Dynastic kings procession; indeed, it is the only convincing explanation for the appearance of the placenta in Early Dynastic rituals” [Rice, 1990: 248].

This conclusion accords with the reality of kingship on the African continent today and Diop is right in saying that the tracement of the customary practices and knowledge back to the source, may give us an explanation of the common denominator of the remnants of thought and a connection between the African cosmogonies in the process of fossilization.” This is because by following this hermeneutic approach, we can understand why today in the kingdom of Buganda (in Uganda), the Kabaka's (kings') umbilical cord continues to be preserved as the his double and a “human body” is built around it to materialise and symbolise the kings' duality. A separate palace is built for the Kabaka's double and has a retinue of officialdom serving him such as the prime minister, ministers, etc. It would appear that therefore to understand the African worldview; one has to take these cosmogonies into account as a basis for the epistemology and methodological framework for study and research in knowledge and wisdom on the continent.

In the Swazi pre-colonial political system, which was a centralized territorial state based on clans, the patrilineal system depended on a system known as the “dual monarchy” in which the king ruled together with his mother. It is a system that compromised the original matriarchy and matriline within the emergent patriarchy and patriline. Under the system, the king was chosen indirectly when one of the several queens of the late king was chosen by the royal council to be queen mother. Once this was done, the king was automatically chosen from the line of sons of that new queen mother with whom he must rule. The King-the *Ngwenyama*-and the queen mother-*Ndlovukazi* thus ruled side by side. The role of the queen mother was to restrain her son’s possible high-handedness and arbitrary use of power. Up to now this system continues to be upheld, if only in form, due the colonial interference with the system, when it tried to turn it into its opposite [Kuper, 1947: 9].

Having said the above, we must return to Thoth-the African Egyptian god of all knowledge. As we have seen, before the Greeks and the Romans turned him into a syncretism of Herms and later Trismegistus, Thoth was an Egyptian powerful national god who had certain specialities and local associations. In particular Thoth was regarded even in the most primitive period as the “man-go.” He was seen as a counsellor and secretary to the solar divinity Re, and of the moon as the ruler of the stars, which distinguishes seasons, months and years thus becoming the lord and multiplier of Time, and the regulator of individual destinies.

Toth also came to be looked upon as the origin of both the cosmic order and of the religious and civil institutions. He was a divine scribe and inventor of writing and lord of wisdom. The Egyptian priesthood attributed much of the sacred literature to him and parts of the authorship of the *Book of the Dead* were attributed to him. He was also acknowledged as the source of occult knowledge and the lord of knowledge in general as well as language and science. His magical powers also made him a doctor. He conducted the dead to the kingdom of the gods, and participated in the judgement of their souls.

He also played a role in the drama of creation itself, as we have already seen. It was his role as the guide of the souls and judge of the dead that he was most loved by ordinary people so that even after the Greeks and Romans occupied Egypt, he was most adored by the masses. The Greek settlers in time came to identify Thoth with their own god Herms. He was also associated with trickery and inventiveness as well as functioning as the messenger between the gods and humans and as the interpreter of the divine will to mankind [Fowden, 1986: 22-31].

Our interest in Thoth here is that he is in fact the representation of the African collective knowledge and wisdom. According to Fowden, the attribution of all knowledge and wisdom to Thoth arose out of the fact that the milieu in which Egyptian knowledge developed did not encourage personal or literary individualism: “in fact if Herms (Toth) had not existed he would have to be invented.” The knowledge and texts attributed to Thoth also gained weight and popularity, in the eyes of his followers “precisely because it was not merely the product of an autonomous authorial act, but reflected the sedimentary intellectual culture of his own and earlier times- in short, because it did not strive to originality” [Ibid: 187].

This is especially important because *Thothism* and *Thothology* (as we can now prefer to call this collectivity of African knowledge and wisdom) is widespread in African written and oral literature and texts, painted mural art, masks, stories, songs,

philosophical proverbs and general folklore, with which we have to deal as researchers and teachers. These texts are always available to any individual to consult, apply and transmit on to posterity. In other words, African collective knowledge and wisdom faces in all directions, open to all and capable of application in a hermeneutic manner. In short, Thothism is an open-ended approach to knowledge creation, interpretation and application. As such it is also dialectical and historical with both long-dated and short-dated horizons. Thus although our understanding of knowledge and reality as we apply it is finite, the source from which we draw this knowledge and wisdom are infinite in horizon.

