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## The Pasts and Futures of African Studies and Area Studies<sup>1</sup>

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza

### Introduction

The term "crisis" is much beloved in African studies, smearing all it touches, including its object of study, Africa, and its own epistemological standing and future. And so we hear that African studies, like all area studies programs in the United States, are in a terminal state of crisis. The crisis is seen as something new, spawned by the ideological ramifications of the end of the Cold War and the intellectual ravages of globalization. A powerful narrative no doubt, but one that falsifies and simplifies the past as much as it forecloses the unpredictable possibilities of the future. Is there, indeed, a crisis for African studies and other area studies programs in the United States? Or is it a storm in a teacup, as Michael Watts<sup>2</sup> believes; a peculiarly American debate of no priority for Africans, as Michael Chege<sup>3</sup> contends; one inspired, according to Zeleza, by America's "channel-surfing intellectualism in which the temptation to reinvent newness is always great?"<sup>4</sup> Will we, a decade from now, as Julius Nyang'oro re-assures us, "realize that the current debate was not about the viability of area studies as such, but rather a nervousness brought about by the fear of shrinking resources in the academy generally?"<sup>5</sup> But if in fact there is a crisis, whose crisis is it and what is its trajectory?

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<sup>1</sup> Several versions of this essay were presented at different seminars at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, May 1997; Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, July, 1997; Maseno University College, Kisumu, Kenya, July 1997; Center for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, August, 1997; and the James S. Coleman African Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, May, 1998. I wish to thank the participants at these seminars for their provocative comments and questions which assisted immeasurably in clarifying my thoughts.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Watts, "African Studies at the Fin de Siècle: is it really the 'Fin'?" *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 185.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Chege, "The Social Science Area Studies Controversy from the Continental African Perspective," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 133.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Perpetual Solitudes and Crises of African Studies in the United States," *Africa Today*, 44. 2 (1997): 201.

<sup>5</sup> Julius E. Nyang'oro, "Funding African States in the Twenty-first Century," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 166.

Being an historian with an aversion to crystal-gazing and apocalyptic speculations parading as knowledge, I am far more comfortable dissecting the past than predicting the future, in untangling and unpacking the messy processes of change than in reducing them to an omnipotent crisis. Much of the alarm is fueled by Afropessimism, the belief that Africa is condemned to eternal marginality, especially now that it has lost even the dubious attentions of pawnship during the Cold War. I do not share the view that Africa is marginal, not to the world as a whole, and certainly not to its peoples on the continent and in the diaspora. Priscilla Stone is right that we must stop asking self-defeating questions: "Why is African Studies marginalized, disadvantaged, and impoverished relative to other Area Studies?" This question is no longer relevant if it ever was."<sup>6</sup>

And so I prefer to talk of challenges: what are the challenges facing area studies, including African studies? In what ways are they linked to changes in the wider American academy and its international knowledge system? How are these challenges being met? How can they be tackled, tamed, and transcended? These are some of the questions addressed in this paper: the changing intellectual, institutional, and ideological contexts, social composition, and scholarly cultures of African studies and area studies in the United States.

### Reconstructing Histories and Boundaries

The claims that area studies and African studies are in crisis rest on and reproduce incomplete histories of the area studies project, which, in turn, lead to inadequate analysis of the nature of the current challenges and ways they might be overcome. It is commonly assumed that "Area Studies" in the American academy were given birth by the Second World War and bred by the Cold War, in response to the grueling demands of global confrontation spawned by the two wars. It follows that since the Cold War is now over, area studies have lost their *raison d'être*; knowledge of the world outside Euro-America can be inferred from the universal models of the disciplines, or the homogenizing imperatives of globalization. This narrative is quite appealing to triumphalist right-wingers who think history is over; fiscally-minded university

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<sup>6</sup> Priscilla M. Stone, "The Remaking of African Studies," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 181.



administrators seeking programs to cut; and desperate social scientists aspiring to be natural scientists with their rational-choice models. But it silences other histories. Pearl Robinson eloquently contests this history:

Debates about the future of African Studies seem to have little to do with the past as I know or have come to understand it. What I discern is a profusion of arguments linked to differing standpoints and designed to privilege new hierarchies of access to resources. Virtually all the prevailing reconstructions of African Studies begin with the Cold War and focus on the legacies of government- and foundation-funded Area Studies programs. Curiously, such accounts generally omit any reference to the long-standing tradition of African Studies at historically black colleges and universities, only rarely gives a nod to African American professional and lay scholars of Africa, and seldom acknowledge the existence of epistemic communities based in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Thus history is used to stake positions, to mark boundaries, to confer authority in the struggle for intellectual, material, and reputational resources as African studies and other area studies programs, indeed, as the academy as a whole is restructured in response to internal institutional and epistemological changes and new global economic and political realignments.

There is no doubt that the Second World War and the Cold War had a profound impact on the development of area studies, and that the end of the Cold War has brought new contexts. But area studies, certainly African studies, antedated both wars. The roots of the area studies tradition go back to the nineteenth century. According to Burkart Holzner and Matthew Harmon,

(p)rior to 1900, U.S. "research" about other parts of the world consisted of four traditions: the "classical" tradition, which studied the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome,

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<sup>7</sup> Pearl T. Robinson, "Local/Global Linkages and the Future of African Studies," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 169.

and Egypt; the missionary movement, whose proponents traveled to other nations with the intent of encouraging conversion, but who were often anti-intellectual and explicitly limited the scope of inquiry into their host societies; a "scientific racism" tradition that attempted to demonstrate the superiority of whites through comparison with and systematic examination of other races; and, finally, an anecdotal "tradition" of relying on information about non-Western cultures from potentially unreliable travelers.<sup>8</sup>

During the late 1940s and 1950s when area studies became institutionalized, Gilbert Merckx<sup>9</sup> contends, Cold War concerns were often used to achieve long-sought support for higher education in general and long-standing research on the non-western world in particular.

The area studies project was bolstered by the need to overcome the isolationist and parochial tendencies of the American public and academy, increasingly seen as unbecoming and perilous for a superpower. The American public was woefully uninformed about the rest of the world, especially the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia, where the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in fierce combat to win hearts and minds. The need for information about these countries, including America's turbulent backyard, Latin America, as well as the Soviet bloc, was seen as essential in the struggle for global supremacy between the USA and USSR. Reinforcing the national security imperative was the epistemological imperative to internationalize knowledge in the academy. While the link between social science and area knowledge goes back to the origins of some social science disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, most of the disciplines remained resolutely ethnocentric, an intellectual deficiency syndrome that worsened as they aspired to "scientific" status and concocted, from American experience, universal models and theories that magically transcended the

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<sup>8</sup> Burkart Holzner and Mathew Harmon, "Intellectual and Organizational Challenges for International Education in the United States: A Knowledge System Perspective," in John Hawkins, et al., eds. *International Education in the New Global Era* (Los Angeles: International Studies and Overseas Programs, University of California, 1998) 47.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert W. Merckx, "Graduate Training and Research," in Hawkins, et al.

realities and diversities of global histories and geographies, cultures and societies, politics and economies. The theoretical conceit and parochialism of the disciplines reflected the imperial provincialism and ignorance of the American public.

