

Africans in Academia. Diversity in Adversity by Grada Kilomba

My View: J. Mutinda Munguti

Am perplexed how Grada deliberately develops a mean argument assuming a defensive and offensive approach to scholarship. It deviates from the intended propagation of African Thought.

Africa must learn how to articulate solutions to her problems rather than burning the midnight oil rehearsing miseries related to colonialism and other externalities. The threefold human crisis in Korten (1995) terms, of poverty, social disintegration and environmental crisis face the entire world unselectively. History and research shows the collapse of great societies like the Great Roman Empire, Maya of Central America, Norse Greenland, and Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania. The caustic agents were catastrophic plethora of diseases and epidemics, civil war, drought, famines and natural disasters but mainly due to lack of innovation and socio-economic transformation, and cultural rigidity to cope with predicaments. It is worth noting that in Africa, diseases especially malaria and HIV-Aids if not checked have a potentiality to wipe out single or multiple societies. However it is undisputable that colonialism and slave trade caused severe untold misery in forms of material rape, violence, imposition and human capital disintegration. Africans were forced to abandon their 'wicked' religions, 'unappealing' cultures and 'medieval' technologies to adopt and emulate the holistic ways of the master.

The coercion and century long period made Africa lose touch with societal past and assumed capitalistic individualistic lifestyles even after independence as portrayed by post independence African scholars and societies.

With the liberation dispensation of the 50's and 60's, "hail colonialism, down the whites!" became the social, economic and political slogan. It was mandatory in the syllabus to teach the nitty-gritty of colonialism in all post colonial schools.

The ills of colonialism and subsequent struggles are publicised in all manner of institutions and media. Mark you the celebrations of Independence days in Africa are done with reverence and grandeur! What is the underlying meaning? "Hail colonialism, down whites, up! up! The blacks."

This may answer why a 12-year Kenyan school girl will be able to narrate eloquently the story beginning with when the first colonialist stepped on the Kenyan soils, his ensuing mission and ending with what time the Union Jack was hoisted down. Colonialism was just a few decades ago, many of the 'survivors' are still alive thus making it easy to 'identify' with the recent past. To a great extent the Europe of today is not proud of colonialism. It was a barbaric way of wealth accumulation orchestrated by their forefathers and the reparations on economic indebtedness can be seen in the flow of aid money.

The same period 60's and early 70,s saw many black students mainly on scholarship mercies travelling to Europe and America for university studies. They took the pride of freedom with them. They had to prove it; they are equal, they are better, they can make it. Due to sheer determination, thrift, and motivation arising out of set targets they proved it. The objectives were smart. They were achievable. It is not that one race is smarter than the other as Grada depicts but the motivation is set on different premises.

Sadly a considerable number of them 'over' stayed to display their prowess and pride, gaining multiple doctorates, hopping from one western university to another and only becoming tourists in their native countries.

Who said the West was in short of scholars and expertise?

A considerable number of those who returned sacrificed their scholarly work to political patronage to keep in good books with the governments of the time. It's a pity universities became centres of political incubation and alignment. . Politically

they shined, academically they waned but titles were kept. Neo-colonialism prevailed.

While Science, an indispensable discipline has received lip service praise, it is not uncommon to walk into a science related lecture in Africa and find students studying the components of certain equipments on paper. Practice makes perfect and I think also it will make a thesis more scientific.

African Thought didn't grow. Western thought took centre stage. Bookshops and libraries were and are lined with Western Thought books. Since independence, Africa has known how to survive emotionally by perfecting the art of borrowing and pulling faces. On numerous occasions Africa has made the West to admit shamelessly that the tears on an African child are due to colonial induced poverty/deprivation while the tears on a European child are healthy and acceptable.

Such emotionalism has been internalised and engrained in all walks of life even when we present dissertations, policy papers, not to mention aid borrowing proposals.

However, archaeology tries to construe Africa folk historically as having been articulate, prudent, skilled, initiative, substantive and afore-knowledgeable. Substantive, I mean they could not raid other communities with crude weapons for material gains. And afore-knowledgeable I mean they reinvested in the present for future regeneration.

Where has all this gone?

To the drain of course!

Borrowed from Sheldon's terms, African scholars have wandered all the world drilling oil wells while neglecting oil fields in their backyards. May be as reserves for a rainy day, may be the food on the other table seems to be more delicious. Time will tell but not without consequences.

They don't propagate African Thought

They don't write books on African thought

They don't teach African thought

Why worry when they are cuddled to the periphery? Where do they stay in the margins anyway? Africa? Asia? Europe? US?

European scholarly can only be validated by Western Thought, what about African scholarly?

Africa knows how to haggle over a dead corpse. No matter what the ritual is, the destiny is the same. The debate on gender, discrimination, inequality, endowments and entitlements has spanned over a half a century. What have we done to embrace the truth and make necessary policy changes aimed at treating humanity equally? How much have we spent on the debate?

Why cash on emotionalism? Let Africa move and institute gender sensitive policies and structures. Born man or woman is a preserve of genetics, being feminine or masculine is a social construction aimed at causing division and inequality in resource ownership, distribution and entitlement. How could man invent such an evil and fallacious scheme? We unconsciously promote this inequality, Grada does it too, and she refers her colleague as a female colleague. And there it goes too; identification is the first aspect of this inequality.

I bet academia is a neutral space.

I bet if Grada was committed to propagating African Thought and teaching in the university of Sao Tome e Príncipe (for God's sake if it exists), a neutral fora and a pregnant audience will definitely be available.

Why cast your bread to the dogs?

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Corrections and criticism expected.**