What is said above has epistemological and methodological implications regarding the way we can research into and access knowledge and wisdom in African conditions. It is now clear that in these cosmological conditions we cannot attribute knowledge and wisdom to anyone individual or groups of individuals. The Baganda have a proverb, which clarifies this point: “*amageezi si goomu*” (“knowledge does not belong to any single human being”). This reluctance to attribute the authorship of knowledge and wisdom to any individual or groups of individuals has resulted in their preservation even under very difficult times, say, during invasions and occupations of African territories. In such situations, those individuals who were the custodians of such knowledge and wisdom withdrew themselves from public life and formed themselves into secret societies as a way of conserving the knowledge and preventing its leakage to foreigners through individuals claiming such knowledge to be their personal “intellectual property” and divulging it to foreigners.

If we are to truly access African knowledge and wisdom, we have to take cognisance of this reality, which still persists in the way knowledge is organised up to the present. We have to start with the proposition that African knowledge is collective and on that basis build concepts and theories, which recognise it as such and reward the communities concerned for any use or application of their knowledge for profit. Western notions of “intellectual property” cannot therefore be applied except by imposition of “modernity” upon Africans, which a majority of Africans have refused to accept. This is important, for instance, in the way we should relate western legal concepts and formulations to African knowledge situations. Africans of the era of the African renaissance must forge an African legal system that takes this epistemology as the starting point and foreground the African collective concepts for certain forms of knowledge. It is the task of Afrikology, applying the epistemology of Thothism to bring this reality out and mainstream it.

Here, the aspect of Thoth being a messenger of the gods and a transmitter and interpreter of knowledge from the gods to the humans and vice-versa is what led the Greeks and European philosophers in general, to focus on the philosophical-methodological significance of Thothism. They tried to develop it as a ‘method’ that could be used to interpret the text of the Bible as well as being used in philology. They called this philosophical approach *hermeneutics* after Herms, whom they had synthesized with the Egyptian Thoth. This is the area where we can demonstrate that hermeneutics, which comes from the African way of conceiving knowledge and its dialectical application has a scientific basis built within it. African scholars can develop this epistemology, which alone can enable them to access such knowledge by working with

the custodians of knowledge and wisdom in the rural African communities that has long been buried in secret societies and secret practices.

This historical approach will also enable us to disentangle those aspects of African knowledge that has been “ossified” and currently applied out of their religio-philosophical contexts. Cheikh Anta Diop points out that certain African initiatory traditions have tended to degrade the quasi-scientific thoughts and practices that we received during the ancient times, instead of enriching them. These have to be investigated in order to discover those negative cultural practices, which may still be imitating and continue to practice certain ancient rituals and initiations that no longer carry the meanings they did under the old cosmogonies. The idea of an African regeneration requires that these practices be identified, debated and new ideas and practices be developed to replace them where necessary [Diop, 1981: 322-23].

Thothism also implies that dialects be used to comprehend African reality. Instead of treating dialectics as an idea to be used in interrogating thought, dialectics in African conditions must relate to actual life situations and be utilised to arrive at the truth through open-ended methodologies. In lived experiences, the dialectical method involves the dialogue principle in conversation that enables the cross-investigation of phenomenon through verbal communication: posing of questions and provoking answers to them. In African conditions, therefore, research and the pursuance of knowledge through investigation must take a dialogical form crafted in peoples’ own languages.

Thus from *logos* we move to language and from myth we move to concepts that are created by the living word and tradition. This historical experience has never stopped since the Cradle of Mankind came into being. The *logos* guides us up to a certain point, but thenceforth the divine intellect (*nous*) takes over and must proceed on its own, “with nothing but the reminiscences of the teachings it has received in the sphere of reason to compare experience with” [Fowden: 100-01]. Fowden argues in this context that:

“One could hardly wish for a more concise statement of the ancients’ conviction that human and divine knowledge, reason and intuition, are interdependent- a view which continued to prevail in Islam, particularly in Shiite and Sufi circles, but with the Western intellectual tradition has often rejected, decomposing knowledge into independent categories, separating philosophy from theology, and in so doing setting up serious obstacles to the understanding of more unified world-views [Ibid: 101].

This separation and division of the oneness of knowledge created from the Cradle must be overcome by Afrikology and this is possible if we pay due attention to the issue of African languages as the medium of knowledge and the *verbal word* as the source of understanding and the creation of a better all embracing knowledge and wisdom shared by all humanity.

According to African wisdom, *speech and tradition are the sources of knowledge*. Oral tradition is the “the Great School of Life,” which deals with religion, philosophy, the social sciences as well as the natural sciences. Africans are known to be experts in fields such as mineralogy, medicine and the pharmacopoeia. Much of its knowledge is contained in oral tradition carried from age to age in skills of historical collective memory. According to Professor Hampâté, a specialist in African Oral tradition, knowledge in African societies is not something abstract and separate from life; it is bound up in Man’s tangible social behaviour and daily life: “Through the divine Word, it

is connected both with the present-day world and with the origin of all knowledge.” He points out that in Bambara society, for instance, the carriers of traditional are known as *doma* or *soma* meaning: “those who know.” In Fulbe, custodians of tradition are similarly known as the “makers of knowledge.” In this tradition, knowledge is not fragmented, but is a holistic:

“As a rule, the master of knowledge is a ‘general practitioner’ versed in the sciences of plants, of the earth with its agricultural and medicinal properties, of water, and also in astronomy, cosmogony, psychology and other subjects. What is involved, in fact, is eminently practical science of living, which consists in mobilising the energies available so that they may serve life. The great *doma* with total knowledge were the Fula Ardo Dembo, the Bambara brothers Danfo Sine and Latif and, still living, Iwa and the great blind musician Banzoumana” [Hampâté, 1989:62-65].