Area studies were expected to overcome these deficiencies and to provide the public and academy with information about the non-western world. It was, therefore, infused with the twists and turns of American foreign policy and the projection of imperial power, in which knowledge of America and the allied West was lodged within the disciplines, and that of the rest of the world was relegated to the area studies ghetto and inscribed with the pathologies of otherness. Consequently, the United States was not considered an "area", but at the very core of disciplinary knowledges, its experiences and the epistemologies derived from them elevated to manifestations of the universal. And so the pernicious fictions were born and bred that area studies were concerned with the parochial and the particular, while American studies, and their civilizational cousins, European studies, were intellectual parables of the human condition. Thus, conceived as a response to a perceived crisis in American higher education, the role of area studies was to "nourish" the disciplines with empirical data, while remaining subordinate to the epistemological and managerial authority of the disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, area studies programs provided little of their own independent instruction, or made faculty appointments. Their primary function became that of coordinating and campaigning for the inclusion and integration of "area" knowledge and specialists in the ethnocentric disciplines.

The development of area studies was also tied to the fate of ethnic minorities in the United States. The "scientific racism" that colored much of the earlier work on non-Western societies was rooted in racist and discriminatory policies at home against the Native Americans, African Americans, and others. The exclusion of these populations from political and cultural citizenship, from the American mainstream, necessitated the separation of their ancestral cultures and continents from disciplinary narratives. In short, given the centrality of race in American society and politics, the eternal struggles between blacks and whites, African

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<sup>10</sup> Vincente L. Rafael, "The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States," *Social Text*, 38 (1994): 94-95.



Americans and European Americans, rooted in slavery and segregation, it meant that the privileges and pathologies of the wider US social and intellectual order were refracted and reproduced with a ferocious investment of patronage, passions, and pain in African studies in a manner that was unusual among the area studies programs. The place of Africa in the American social imaginary was inextricably tied to the state of American race relations, so that more often than not, definitions and defamations of Africa were projections of African America. The vocabulary used to depict the otherness and failed promises of Africa was often the same as that used for African Americans. This congruence of constructions and condemnations lay at the heart of the future contestations, often bitter, between Africans, African Americans and European Americans in the study of Africa.

The result was that, before the Second World War, except for missionaries and anthropologists, the quintessential discipline of the non-western other, Africa remained an intellectual "dark continent" in mainstream academy. But it also meant Africa would figure centrally in African American popular and intellectual discourses. From the 19th century, African American scholars began to systematically study Africa, in an effort to correct biases and distortions, vindicate the continent's cultures and histories and restore them to the repertoire of world civilizations, as part of their struggles for emancipation from slavery and later segregation in America. The African American restorative and emancipatory tradition of African studies was pan-African in inspiration and orientation. "Rejecting the dichotomies on which Africanist scholarship would later be constructed," Michael West and William Martin state, the African American scholars "connected ancient Africa to modern Africa, Africa north of the Sahara to Africa south of the Sahara, and, especially, the African continent to the African diaspora. They tended to concentrate on broad political, religious, and cultural themes that transcended national and continental boundaries in the black world."<sup>11</sup>

Located in the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), these scholars were often public intellectuals, who saw their work as an integral part of the liberation struggles of Africans and African Americans. The era of the professional academic Africanist had yet to

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<sup>11</sup> Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "A Future with a Past: Resurrecting the Study of Africa in the Post-Africanist Era," *Africa Today*, 44.3 (1997): 311.

arrive. But the conceptual and ideological foundations had already been laid: from colonial Europe came the paternalistic focus on the "native" other; from settler America came the preoccupation with "racial" difference; both could trace their roots to Hegel. The racialized discourse of Africa in the American academy and society, required and reinforced the Hegelian denial of Africa's historicity and humanity. Hegel's ghost, as Olufemi Taiwo has argued so passionately, was to cast a permanent pall on African studies programs that emerged from the late 1940s.<sup>12</sup> The Africanists' Africa did not refer to the continent as a whole, but to that truncated concoction known as sub-Saharan Africa. Africa was black, tropical, trapped, as Hegel decreed, in the bosoms of the "undeveloped, unhistorical spirit." The northern part of the continent was removed and recast into the imperial cartography of the Middle East. "Middle from whom?" Peter Abrahams, the South African writer, once asked. The British of course! In short, the racialization of Africa reflected the racialization of America, and reproduced the Hegelian and Conradian dismissal and diminution of Africa as the "Dark Continent," the ultimate other of Europe, of white western civilization.

By the turn of the 1950s, then, there were at least two competing Africas in the American academy and social imaginary; the Africa of the African American scholar-activists and the Africa of the academic Africanists; the Africa of popular struggle and liberation and the Africa of policy formulation and implementation. In one, Africa was a civilizational presence, in the other a basket case of absences, a continent awaiting development and modernization. The Africanists's Africa triumphed in the academy, not for its superior intellectual insights, but because it resonated with the predilections of the general public and the prescriptions of the foreign policy establishment. And so the history of African studies had to be re-written, the newly institutionalized African studies project sanctified. From then on, in the official histories of African studies, including Jane Guyer's most recent, *African Studies in the United States*,<sup>13</sup> it became fashionable to ignore the fact that African studies were pioneered in the

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<sup>12</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, "Exorcizing Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy," *African Studies Quarterly*, 1.4 (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Jane I. Guyer (with the help of Akbar M. Virmani and Amanda Kemp) *African Studies in the United States: A Perspective* (Atlanta, GA: African Studies Association Press, 1996).



HBCUs and not in the HWUs (Historically White Universities).<sup>14</sup> Wrestling paternity of the field from W.E.B. Dubois to Melville Herskovits, from Howard to Northwestern, represented a much larger battle. This battle included the incorporation of Africa into the orbit of American foreign policy and Cold War calculations, and a paradigmatic shift from posing large civilizational and cultural questions to policy-oriented developmentalist research, and from popular engagement to professional encounters with Africa.

The professionalized and developmentalist thrust of African studies from the 1950s reflected wider trends; first, the territorialization of poverty and the professionalization and institutionalization of development practice; and second, the commoditization and corporatization of academic culture, which forced and facilitated the divorce of academics from social movements. The momentous discovery that poverty was a peculiar Third World condition amenable to technical and technological fixes, which was made in the heated postwar context of American-Soviet ideological rivalries and imperial-colonial struggles, allowed the emergence of the development experts and the prescriptive and policy orientation of area studies, especially in African studies since Africa was regarded as the most underdeveloped region.<sup>15</sup> At the same time intellectual life was becoming more professionalized, thanks to the postwar expansion of university education and growth of middle class comforts, consciousness, and conservatism, all of which spawned a social science research culture that valorized objectivity, detachment, and a mindless chase for theory, as Edward Said has complained so bitterly.<sup>16</sup> This expedited the separation of African studies from domestic African American constituencies and reinforced the use of deductive methods and

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<sup>14</sup> See Robert D. Baum, "Government-sponsored Research on Africa," *African Studies Bulletin*, 8.1 (1965): 42-47; and Gray L. Cowan, "Ten Years of African Studies," *African Studies Bulletin*, 12.1 (1969): 1-7; Philip D. Curtin, "African Studies: A Personal Assessment," *African Studies Review*, 14.3 (1971): 357-368; Carol A. Dressel, "The Development of African Studies in the United States," *African Studies Bulletin*, 9.3 (1966): 66-73; Gwendolyn M. Carter, "African Studies in the United States: 1955-1975," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion*, 6.2-3 (1976): 2-4.