The speech is held by many traditionalists to be divine in origin. Prof. Hampâté quotes Danfo Sine, to whom he has referred above as always communicating with the respected ancestors as follows: “Hold firm the reigns of my tongue, O ancestors, guide my words as they come forth, that they may follow the natural order.” The correct order is the order that brings out proper meaning. He adds that the Griots, who are known in certain West African states to be great carriers of tradition, “are allowed to have two tongues.’ But these griots should not be confused with the *doma* or *soma*, who teach and are specialists in their knowledge. The griots on the other hand act as minstrels and house captives, whose job is to entertain and are allowed two tongues for their profession and their normal tongue for communicating true words [Ibid: 64].

Falling in the western tradition, Gadamer sees language in this hermeneutic form as the basis for understanding between two traditions. He points out that one form of authority, which the Enlightenment tried to down grade was tradition. This is the same attitude exhibited by the colonialists towards African traditional knowledge systems; because they feared that they could have been used as “the focal point for resistance movements, and as a result they took refuge in the bush as well as forming secret societies.

According to Gadamer knowledge, which had been sanctioned by tradition and custom had the authority that was nameless, according to classical sources of antiquity. Our finite historical beingness was marked by the fact that the authority of what had been handed down to us-and not just what was clearly grounded, always had power over the attitudes and behaviours of peoples and communities. All education depended on it. In such a setting, becoming mature did not mean that a person had become his/her own master in the sense that he/she was freed from tradition. The real force of morals, for example, was based on tradition: “These are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reason” [Gadamer, 1989: 280].

Gadamer adds that tradition was not fixed and inflexible. It always renewed itself and that is what why he calls this form of renewed tradition to be “traditionalism” [Ibid: 281]. For him, just like for Africans, a living language is based on its orality. The verbal word is the basis of communication and dialogue, and it is through communication and dialogue that true understanding is arrived at. That is why, in his view, tradition is important to the creation of understanding and true knowledge. In this connection, he argues that the hermeneutic approach is precisely concerned with the ‘recovery of

knowledge' from the rigidity of modern science and 'scientific knowledge' to true knowledge [Ibid].

This is why in our submission; the predominance of orality and verballity in the African worldview presents humanity with the possibility of tracing back the origin of concepts of things and worldviews. In the pursuance of this task, interdisciplinarity is just one of the mechanisms of fighting the rigidity of the modern 'scientific method' that focuses too narrowly on "the disciplines" that themselves were "constructed" in the process of the production of knowledge for domination. But interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity are not the answer to discovering knowledge and wisdom present in African worldviews. Afrikology and other attempts by African scholars to define new approaches of research in accessing African knowledge and wisdom are required.

Inter-multi-trans-disciplinarity?

As we have already seen above, the Centre for African Renaissance Studies-CARS is described as "a unique multi-inter-trans-disciplinary research, teaching and publication academic institution," whose vision and mission is to promote African Renaissance Studies, in the context of the 'renewal' and 'rebirth' of the African continent and its peoples. It has been the objective of this paper to challenge this approach as too narrow a 'paradigm' since such an approach does not raise cosmological, philosophical and epistemological issues that have been used through these disciplinary Eurocentric methodologies to undermine African civilisation and her contribution to world civilisation throughout history.

In this section, we want to focus on the limited value that an inter-multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach can deliver by way of regenerating the African memory and recovering its authenticity. To be sure, interdisciplinarity was introduced in the United States out of the work of the Social Science Research Council-SSRC through the so-called **Area Studies** in regions it wanted to know in order to exercise its neo-colonial control. There were three areas that attempted to bridge the social science disciplines. The first was the areas studies themselves, which from the 1950s to the close of the 1980s engaged several American young scholars whose 'loyalty' was divided between their particular disciplines and that of the geographical "area" they were assigned to, thereby creating a kind of "dual loyalty" between the discipline and the world region in which they operated. On return on for self-reflection and briefings at the SSRC, these scholars held "focus group" conversations during coffee breaks in the meetings and out of these encounters there developed team-teaching courses and co-authored researched publications, which came out of their research. According to Lisa Anderson:

"A demographer who worked in Thailand, an anthropologist whose field site was in China, a political scientist whose research focused on Africa could talk, not only to their area studies colleagues from other disciplines, but thanks to that experience, even to each other. They were familiar with, and respectful of, other cultures, in the world and in the academy Anderson [2000: 8].