<sup>15</sup> See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); also Zeleza, "The Perpetual Solitudes," especially Chapter 7.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 4 in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993).

models, in which Africa was reduced to a testing site for theories manufactured with faddish regularity in the American academy.

These competing Africas in the American academy and general public, which were by no means monolithic and unconnected, were complicated, from the 1960s following African independence and the explosion in higher education on the continent and the nationalist project to decolonize education and culture, by the entry of African scholars into the fray. Carrying their own baggage of memories of colonial and racial oppression, and the developmentalist ambitions of an aspiring nationalist elite, African students and faculty flocking to American campuses in the 1960s were caught up in the fault lines of America's racial solitudes and the revolutionary fervor of the civil rights movement. While they saw common cause between the struggles for independence in Africa and civil rights in America, unlike the generation of the Kwame Nkrumahs and Nnandi Azikiwes who were educated at the HBCUs, the new generation of African students were increasingly trained at the historically white universities (HWUs) and were more likely to be sponsored by governments and international agencies than sustained by the contributions and civilities of black communities and churches. The contradictions in their structural, social, and spatial positions provoked intense unease and discomfort with the content and composition of African studies.

The result of all this was the confrontation of Montreal in 1969, where a group of African and African American scholars and activists took on the Africanist establishment and demanded "pluralism and parity." Token reforms were made in the organization and orientation of the African Studies Association (ASA). But members of the Black Caucus that spearheaded the demands for reform in the ASA were not satisfied and they broke off to establish the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSAs). The formal split between African American and European American Africanists was facilitated by, and in turn reinforced the growth of the Black or African American Studies movement in the American academy.

Concentrated in the HWUs, rather than the HBCUs, the African American studies movement was both an ally and a foe of African studies. Many a reluctant university administration was forced to establish or expand African studies programs in direct response to the institutional and epistemological challenges posed by African American students and

faculty, inspired by the black consciousness, black arts, and the civil rights movements more generally, as outlined so cogently by William Banks.<sup>17</sup> Demands for courses on the black experience soon turned into calls for black studies departments, centers, institutes, or programs that should both be independent and involved in community service. To quote Floyd Hayes;

The African American Studies movement converged with mass movements of protest against the brutalizing effects of social injustice, socioeconomic inequality, racial antagonism, the Vietnam War, and university paternalism... African American students also audaciously called into question the American academy's dominant Eurocentric perspective—the unchallenged assumption that Western European culture is superior, neutral, and normative. Labeling this orientation ethnocentric, African American students charged that Western education, wittingly and otherwise, diminished, distorted, and, in many instances, obliterated the contributions of African peoples to world development generally and the contributions of African Americans to America's development specifically. Therefore, African American students demanded that the university establish courses of study that provided a systematic examination of African and African-descended peoples' experiences.<sup>18</sup>

By challenging Eurocentric paradigms and the rigid barriers between academic disciplines, the African American studies movement helped legitimize the study of non-Western cultures and multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies; but by pointing to the configuration of European American power and domination in the American academy, even in African studies, and emphasizing the collective Black experience, it challenged African studies as constituted at the time. In short, as

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<sup>17</sup> William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) Chapters 8-10.

<sup>18</sup> Floyd W. Hayes, "Taking Stock: African American Studies at the Edge of the 21st Century," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 18.3 (1994): 154.



Manning Marable reminds us, the African American studies movement was an integral part of the multiculturalism debate which facilitated the entry of African studies programs and other minority and women's studies programs into the academy.<sup>19</sup> It should not be forgotten, Wahneema Lubiano and Mae Henderson stress, that the engagement and encounter of African American studies with the disciplines involved contestation and negotiation over the production and construction of knowledge and the exclusionary and hierarchic practices of the academy long before the rise of Cultural Studies and other deconstruction projects of theorizing about difference, absences, presences, and oppositionality that have become so popular in the American academy over the last two decades.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 1980s more than 600 of the nation's 3,535 institutions offered courses in Black Studies, African American Studies, Afro-American Studies, or Africana Studies. The number had dropped to about 215 by the early 1990s, thanks to internal dissensions, overwork, dwindling administrative support, and growing competition for resources by other ethnic studies and thematic studies programs.<sup>21</sup> Except for the Africana studies programs, most of the Black Studies programs focused largely on the American experience. Those that incorporated Africa and the African diaspora as a whole tended to adopt pan-African and Afrocentric approaches that found little favor among Africanists in the African studies programs. To be sure, there were vigorous debates over Afrocentricity among African American scholars, but they were more willing to engage African social thought and seminal thinkers, from Cheikh Anta Diop to Franz Fanon, than was the case among their Africanist counterparts who tended to ignore African writings and paradigms.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Manning Marable, "Black Studies, Multiculturalism, and the Future of American Education," *Items*, 49.2-3 (1995): 49-57.

<sup>20</sup> Wahneema Lubiano, "Mapping The Interstices Between Afro-American Cultural Discourse and Cultural Studies: A Prolegomenon," *Callaloo*, 19.1 (1996): 68-77; and Mae G. Henderson, "'Where, By the Way, Is This Train Going?' A Case for Black (Cultural) Studies," *Callaloo*, 19.1 (1996): 60-67.

<sup>21</sup> Mary-Christine Philip, "25 Years of Black Studies: Pondering Strategies for the Future," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 11.5 (1994): 14-19; and Frank G. Pogue, "The Future of Black Studies," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 59 (1993): 536-540.

<sup>22</sup> Molefi K. Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987) and Molefi, K. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988). See also Perry A. Hall, "Beyond Afrocentricity: Alternatives for African American Studies," *The*

Thus the divide between African studies and African American studies was institutional and intellectual: housed in separate, sometimes antagonistic, units that often ignored each other, they examined different Africas from distinct angles. The Africa of African studies was the sub-Saharan contraption examined through the gaze of modernization and development; the Africa of African studies was continental and diasporic and focused on the ancient past and transnational connections among African peoples. The gulf between development and diaspora was deep and unproductive. As Alfred Zack-Williams puts it:

Diasporic studies which is situated within the tradition of cultural studies, tends to be de-linked from political economy, thus running the risk of a descent into its cultural relativism. Similarly, development studies, with its emphasis on political economy divorced from cultural studies, runs the risk of economic reductionism.<sup>23</sup>

Writing from the vantage point of Europe, he notes that, "development studies has maintained an ostrich-like detachment from issues of race and diasporan concerns. In the context of African studies, apart from the study of the aberration of apartheid South Africa, African studies is silent on African migration to Europe and the condition of the African diaspora in Europe."<sup>24</sup> The institutional divide was loudly racial: African studies programs were dominated by European Americans and African American studies programs by African Americans.

The entry of increasing numbers of continental African scholars into the African studies fray offered African studies both an opportunity and a challenge. As migrants from predominantly black societies, African migrant intellectuals were not always sensitive to the racial dynamics and demands of American society and the academy. Some even internalized the dominant society's negative stereotypes of African Americans, which

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*Western Journal of Black Studies*, 15.4 (1991): 207-212; and Gordon D. Morgan, "Afrocentricity in Social Science," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 15.4 (1991): 197-205; Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 1997) Chapter 4.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Zack-Williams, "Development and Diaspora: Separate Concerns?" *Review of African Political Economy*, 65 (1995): 349.