In this respect, it can be said, that area studies, among other things, were aimed at developing interdisciplinary approaches to international research and scholarship. According to the history of the SSRC, the Council in this respect "developed a distinctive style of work, flexibly responding to both the internal development of intellectual agendas

and the identification of public needs for social science research.” This included carrying out research projects, but it also involved bringing together dispersed researchers for discussions that shaped future inquiry. Not bound by the specific combinations of faculty at any one university or research center, the Council drew researchers from around the country and increasingly around the world to create interdisciplinary teams defined by specific themes and able to push intellectual frontiers” [Worcester, 2001: 105-110].

The second area where interdisciplinary approaches were attempted was in **public policy studies**. This involved studies in policy areas such as children health care, nuclear non-proliferation, land reform, electoral design, criminal justice and other public policy domains. This brought together social scientists from a variety of disciplines to work not only with natural scientists and humanists, but also with each other. These scientists, begun to develop interest in sharing knowledge of policy significance and so that they begun to become more pragmatic and eclectic in the utilisation of a variety of approaches, perspectives and methods [Anderson: op. cit: 8].

The third area where social science disciplines tried to transcend their disciplinary limitations was in **“cultural studies.”** This field “enticed” geographers, social anthropologists, game theory economists, sociologists and political scientists. Concerns with cultural studies essentially challenged the division of knowledge into academic disciplines and tried to create a space between them. Cultural studies provided room for enquiries in these divisions and that is what created a strong foundation for the field [Ibid].

Nevertheless, questions continued to be raised as to the viability and validity of the whole idea of inter-disciplinarity. Who was to judge its merit, despite the proliferation of interdisciplinary journals that appeared in the meantime? Instead networks and collaborations between them even compounded the problem to the extent that questions were being raised as to “how interdisciplinary was interdisciplinarity.” Thomas Bender adds: “Who is to judge its interdisciplinary field are often granted licenses to proceed with a fairly thin knowledge of the second or third or fourth disciplines being drawn upon [Bender, 2000: 11].

He continues that although there is much evidence that the established disciplines are not so effective as their founders might have hoped in keeping the market and its values at bay, interdisciplinary studies have become even more vulnerable to the perverse forms the market assumes in academe today: “The individualism of the marketplace is transformed in academe into a kind of expressive individualism that values the performance of difference. To some extent, the disciplines can moderate this. But interdisciplinary fields, partly because of their defining virtues, exhibit some of the worst aspects of contemporary academic culture” [Ibid].

He points out that under the disciplines rule, tenure committees seldom ask whether the candidate’s work correctly describes the world (to say nothing as to whether it is true): “Rather they ask whether the methods and theories are original, innovative within the discipline and likely to stimulate further work in the discipline. He finally points out: “It is all very worrisome, even discouraging. Yet if we wish to keep addressing the issues of contemporary life and if we wish to maintain intellectual vitality in the disciplines, we must keep advocating and doing interdisciplinarity, however impossible” [Ibid].

Thus, we have here a methodology that has become ‘worrisome’ to many and that the market, which they were intended to serve, among other things, has become their

enemy. We can see this today where the Universities have become a kind of market producing particular subjects that the market can accommodate. The real question for African scholars is whether it is possible and rewarding to adopt such a ‘tired’ methodology to the innovative and revolutionary work of the African regeneration in research about our societies? Alternatively, is it possible to fight from the enemy’s rear and utilise these approaches in the process of their being interrogated and problematised as we fight on? It is clear that the first struggle in the decolonisation of knowledge within the western social sciences has made a lot of progress in exposing the ideological biases that exist within the Eurocentric social and human science disciplines drawn as they did from their specific areas of concern during the periods of their development in the European and later American dominance of the world.

Nothing demonstrates better than the attempt UNESCO made to attempt to write a general African history. According to Prof. Curtin in his chapter in volume 1 of the UNESCO *General History of Africa: Methodology and African Prehistory*, argues that the process was a gradual one so that with the re-emergence of an authentically Afrocentric history the need arose to “join forces with the movement for an *all-embracing social history* in the first place through an through an interdisciplinary approach combining the histories of agriculture, urbanisation, and social and economic relations, and subsequently as a result of these advances made in history based on field surveys:

“The latter approach freed researchers from the constraining influence of archives in which the documents were often unreliable and were basically flawed because of the prejudices of the people who compiled them from the time of the slave trade to the end of the colonial period. The first-hand verbal accounts of contemporary African victims of colonization have proved an effective counterweight to the testimony of official papers. Moreover, as a result of the methodology evolved for making use of oral tradition, historians of Africa have become pioneers in that field and have made a remarkable contribution to its development [Curtin, 1989:25].

Prof. Curtin continues that this approach, which had been adopted by some “far-sighted scholar-administrators in the colonial service” and which enabled them to collect “accounts of African traditions, where countermanded by academic prejudices of people like Murdock, following the footsteps of the British functionalist anthropologists by “bluntly asserting that ‘indigenous oral traditions are completely undependable.’ However, following the publication of Jan Vansina’s book: *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* [1961], in which he and other scholars, including Africans, “demonstrated the validity of oral tradition as a historical source, provided that it was subjected to the necessary critical controls [Ibid]. The seminars held later by historians in Dakar in 1961 and in Dar es Salaam in 1965 had emphasized the same view, “as well as the roles of linguistics and archaeology,” so long as they were also subjected to the same critical controls, we should add.

Prof. Curtin also notes that it was the process of the decolonisation of African history that also liberated “colonial history” by *reversing* it, and did away with the presentation of European conquerors “as heroes of civilisation.”

“In the work of the historians of decolonisation, the picture was completely changed and aligned more closely to the facts: the heroes were the African resistance fighters, whereas the conquerors were the leaders of expeditionary columns and colonial governors, who

equated right with might, a policy always applied with brutality and sometimes with bloody consequences. A second step forwards was taken when the spotlight was focussed on the protest and resistance campaigns which, at the height of the colonial period, were to pave the way for the national liberation movements” [Ibid: 24-5].

These approaches had rendered outstanding service to the other social sciences, and what achieved this was not the interdisciplinary methodology, but that for the first time African voices through their oral traditions had brought out the facts of their heritage and knowledge systems. The African decolonisation struggle had even gone further to ‘reverse’ the way history was henceforth to be written: as a social history. Primarily, the results showed that ‘traditional’ Africa had never been static and changeless, as the prejudiced Eurocentric historians such as Coupland had asserted on the History of East Africa [Coupland, 1938: 1]. The studies from oral tradition also disproved those economists, historians, political scientists and sociologists who had split Africa into the ‘before’ and ‘after,’ implying separation of traditional and ‘modern’ Africa in which the former was depicted as static and the later as dynamic because it was said to have ‘jolted (Africa) into action,” because “before” it was “a world that had lain sleeping until them” [Curtin: op. cit]. Curtin ends by observing that:

“It was the English-speaking anthropologists who were most put out by the revelation that dynamic internal forces had been at work in traditional African society. As functionalists, they had taken the structures of that society and had set about isolating the different agents or groups that had played a specific role in the original balanced state of things; their method entailed analysing the real and observable present and sifting out everything that might have been added since the arrival of the Europeans, so as to end up with an indigenous ‘model’ in the pristine state, in a sort of timeless ‘anthropological present’. It is true that this approach, which was dominated by the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, helped give an insight into the workings of societies. But this partiality for an Africa that was as ‘primitive’ as possible and, what is more, was immobilized in the museum of the ethnological present, tended to strip the people’s of Africa of one of their most important dimensions: their historical development. Consequently, historical studies had a positive impact on functionalism by recalling that the present is by definition transient” [Ibid: 25-6].

In his preface to the General History, Amadou Mahtar M’Bow, the Director-General of UNESCO, observed that since the European Middle Ages, which as we have seen, was the drawing line between the European dark ages and the modern era, the new Europe was used as the yard stick for judging other societies, although the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, based on oral tradition, were rightly regarded as essential sources of the history of ancient Greece from which Europe was claiming its heritage for their renaissance. Much of this source also contained elements of African history, but this was ignored and African oral tradition, the collective memory of peoples of Africa that “holds the thread of many events marking their lives, was rejected as worthless.” But, he added, African oral tradition and history, “after being long despised, has now emerged as an invaluable instrument for discovering the history of Africa, making it possible to follow the movements of its different peoples in both space and time, to understand the African vision of the world from inside and to grasp the original features of the values on which the cultures and institutions of the continent is based [M’Bow, 1989: vii, ix].

Therefore, we have a peoples’ history as the entry point in going deeper into the African soul to discover what Africa stood for and what it offers today. The oral tradition

and the hieroglyphs as well as the archaeological sources, literature, art, religion, philosophy all offer the opportunity to bridge the confusing “paradigms,” methodologies and scientific epistemologies that have alienated humankind from historical bearings rendering modern society into a materialistic, greedy and immoral society that foregrounds self-interest above community.