<sup>24</sup> Zack-Williams, 351.

often made them accomplices with European Americans in America's eternal racial war, for which they were sometimes rewarded with preferential hirings and promotions over African Americans. By hiring a few continental Africans, African studies programs gained credibility and universities shored up their affirmative action credentials. But the Africans were not always so easily placated; their blackness assumed greater salience the longer they stayed in America and as they and their families were forced to negotiate the country's treacherous racial quagmire and their children became African Americans or American Africans, as Ali Mazrui calls the children of first generation African immigrants.

The gravitation towards African American grievances reinforced the Africans' own long-standing grumblings against the marginality of African voices in African studies. Hence, the growing trail, from the late 1960s, of complaints by African scholars resident in the United States about the relevance and reliability, accountability and authority, biases and boundaries, concepts and constructions, definitions and distortions, integrity and imperatives, ideological attachments and intellectual agendas of the Africanist enterprise.<sup>25</sup> The conflicts and mutual suspicions were quite troubling to many, as borne out in several recent comments by European American Africanists. Hunt Davis writes wryly: "The relationship and interaction between black and white scholars of Africa

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<sup>25</sup> See Abiola Irele, "The African Scholar. Is Black Africa Entering the Dark Ages of Scholarship?" *Transition*, 51 (1991): 56-69; Mahmood Mamdani, "Critique of the State and Civil Society Paradigm in Africanist Studies," in Mahmood Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba, eds. *African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy* (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 1995); Thandika Mkandawire, "The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence," *African Studies Review*, 40.2 (1997): 15-36; Victor Uchendu, "Africa and the Africanist: The Challenge of a Terminal Colonial Order," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion*, 7.1 (1977): 5-11; Maxwell Owusu, "Anthropology: New Insights... or Just New Stereotypes" *Africa Report*, 16.7 (1971): 23-24; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Guy C. Z. Mhone, "The Case Against Africanists," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion*, 3 (1971): 8-13. Also, Mlahleni Njisane, "The African Studies Association: Priority Issues," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion*, 1 (1971): 2-5. See Nyang'oro; Zeleza, "Perpetual Solitudes" and "African Migrant Intellectuals;" Michael Chege. Oyekan Owomoyela, "With Friends Like These... a Critique of Pervasive Anti-Africanisms in Current African Studies Epistemology and Methodology," *African Studies Review*, 37.3 (1994): 77-101; Dickson Eyoh, "From Economic Crisis to Political Liberalization: Pitfalls of the New Political Sociology for Africa," *African Studies Review*, 39.3 (1996): 43-80.



have often been uneasy and sometimes openly antagonistic..."<sup>26</sup> Jane Guyer laments that the major challenge in African studies continues to be the boundary "between us [Africanists] and intellectual production in Africa... For a variety of reasons, one senses that in African Studies we have not yet arrived at the point at which collegial engagement on a completely egalitarian footing is the norm."<sup>27</sup> Ron Kassimir, program director for Africa at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), concedes:

it must be recognized that Area Studies are also contested from within... there is no consensus on the meaning of 'African Studies.' Its definition is a matter of both epistemological and political debate.... African scholars based on the continent often do not recognize the Africa that is analyzed and invoked in ASA [African Studies Association annual meetings] panels.<sup>28</sup>

Iris Berger, former president of the ASA, tried to be more sanguine in her presidential address at the 1996 ASA Annual Meeting: "controversies over boundaries and authority are healthy provided that the field's intellectual and organizational vitality emanates as much (or more) from Africa as from other parts of the world."<sup>29</sup>

While many African scholars based in the United States have continued to bemoan the persistent pathologization of African societies, cultures, economies, states, polities, and leaders, and their own marginality in African studies and that of Africa in the American academy, Ali Mazrui<sup>30</sup> celebrates the role of the African migrant intellectuals as an academic fifth column of counter-penetration that can subvert Western

<sup>26</sup> Hunt R. Davis, "For African Studies, Race Still Matters," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 146.

<sup>27</sup> Guyer, "Distant Beacons," 151.

<sup>28</sup> Ron Kassimir, "Internationalization of African Studies: A View from the SSRC," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 161.

<sup>29</sup> Iris Berger, "Contested Boundaries: African Studies Approaching the Millennium," *African Studies Review*, 40.2 (1997): 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1978).

scholarship. Abiola Irele<sup>31</sup> sees them as potentially key players—because of their immersion in both African and Western cultures, languages, experiences, and epistemologies—in verifying, validating, and expanding Africanist knowledge, promoting comparative scholarship, and reconfiguring the disciplines and international scholarship.

As these debates were raging, the area studies project as a whole faced challenges, old and new, about its overall mission, relations with the disciplines, as well as funding. Besides resources provided by the universities themselves, funding for area studies came from the foundations, especially the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, and the Federal Government under Title VI of the National Defense Education Act passed in 1958. Enacted in the aftermath of the Soviet Sputnik space mission, the first Title VI clearly sought to bind education to national security needs. The original emphasis was on foreign language training rather than area studies. Six priority languages were identified: Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Hindi-Urdu, Portuguese, and Russian. 18 other languages were given second priority and 59 additional languages had third priority emphasis.<sup>32</sup> In the first year of the program, \$3.5 million was appropriated. The funds were allocated to 19 centers for teaching foreign languages and 171 students received fellowships for studying the six priority languages. 26 research projects were funded, most of which were on effective methods of language teaching and the development of teaching materials.

In subsequent reauthorizations of Title VI in the 1960s, both the appropriations and mandates of Title VI expanded. According to Merckx, “the high point in Title VI appropriations, controlling for inflation, was reached under the Johnson Administration. Both the Nixon and Reagan administrations sought to zero-budget Title VI. In both cases, proponents of the specialist training mission were able to rescue Title VI from oblivion, with significant support from the defense and intelligence communities.”<sup>33</sup> Despite the rescue efforts, the number of centers funded by Title VI were cut in half from the 106 that had been established by the late 1960s. Also, new requirements were instituted, including a three-year competitive cycle for centers. Funding was provided for centers focusing

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<sup>31</sup> See Irele.

<sup>32</sup> Richard D. Scarfo, “History of Title VI/Fulbright-Hays,” in Hawkins, et al., eds., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Merckx, 77.

on Western Europe and functional topics and to internationalize general undergraduate curricula and centers were asked to undertake outreach beyond their immediate faculty and student population.

In the 1980s and early 1990s new mandates were added to Title VI, such as minority recruitment, library acquisitions of foreign materials, and establishment of support for overseas research. Also, centers for international business education were added "as national resource centers in teaching improved techniques, strategies, and methodologies in international business, instruction in critical foreign languages, and other fields to better understand U.S. trading partners, and to conduct research and training in international aspects of trade and commerce."<sup>34</sup> Thus from a preoccupation with national defense and security in the 1960s, federal funding for area studies in the 1990s shifted to greater concern for U.S. international economic competitiveness. But the expansion in the functions of Title VI centers was not matched by increased funding. Adjusted for inflation, Title VI funding fell by 17% from \$64.2 million in 1967 to \$53.3 million in 1995 and funding for Fulbright-Hays programs fell by 56% from \$13.8 to \$5.8 during the same period.<sup>35</sup>

Declining federal funding for area studies since the 1960s raises fundamental questions about the importance of these programs in American foreign policy calculations. By the 1980s, about 95% of all funding for foreign language and international studies in the Title VI National Resource Centers was derived from the universities themselves. But as the supporters and beneficiaries of Title VI are quick to point out, "in spite of the relatively small amount of funding awarded a center, the national reputational status among faculty and students and the frequent re-competition is very important to universities in deciding whether to invest in new faculty positions, librarians, library holdings, and other resources for the study areas or fields."<sup>36</sup> While this is correct, the fact remains that area studies programs must compete with other units and departments in universities for the bulk of their funding. The fate of area studies is therefore tied far more firmly to the shifting fiscal and

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Miriam A. Kazanjian, "Charge of the Conference," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 21.