While we may use existing inter-multi-trans-disciplinary approaches to try to understand our reality, we have to realise that we do so with approaches that emanate *from outside*. The question is whether we can move further from this external orientation nearer *to the inside*. As we do so, we should discover that the African story knows of no disciplinary boundaries to negotiate with and that the open-ended hermeneutic approach based on Thothology enables us to create the real conditions for re-establishing a true understanding of African knowledge and wisdom through its traditions, which is at the same time African world and its relationship with the rest of mankind.

The all-embracing character of oral African social history also demonstrates, as Prof. Ki-Zerbo had noted, the complexity of African history as a subject area for a single discipline on its own to grasp all its facets and elucidate them. Since it is a universal discipline that all branches of knowledge need, it remains on the scholars to identify the different kinds of discipline areas these should be. In Ki-Zerbo’s view, the interdisciplinary approach was adopted in the writing of the *General History of Africa*, “in order to escape from the overriding influence of the written word, which has tended to overwhelm other sources and reduce them virtually to nothing.” Furthermore, he added, research in social and human sciences in Africa had suffered from two contrasting, but equally unrewarding biases. The first was the “typically historicist approach,” where human development was seen as a “succession of events with dates like beads on a string.” Apart from these dates, everything disappeared, including key factors such as economic, social structure and culture, which were disregarded [Ki-Zerbo, 1989: 139].

The other “aberration” was the “ethnographic contempt for the sequence of events” and a tendency to concentrate on structures and a certain linguistic approach that became “blind and deaf” to the dynamics of language, which was also the weakness of functionalist anthropologists. Therefore, for African historians, the interdisciplinary approach was not a question of choice, but one of necessity and in this respect he regarded oral tradition as a “fully-fledged historical source.”

In this respect too, Ki-Zerbo placed emphasis on linguistics, which he regarded as an “inexhaustible historical source, for tradition is encapsulated in the living museum of language.” It is not only a psychological entity, its vocabulary “is like sedimentary layer in which the realities forged by each people’s history are deposited.” He added: “But conversely, it is language, the ‘word’, which conveys the ideological and cultural or political messages and which makes and unmakes history and makes it afresh by creating the ideas and rules governing behaviour. Some of the concepts involved are untranslatable because they bear the stamp of an entire culture” [Ibid: 142].

Ki-Zerbo goes into detail in discussing the issue of interdisciplinary method, which also reveals the weakness of the method, despite the fact that it had been used in writing the *General History*. He asks the question: “How can so many disciplines be harnessed to the common task of reviving the past”? His answer is that the first “method” consists of “creating a very loose association in which the efforts of all concerned are pooled. At the outset a number of common objectives are laid down and then each

member of the group is asked to focus on the “problem area” of his own discipline. After exchanging information from time to time, “the group eventually comes together to collate findings.” But very quickly Ki-Zerbo realises that this “approach” is “not very satisfactory” and the reason is that “it perpetuates almost all the drawbacks inherent in the individual disciplines without making the most of the specifically beneficial effect generated by their close association” [Ibid: 144].

He then suggests “a more rewarding approach,” which “involves the interdisciplinary method,” whereby the different disciplines “are dovetailed together rather than left to work alongside one another.” In this “method” both the overall research strategy and the detailed technical stages have to be worked out jointly.” After the “fundamental issues have been identified, the work entailed is broken down into specific tasks. At the end of this process, “findings are reviewed or collated at regular intervals or at the request of one of the parties involved, so that the problem can be restated in fresh terms, in the light of the progress made.” He further notes that problems can occur at this stage and his solution is that if necessary, “any obstacles identified can be handled by means of ‘crash programmes’ on which all efforts are concentrated.” The kind of “team work” may have either a single director or several directors in turn, depending on whether the stage reached calls for a linguist, a sociologist, or another type of specialist.” He nevertheless notes with caution that:

“Research conducted along these lines may well enhance the scope of the discipline, remedy its shortcomings and pave the way for original insights and time saving short-cuts. However, African research centres will have to gear their structural organisation to this type of approach and researchers will have to adjust their outlook accordingly” [Ibid: 144].

But then he again poses the question: “What is the purpose of all this”? His answer is:

“The idea is to recreate the image of social life, if not in all physical details, then at least without disfiguring it through oversimplifications. Social life is not one-dimensional. People do not have one life catering primarily for the body needs, with another separate life engaged in social relations, and yet another embracing art, philosophy, education, and so on. All these different strands are woven together to form a single whole” [Ibid].

But this turns out to be the crux of the problem so that the second method proposed of an interdisciplinary approach or even multi-or trans-disciplinary approaches cannot solve. First, the amount of energy and resources needed to coordinate these different actors, including creating directors to organise the people involved to work in continuous team work” with the possibility of engaging in “crash programmes” so that “all efforts are concentrated” cannot bring out the different strands of social life that constitute “a single whole.” Although he regards this as an “all-inclusive” approach, it cannot even be helpful in centres of research such as CARS to gear their structural organisational forms to an already “tired” methodological approach even for western scholars, nor is likely to result in the researchers themselves “adjusting their outlook accordingly.” This will be so, so long as the disciplines remain as they are.

It seems to me that the real problem here is the idea of the disciplines themselves. Once we accept that we have to operate within these disciplines in order to “recreate images of (African) social life,” ostensibly one that projects their authentic selves, it is

naïve, in my humble opinion, to expect that people who have been trained and *disciplined* to see African society from the outside and whose disciplinary concepts and ways of thinking are imbued with prejudices built within the disciplines conceptual frameworks, can abandon these conceptual framework unless they have internalised another epistemological framework that accords with the communal and oral character of the African wholeness.

In short, the scholars must be ideological transformed to see through the conceptual and theoretical frameworks they use and to cope different meanings that cannot sometimes be not only linguistically translatable but even epistemologically consistent with the new concepts found within the traditions themselves. It is also idealistic and naïve to expect them just change their ‘outlook’ and work coherently with other equally segmented and fragmented disciplined individuals, whose ideological positions might be incompatible. This is even more so if new centres of research and learning have to be organisationally structured to accommodate this fragmentation and compartmentalisation, where the epistemological and ideological elements are already pre-determined in the structures to be erected and the individuals to be deployed.

These epistemological and methodological approaches must be undermined if we are to make any progress in advancing scholarship under conditions of an African ‘renaissance’ and regeneration. African scholars together with the African masses have to create a new world by being able to recognise their existing cosmological worlds. As we move *from the outside to the inside*, we have to define new approaches of understanding that are appropriate to the African world. Academic disciplines in Europe arose with the needs of the time to serve particular interests, as we noted above.

Prof Ki-Zerbo himself argues that it is an “imperative requirement” that African history “should at last be seen *from within* instead of being interpreted through references to other societies, ready made ideas and prejudices.” It is time for us, he challenges, “to take an *inside look* at our identity and our growing awareness.” He is particularly bothered by the fact that “our history is being explained by a whole series of words and concepts that have come from Europe or other continents and that translate - and quite often betray - realities and structures created in another linguistic and social context” [Ki-Zerbo, 1989: 8]. But we cannot do this, if at the same time, we detach the academic disciplines from their concepts and prejudices by adopting interdisciplinary methodologies, which he advocated. To do, we would be moving in vicious circles with the blissful hope that these same disciplines will deliver us from the problems we seek to overcome.

So long as the “scientific methodologies,” that were ideologically “constructed” to animalise the African people are not themselves problematised and new epistemologies developed based on their own cosmogonies, it will be difficult to “domesticate” these same academic disciplined based to re-humanise the world. Linguistic gimmicks will not do unless these are built on the principle that African languages are the tools through which a dialogue is possible that alone can promote their self-understanding and orient African scholars towards their own societies.

Even in the area of linguistics that we all believe should be at the core of our work, and it is in fact in this area that we can be inspired to develop new ways of knowing ourselves, there is a lot of innovative work that has to be done. Prof. Greenberg adds that the Africa displays a greater degree of linguistic complexity than other

continents and that the classification of African languages that has so far been carried out by mainly western linguists have created even more confusion because by following their individual conceptualisations, “the linguistic divisions constructed by one researcher or another are disturbingly reminiscent of the colonial divisions of yesteryear [Greenberg, 1989: 121]. To cure this problem, he calls for more monographs to be written so that more “scientific identifications of the outlines of the groups that may exist between the major “families” and the basic units, “which are currently the only irrefutable evidence [Ibid]. For this to be done, Greenberg, calls for Africans themselves to do this work and this cannot be done in my view without the African griots and other indigenous linguistic experts becoming part of the process of research and teaching:

“It will also be necessary to wait until people who actually speak these languages become linguistics (sic!) and start to tackle comparative linguistics in order to ascertain whether or not relationships exist between the host of neighbouring languages [Ibid: 121].

This work was in fact begun with the pioneering attempt by Cheikh Anta Diop to link the Egyptian language with several West African languages followed by the work of T. Obenga in the same field. It was with their work and struggle that the ancient Egyptian language, which had previously been linked to Semitic group of languages, was corrected at the UNESCO Symposium organised in Cairo in 1974 on ‘The Peopling of Ancient Egypt’ to be part of the family of African languages. This major achievement brought nearer the acknowledgement of Egypt as an African civilisation.

The essence of the matter is that African scholars must be prepared to do the kind of research that is original and that can enable them to abandon Eurocentric clothing of academia and engage in dialogue with the experts in their communities. They have to admit that in that case, they alone cannot determine the research agenda from above, but must humble themselves to come under the feet of the African sages and griots, just like the Greek students like Plato did in Egypt to learn at the feet of the Egyptian scribes.