<sup>36</sup> David Wiley, "The Conference Rapporteur's Synthesis of the Findings of the National Policy Conference on Title VI of the Higher Education Act and Fulbright-Hays Programs," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 218.



intellectual currents on campuses than to the winds of change in Washington. This requires proponents of area studies to understand and negotiate the changing political economy of higher education in the United States.

Within the universities, area studies programs, like other interdisciplinary programs, have always faced institutional and intellectual challenges from the disciplines. The disciplines, which tend to focus on the United States, regard "area studies," at best as sources of data to test existing theories, and at worst as unscientific relics of the Cold War maintained as concessions to political correctness and minority nationalisms. The often-quoted statement by Robert Bates, a rational-choice Africanist, is a typical if extreme example of the disdain for "area studies" among some of the disciplines. "Within the academy," Bates asserts, "the consensus has formed that area studies has failed to generate scientific knowledge."<sup>37</sup> Holzner and Harmon comment that "(t)he idea that area studies has not produced scientific knowledge is obviously untrue, indeed comical. It presupposes an unrealistically narrow definition of what science is. By a realistic conception of the nature of science, the disciplined pursuit of increasingly valid knowledge about the world, area studies have made enormous contributions to scientific knowledge, especially through empirical challenges to scientific theories, social and otherwise."<sup>38</sup> Bates' characterization of the tensions between area studies and what he calls social scientific approaches caricatures, to use his own words, area studies. His suggestion that what he mysteriously calls "analytic narratives" offer "a bridge between the social sciences and Area Studies" shows the dangers of acquired intellectually deficient science.<sup>39</sup>

Bates is an Africanist political scientist of long-standing in the field. Much of the intellectual challenge to area studies has come from political science and its dismal social science cousin, economics. Armed with the reductionist and deductive theories of rational choice models, from the 1950s economics began to banish much of the real world into oblivion in a relentless pursuit for the rigors of natural science. Economics

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<sup>37</sup> Robert H. Bates, "Area Studies and Political Science: Rupture and Possible Synthesis," *Africa Today*, 44.2 (1997): 127.

<sup>38</sup> Burkart Holzner and Mathew Harmon, "Intellectual and Organizational Challenges for International Education in the United States: A Knowledge System Perspective," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 38.

<sup>39</sup> Bates, 127.

sought to become more like physics, and political science sought to become more like economics. Both ended up becoming caricatures of their objects of desire. As economics mutated into pale physics, "economic history, the history of economic thought, and development economics [were] largely dropped from the graduate curriculum and replaced by courses in mathematics and modeling. One of the consequences has been a sharp decline in both undergraduate and graduate economics enrollments."<sup>40</sup> The results have been less than edifying for the external clients of the discipline, for whom there is little correspondence between the theoretical models and the real world, the validating marker of any good theory and policy. To quote Merckx,

Joseph Stiglitz, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, states that "It's very clear that the new classical economics is irrelevant." The chairman of the National Association of Business Economists is quoted as saying that "Academic economics has taken a very bad turn in the road. It's very academic, very mathematical, and nothing like as useful to the business community as it could be." The head of the global economics group at Morgan Stanley adds that his company will not hire economics Ph.D.s unless they also have substantial experience outside academia... In 1991 the Commission on Graduate Education in Economics issued a report saying it feared that universities were turning out a generation of "*idiots savant*, skilled in techniques but innocent of real economic issues."<sup>41</sup>

The disquiet is not confined to acquisitive business tycoons averse to the intellectual delights of theorizing, but finds echoes within the profession itself.<sup>42</sup> William Barber informs us that "officers of the American Economic Association—as well as a number of the profession's senior establishment figures—have been at the forefront of some exercises in self-criticism. Economists teaching in liberal arts colleges have been

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<sup>40</sup> Merckx, 83.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>42</sup> David M. Kreps, "Economics - The Current Position," *Daedalus*, 126.1 (1997): 59-85.

catalytic agents in this process."<sup>43</sup> Robert M. Solow, one of those senior figures, perhaps best captures the growing anxieties when he protests that "economics became a self-consciously technical subject, no longer a fit occupation for the gentleman-scholar."<sup>44</sup> He believes that the ambition by economists to behave like physicists faces

two dangerous pitfalls. The first is the temptation to believe that the laws of economics are like the laws of physics: exactly the same everywhere on earth and at every moment since Hector was pup. That is certainly true about the behavior of light and heat. But the part of economics that is independent of history and social context is not only small but dull. I want to suggest that a second pitfall comes with the imitation of theoretical physics: there is a tendency to undervalue keen observation and shrewd generalization, virtues that I think are more usually practiced by biologists.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps economists harboring natural science ambitions ought to become more like biologists.

It is ironic that political science should be moving in the direction of economics, when the latter's emulation of the natural sciences is coming under growing attack. This is not the first time political science has joined the party rather late. In the 1950s and 1960s the behavioral revolution gripped the field, as the discipline sought to move toward science, but the discipline was moving, states Charles Lindblom, "to a positivist model of science at the very time that the model was, in several other quarters, under attack."<sup>46</sup> The rational choice revolution is simply the latest in a long line of attempts by some in political science to overcome their scientific inferiority complex. In the hands of anxious Africanist political scientists like Bates suffering from imagined complexes of Third

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<sup>43</sup> William J. Barber, "Reconfigurings in American Academic Economics: A General Practitioner's Perspective," *Daedalus*, 126.1 (1997): 96.

<sup>44</sup> Robert M. Solow, "How Did Economics Get That Way and What Way Did it Get?" *Daedalus*, 126.1 (1997): 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Charles E. Lindblom, "Political Science in the 1940s and 1950s," *Daedalus*, 126.1 (1997): 231.



World methodological and theoretical backwardness, the debilitation becomes both tragic and farcical. Lindblom believes that "political science has rarely done and can only rarely do science as conventionally described. Its conventionally scientific aspirations are bound to be disappointed."<sup>47</sup> Rational choice cannot be a universal explanatory theory of all politics. Critics within the discipline itself point out that, to cite Rogers Smith, "the focus on building a universal theory has led rational-choice scholars to ignore empirical testing or to do it poorly. They contend that the empirically supported contributions of rational choice to our understanding of important political subjects are thus virtually nonexistent."<sup>48</sup> For those interested in tackling the politics of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and the world at large, rational choice is a method in search of a mission.

#### Navigating the New Challenges

It can be seen that area studies in the American academy are beset by many challenges concerning their mission and mandate—intellectual, institutional, and ideological. African studies face many of the same challenges, although they are sometimes articulated in some unique ways because of the specific trajectory of African studies outlined earlier in the paper. Besides the contestations between Africans (both at home and abroad), African Americans, and European Americans over the protocols of scholarly production and authority, paradigms and perspectives, and the very social composition of African studies, which have plagued and weakened the field in the last few decades, the African studies enterprise, together with the other area studies programs confront new challenges, or old challenges recently repackaged as new. They can be grouped into three broad categories: intellectual, institutional, and what I call civic challenges.

The intellectual challenges can be divided into two: those posed by international studies and those from interdisciplinary studies. If the cold war structured discourses and programs in international education, globalization has now become the guiding force and paradigm. It has

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>48</sup> Rogers M. Smith, "Still Blowing in the Wind: The American Quest for a Democratic, Scientific Political Science," *Daedalus*, 126.1(1997): 253-287.

become commonplace to argue that we live in an age of globalization, characterized by the rapid and constant flows of commodities, capital, communication, and cultures; ideas, images, individuals, and institutions; and visions, values, vices, and viruses. Globalization, so the argument goes, renders the old structures of organizing and producing knowledge in bounded regions increasingly obsolete. Besides, the cold war is over. In place of area studies, we need international or global studies, or at the very least, comparative regional studies.

One can respond to these challenges (especially when they are advanced by university administrations compelled more by cost cutting considerations than arcane theoretical debates) with cries of intellectual indignation pointing out that globalization is not new, but that it is a polite way of saying imperialism, which is as rampant as ever. Or that it is a term that often serves ideological rather than analytical purposes and seeks to rationalize a new global regime of free market accumulation and exploitation and to silence opposition and criticisms spawned by detailed regional knowledges and experiences. Globalization does not mean homogenization and globality reproduces locality in new, unpredictable ways that demands more, not less, focused understanding of the world's numerous societies and cultures in all their bewildering complexities. A lot of comparative work already takes place within the broad regions covered by the area studies. For example, comparing South Africa and Egypt, is as demanding as comparing the United States and Japan. Indeed, African studies has always been, as Christopher Lowe argues,

conducted under the rubric of globalizing frames of reference, including modernization theory, underdevelopment theory, the African diaspora, articulation of modes of production, structural adjustment, theories of globalizing markets and democratization, and theories of postcoloniality. Through those lenses Africa scholars have addressed many inherently global and comparative topics, including the slave trade; colonialism and decolonization; formation of states, classes, and ethnicities; urban growth; religious transformations; and the reconceptualizations of choices and meaningful agency through involvement in labor and commodity markets. The problem for Africa scholars has

not been lack of global perspectives or global theory. Rather, the difficulty has been to test and modify the theories and to discover the questionable assumptions underlying them, so as to more adequately describe and interpret African realities.<sup>49</sup>

In short, if Africanist scholarship has any problem at all, it is that Africa has always been globalized, without the global being Africanized. In contrast, in American studies, which pass for the disciplines as currently constituted, the global is Americanized, while America is not globalized. The African intellectual condition is produced by global dependence, the American one by global domination. An American can be a professor in most disciplines in the social sciences and humanities without knowing anything about other societies and countries; almost unheard of is an Africanist or African professor who only knows the society s/he studies or comes from. Thus, it is not area studies people, certainly not the Africanists, who need to be internationalized, but those in the ethnocentric disciplines. Proclaims Chege

It is also time for North America and Western Europe to be designated as "Area Studies" as well... To that extent, calls for methodological rigor should not be dismissed offhand. The same applies to Western-based scholarship, to the extent that it is prepared to see itself objectively as one more "area" in which theory is validated or rejected. Such an approach would help short-circuit the sterile polemical debate on the relevance, or lack thereof, of Area Studies and still adopt a stridently critical demeanor concerning the reigning concepts of social science.<sup>50</sup>

It is one of the supreme ironies that at the time that globalization and internationalization is in vogue, even among the most parochial of university administrators, death wishes for area studies are heard more loudly than ever. These wishes are often made by those who know little

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<sup>49</sup> Christopher C. Lowe, "Unexamined Consequences of Academic Globalism in African Studies," *Africa Today*, 44.3 (1997): 298-9.

<sup>50</sup> Chege, 136-137.



about area studies, or area studies people, such as Bates, anxious to burnish their disciplinary credentials. Part of the problem lies in the misunderstanding of the international knowledge system in the American academy and the place of area studies within it. Another is that while the corporate pressures for globalization are recognized and even embraced, the demographic pressures of globalization are less well-appreciated. Holzner and Harmon<sup>51</sup> identify five components of the international knowledge system, the first three of which are specifically aimed at producing knowledge about the world outside the United States, and the other two involve educational and professional activities beyond the country's borders. It is critical for proponents of area studies to have a clear understanding of the system as a whole and how it can be better integrated and improved.

The five components are, first, area and foreign language studies which focus on particular countries and cultures in specific world regions; second, transnational and international studies which deal with phenomena that involve more than one country or world region and the interrelations of events within and across countries; third, global studies which focus on processes that are global in scope or that affect the planetary habitat as the context of all human activities; fourth, international education professions responsible for the mobility of students, scholars, and others across national boundaries; and fifth, scientific and professional activities carried out in international settings. It is important to emphasize that all these components overlap and one cannot be removed without undermining the entire system. There can be no meaningful transnational and international studies or global studies without area and language studies, and vice versa. Those who think otherwise need to do a little more traveling, both figuratively through reading and literally, outside their comfortable intellectual and residential cocoons. In a masterly speech surveying American social sciences delivered at the 40th Anniversary of Title VI in April, 1998, Ken Prewitt, President of the Social Science Research Council, reported the intellectual anguish of many America-centric social scientists in the recently-reorganized SSRC committees, half of whose members are scholars from other regions, when they discover that their overseas colleagues swear by different research methodologies and theories even on the same topic or theme. A small reminder that there are

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<sup>51</sup> Holzner and Harmon, 33-4.

indeed many real worlds outside the United States. If the so-called universal theories that parade in the American academy with such self-assurance cannot explain or correspond to those worlds, then such theories are no better than academic fetishes, held more as an act of patriotic faith rather than intellectual reason.

One of the major forces fueling interest in international education on American campuses is the need to maintain, if not improve, the global economic competitiveness of the United States. While the world has experienced many dazzling changes in recent years, including the end of the Cold War, the proliferation of states and transnational social movement organizations, as well as dizzying technological revolutions involving computers and the Internet, waves of migrations, and turbulent social and environmental disruptions, the transformations in the global economy may be more fundamental. In the words of JoAnn McCarthy,

...the most dramatic changes, however, will take place in shifting economic powers of the world. The list of the G7 countries already misrepresents the leading economic powers since neither the United Kingdom nor Canada currently rank among the top seven. At present, the seven leading powers (in rank order) are: the United States, Japan, China, Germany, France, India, and Italy. By 2020, the seven will most likely be (in order): China, the United States, Japan, India, Indonesia, Germany, and South Korea. The Department of Commerce is predicting a major shift in U.S. exports away from our traditional trading partners in Japan and Europe to ten developing nations known as the Big Emerging Markets. These countries are: China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), India, Indonesia, South Korea, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Poland, and Turkey.<sup>52</sup>

Predictions are, of course, always unpredictable. But if the last half-century is anything to go by, it would not be rash to expect profound shifts in the global economic and political order in the next half-century,

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<sup>52</sup> JoAnn S. McCarthy, "Continuing and Emerging National Needs for the Internationalization of Undergraduate Education," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 66.

although the exact configurations of that order cannot be forecast with precision.