The designing of the research is not a top-down affair. It has to involve those who have the knowledge and information required for whatever is desired to be achieved by the research. In that case, the methodology cannot be predetermined. It has to be ‘negotiated’ with those ‘who know’ and during this process, the problem of the disciplines in which the hypothesis is formulated will be determined by the result of the dialogue between the researcher and those who know. The crucial question will be: “What is the purpose of the knowledge to be created.” Is it for knowledge’s sake or is it intended to result in some good for the community who will participate in such a research and knowledge production? This question cannot be answered in the abstract. It can only be answered with the people who can produce the knowledge and for whom it should be produced.

Time has come when the African elites must stop looking down at their community compatriots as ignorant and illiterate, while the villagers look upon them as agents of foreign culture and economic interests. Hostility exists between the two and there is no trust between them since relationships between them is based on top-down “development” dictates passed on by the elite to the “ignorant masses.” This is the reason why African cultures and civilisation have stagnated, only changing to accommodate foreign inspired solutions. As Prof. Hubert Vilakazi has argued:

“The peculiar situation here is that knowledge of the principles and patterns of African civilisation remained with ordinary, uncertificated men and women, especially of those in rural areas. The tragedy of African civilisation is that Western-educated Africans became lost and irrelevant as intellectuals who could develop African civilisation further. Historically, intellectuals of any civilisation are the voices of that civilisation to the rest of the world; they are the instruments of the development of the higher culture of that civilisation. The tragedy of Africa, after conquest by the West, is that her intellectuals, by and large, absconded and abdicated their role as developers, minstrels and trumpeters of African civilisation. African civilisation then stagnated; what remained alive in the minds of languages of the overwhelming majority of Africans remained undeveloped. Uncertificated Africans are denied respect and opportunities for development; they could not sing out, articulate and develop the unique patterns of African civilisation” [Vilakazi, 2002:203].

Prof. Vilakazi adds that Afrika therefore finds herself in an awkward situation. Afrika needs to develop an educational system founded upon and building on the civilisation of the overwhelming majority, yet her intellectuals are strangers to that civilisation. They have no spiritual or intellectual sympathetic relationship with the culture and civilisation embracing the masses of African people: “The biggest spiritual and mental challenge to African intellectuals is that in this massive re-education process, (which is necessary) the only teachers they have are ordinary African men and women who are uncertificated, and who live largely in rural areas.” He concludes:

“We are talking here about a massive cultural revolution consisting, first, of our intellectuals going back to ordinary African men and women to receive education of African culture and civilisation. Second, it shall break new ground in that un-certificated men and women shall be incorporated as full participants in the construction of the high culture of Africa. This shall be the first instance in history where certificated intellectuals alone shall not be the sole builders and determinants of high culture, but shall be working side by side with ordinary men and women in rural and urban life. Intellectuals must become anthropologists doing fieldwork, like Frobenius. But unlike academic Western anthropologists, African intellectuals shall be doing field work among their own people as part of a truly great effort aimed at reconstructing Africa and preparing all of humanity for conquering the world for humanism [Ibid:204].

Conclusion

This paper begun by arguing that African Renaissance Studies cannot be fully understood within the paradigmatic context of interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches. We have argued that these research approaches themselves suffer from their Eurocentric origins and ideological biases and prejudices that informed their ideological frameworks. We called for an interrogation and problematisation of these approaches and that to do so requires us to enquire the purpose of the “African Renaissance.” The paper has tried to demonstrate that by imitating Europe in their renaissance as inspirations, we disregard the fact that that European Renaissance resulted in the enslavement and colonisation of the African people.

We called for a thorough historical grounding into the origins of African knowledge and wisdom right from the Cradle of Humanity and have shown how in the search for an African regeneration, we can build on African cosmogonies and epistemologies that emerged in the course of knowledge production in the Nile Valley. Research and teaching methodologies that do not build on this foundation cannot claim to be aimed at an African recovery of its collective memory and consciousness because the

purpose of the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment was to chart a new course, which led to Africa's fragmentation and domination.

Whilst interdisciplinary approaches can as a matter of defence, be used to embark on a study of our societies, this must be done consciously from outside with a view to problematising them as we build new approaches as we move inside to rediscover ourselves, thus providing a new epistemology of knowledge production. We have called this the science of Afrikology based on the cosmogonies of Thothology. A study of African heritage thus will prove beneficial to the rest of humankind for we cannot have an authentic history of the world without having an authentic history of Africa, from which the rest of humanity emerged. It is with this in mind that many far-sighted western scholars have begun to look at Egypt afresh with a view to reassessing its historical significance to the rest of humanity. African scholars cannot afford to leave this task to other scholars to interpret Africa's past and their knowledge for them.

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