There is ample evidence that American universities are not meeting the training demands for workers with the necessary foreign language skills and knowledge. Merks estimates the annual demand over the decade for such workers

at 20,000 business jobs, 6,000 government jobs, and 10,000 education jobs, or an annual demand for 36,000 language or area-trained personnel...[while] a combined total of 25,000 B.A. and M.A. graduates with foreign language or area training enter the job market.... These data suggest that even without further growth in patterns of government, business, and educational employment, the production by Title VI centers of personnel with foreign language training or foreign-area skills remains insufficient to meet the nation's needs.<sup>53</sup>

The shortfall is even evident at the university level, where it is estimated that 2,100 foreign language or area studies jobs will be needed over the next decade, while projected Ph.D. production in these fields stands at about 1,900. At the very least, then, universities need to supply the personnel trained in foreign language and area studies that are demanded by the economy. Already the federal government spends over \$88 million, over one and half times the cost of all Title VI programs, on in-house government foreign language training programs.

It is quite common in Africanist circles permeated with Afro-pessimism to see Africa as even more marginal in the brave new world of economic globalization than it was in the bad old days of the Cold War. It is not sufficiently realized that United States trade with Africa is sizeable and rapidly growing. During the period 1992-96, four African countries—Angola, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa—ranked among the U.S.'s 50 largest trade partners. U.S. exports to South Africa alone equaled U.S. sales to Russia, and were greater than U.S. exports to all of Eastern Europe. In 1997, U.S. agricultural exports to Africa were valued at \$2.3 billion, which were greater than U.S. agricultural exports to

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<sup>53</sup> Merks, 82.



Central America, Eastern Europe, and South Asia combined, and nearly as large as U.S. agricultural exports to South America, valued at \$2.6 billion.<sup>54</sup> As Africanists continue to decry Africa's economic marginality, American businesses see new opportunities and push Congress to enact legislation to promote and safeguard their rising stake in African markets. The disjuncture in perceptions between scholars and capital over Africa's prospects is quite evident at the annual spring meetings of the Association of African Studies Programs and in the deliberations of the National Summit on Africa. The possibilities of academics shaping the corporate agenda are not high; but the growing interest by American business in Africa offers opportunities to quell impressions among university administrators that Africa is more marginal than other regions and therefore African studies programs are not worthy of support. In short, in the struggle for resources, it cannot hurt to temper the excessive Afro-pessimism and point out Africa's growing economic importance, even if one might detest the nature of current U.S.-African economic relations.

Economic forces are not alone in exerting pressure for the internationalization of U.S. education. The demographic processes of migration and immigration are going to have a noticeable impact on international studies in general, and area studies in particular. Immigration brings new dynamics in the relationship between area studies and U.S. ethnic populations that are so familiar to Africanists. According to Linda Rodriguez, "the United States is currently experiencing the largest wave of immigration since the 1901-10 period, when 8.8 million people came to the country. In 1910 immigrants represented 14.7% of the total U.S. population... Today, some 24 million immigrants representing 9% of the nation's population reside in the United States."<sup>55</sup> If current demographic trends persist, it is expected that the percentage of the non-Hispanic white population will progressively drop, falling to about half the total U.S. population by the middle of the twenty-first century. Not only are area studies required to understand the migration flows, but also in addressing the challenges facing immigrant groups, and providing "heritage"

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<sup>54</sup> National Summit on Africa, *Economic Development, Trade and Investment, and Creation*, Thematic Working Paper Series (Washington: The National Summit on Africa, 1998). See also, National Summit on Africa, *Bird's Eye View of Midwest-Africa Trade Linkages* (Washington: National Summit on Africa, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Linda A. Rodriguez, "Immigration, Ethnic Groups, and Area Studies," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 156.

knowledge for their offspring.

Working together with the ethnic studies programs, the area studies centers, Carlos Torres believes, "provide the intellectual and cultural tools with which to integrate the diverse heritage of the racial and ethnic groups that are emerging, as the nation's new majority, into a new synthesis of U.S. culture."<sup>56</sup> While the majority of the new immigrants are from Latin America and Asia, African migration has been on the rise. African studies programs stand to gain from any increased visibility that continued migration might give to area studies, and from specific demands for heritage language training and knowledges demanded by the American Africans. The latter will reinforce long-standing agitation by African Americans for African studies relevant to the historic experiences and cultural needs of African peoples on both sides of the Atlantic, thus making the distinction between (foreign) African studies and (domestic) African American studies less salient. What do all these changes, actual and prospective, mean for African studies and area studies more broadly? Area studies programs have to consciously promote and embed inter-regional, cross-continental perspectives in their triple mission of teaching, research, and public service or outreach. To area studies purists, with lifelong commitment to their beloved African villages, this smacks of heresy. For African studies, it may actually represent a road back to the future, to an African studies that is reconnected to the diasporic and Pan-Africanist commitments and the global and civilizational concerns of Dubois, Dike, Diop, and Davidson, away from the prescriptive developmentalism and pedantic chase for the insignificant. If carefully done, comparative studies have the potential of liberating the study of Africa from the paradigmatic prison of pathological exceptionalism.

Programmatically, this entails promoting closer collaboration among area studies centers and between the latter and domestic ethnic studies programs, such as African-American studies, Asian-American studies, and Latina/o studies in course offerings and curriculum development; extra-curricular activities, such as conferences; organizing joint research projects; and pooling outreach resources. There is already considerable overlap in faculty and student interests in domestic ethnic studies and foreign area studies programs. Cultivating and catering to such

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<sup>56</sup> Carlos Alberto Torres, "Immigration, Ethnic Groups, and Area Studies," in Hawkins, et al., eds., 164.



interests is not only good academic politics, it helps maximize scarce resources. But, it must be part of a larger objective of simultaneously provincializing and globalizing American studies, that is, stripping the study of American economics, politics, sociology, and culture of its claims to universal truth, to epistemological supremacy.

The composition of area studies programs and institutional incentives for international studies also need to be examined. Deliberate efforts ought to be made to increase the representation of domestic minorities in area studies in order to build or strengthen their capacity to pursue teaching, research, or international service careers. Strong disincentives exist in the faculty appointment, promotion, and tenure system that discourage faculty from participating in long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with their counterparts abroad. Tenure clocks are known to favor mass production, which often precludes prolonged collaborative research and co-publishing with overseas colleagues. Yet, the possibilities for international scholarly communication have never been better with the electronic media revolution, which is gradually spreading to many parts of the world, including Africa.

International cooperation is essential for the successful implementation of educational internationalization in the American academy. It requires the construction of genuinely collaborative research and linkage programs between American scholars and their overseas counterparts. The former must realize that the centers of foreign areas scholarship are located in the foreign countries themselves, as much as the United States is the center of American scholarship. Imperial or racial arrogance has often blinded many to this elemental fact, certainly in African studies, where it has been common to equate the material poverty of African nations and universities to the paucity of local scholarly production and probity. I have in mind not simply relations between, say, Africanists and their counterparts on the continent, which obviously need improving, but also between African and American scholars who share thematic interests even if covering different global locations. After all, like their American counterparts working on the United States, African scholars in Africa are more likely to define themselves in disciplinary or interdisciplinary terms than as area studies specialists or as Africanists.

The difficulties of establishing thematic rather than geographic linkages between African and American scholars cannot be underestimated, but the inclusion of foreign scholars in SSRC committees



is a move in the right direction.<sup>57</sup> For Africanists who have prided themselves on comparative work there is nothing to fear from these changes as Nyang'oro and Robinson stress emphatically.<sup>58</sup> Several research funding agencies now require collaboration between American researchers and partners in Africa, or Asia and Latin America, before they can fund a project, although the research priorities and agendas are often set by the U.S. based Africanists, Asianists, or Latin Americanists. Encouraging multi-national thematic research involving American and African researchers is long overdue and would dissolve some of the historic antagonisms between African and Africanist scholars. In my own personal experience, I have rarely encountered difficulties with colleagues who work, say, on Canadian or American history, and I have often wished for more engagement with them for mutually beneficial intellectual conversations.

In addition to the challenges posed by international studies, area studies face competition from interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary studies, which is fueled by internal epistemological transformations taking place within and among the disciplines, and the growing conviction by many scholars, and sometimes by university administrators interested in closing small departments, that the nineteenth century intellectual division of disciplinary knowledge is increasingly becoming obsolete, so that each discipline is incapable, by itself, of explaining the complex and interconnected social, ecological, and physical phenomena and processes. The interdisciplinary scholarship movement if it grows and becomes more institutionalized will increasingly dissolve the contrived tension between area studies and the disciplines. While we await the day when all of us will be liberated from the stifling strictures of disciplinary conformity and can begin to enjoy the permissive pleasures of interdisciplinarity, we need to participate in shaping and inserting our beloved Africa into the new architecture of interdisciplinary scholarship.

First, we need to be at the forefront of challenging the theoretical, empirical, and ideological shortfalls of specific disciplines, informed by our knowledge of African realities and epistemologies. It is surely not enough to celebrate Africa's contributions to the disciplines without actually demonstrating the role of African thinkers and paradigms as is done in the

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<sup>57</sup> Ken Prewitt, "Presidential Items," *Items*, 50.1 (1996): 15-18. Ron Kassimir, 155-162.

<sup>58</sup> See Nyang'oro, also Robinson.

book *Africa and the Disciplines*.<sup>59</sup> Second, area studies programs themselves should be made more interdisciplinary in fact, not simply in intent. All too often, these programs function as glorified administrative offices for Title VI and other grant writing, organizing occasional conferences, and providing postal addresses for visiting African faculty and perhaps spaces for lonely African students to hang out, with little actual interdisciplinary research and teaching. Area studies programs are dominated by the social sciences and humanities, although there have been considerable shifts in the relative concentration of these disciplines over time. The bulk of the faculty who identify themselves as Africanists are in the social science and humanities disciplines, so are those who dominate African studies conferences. At most Title VI centers the number of core faculty from the natural sciences and professional schools is minuscule.

As for conferences, I was struck as National Panels Chair of the 1998 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, that out of the 714 presentations accepted in the preliminary program, 115 dealt with current African politics, especially democratization; followed by 88 on colonial and postcolonial history; and 62 on cultures and cultural change. The dominance of political science, history, and anthropology was even greater when we include papers in other sections focusing on political, historical, and anthropological themes. Altogether, the three disciplines accounted for about three quarters of the submissions. The remainder was shared by geography with 70 presentations, economics with 47, literature and science with 37 each, and philosophy 4. The low presence of literature and the virtual absence of linguistics might be accounted for by the fact that both disciplines have their own associations, the African Literature Association and the Association of African Languages, respectively, which also organize annual conferences. The invisibility of philosophy is a testament to the continued disregard for African thought among Africanists and in philosophy departments.<sup>60</sup> The strong presence of political scientists, on the other hand, reflects both the modernist and prescriptive preoccupations of Africanist scholarship and their alienation from the paradigmatic center of the discipline.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert H. Bates, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr, eds., *Africa and the Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>60</sup> Olufemi Taiwo, "Exorcizing Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy," *African Studies Quarterly*, 1.4 (1997).



The preeminence of political science, history, and anthropology in African studies is attenuated when we examine the production of dissertations on Africa by discipline. Data shows that out of the 3,468 Africa-focused dissertations produced in American universities during the period 1986-94, the three disciplines accounted for 26.4% of the total as compared to 30.6% for the period 1974-87.<sup>61</sup> The two leading disciplines, during both periods, were education and economics (including business). Education accounted for 21.4% and 15.9% and economics and business for 12.4% and 11.6% of the dissertations produced during 1974-87 and 1986-94, respectively. Also remarkable are the production figures for the professional and scientific disciplines of agriculture, communications, natural and applied sciences, and urban and regional planning. Collectively, these disciplines increased their share from 10.8% of the dissertations in 1974-87 to 19.1% in 1986-94. Clearly, since at least the 1970s African studies, with its emphasis on the social sciences and humanities, has not been catering to a large student constituency in the sciences and professional fields. The fact that the majority of the dissertations in these fields are produced by African students—74% in agriculture, 71% in communications, 64% in economics and business, 74% in education, 100% in law, 93% in library science, 75% in psychology, and 47% in sciences and engineering during the 1986-94 period—while American students predominate in the traditional area studies disciplines reinforces the perception of African studies as academic tourism. This leads to a peculiar situation in which African studies loudly wears its developmentalist credentials as rhetoric without the disciplinary capabilities to sustain development as practice. And so the field loses credibility with two critical student constituencies: it fails to satisfy the cultural quests of African Americans and the scientific quests of Africans.

Given the interests of African students in the sciences and professions, broadening African studies to incorporate the natural sciences and professions does not, therefore, simply represent surrender to corporate and academic capitalism, but belated responses for relevance to a key constituency. The challenge is how to prevent area studies from becoming maids to the sciences and professions. This is not a problem confined to the area studies. As noted by Stanley Aronowitz, "... we are experiencing the transformation of nearly all the humanities and many

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<sup>61</sup> Guyer, 27-45.



social sciences into services for business, computer technology, and other vocational programs."<sup>62</sup> Efforts must be made to promote mutual engagement between the area studies and the sciences and professions, to expand the intellectual tent of African studies so that it is no longer dominated by anthropologists, historians, political scientists, and others in the humanities and social sciences, without at the same time reducing these disciplines into intellectual attendants. The case for closer intellectual collaboration is compelling, as I have discovered while writing a book on the economic history of Africa in the twentieth century. One cannot fully understand, say, the development of African agriculture and agrarian systems without situating it as much in political ecology as in political economy, in the overall context of fluctuations in the environment and the economy, which requires readings in environmental science and history. In short, a closer integration of the natural sciences and professional studies in area studies programs would expand the campus constituencies of area studies centers in terms of faculty affiliates and alliances and student involvement, including that of foreign students who come more to learn about science than about their own societies.

It can be seen that the intellectual challenges facing area studies have institutional dynamics and implications. Increasingly, as already stated, these programs feel besieged because of declining funding from their own institutions and from national public and private sources, which is partly a product of the privatization of the economy and the dismantling of the social welfare state and the Fordist social contract of middle class mobility and stability. For programs on the margins of the academy, the fiscal challenges can be debilitating. Funding decisions are tied to political calculations and constituencies, to the rationalities of legitimation. This is why it is imperative for area studies programs to ally themselves firmly with the domestic ethnic studies programs and spread their circle of intellectual friends beyond the social sciences and humanities. Also, the question of instructional authority needs to be addressed. Area studies teaching is often conducted in departments. The challenge for these programs is not to compete with the departments, a losing proposition under the current organizational structure of most universities, but to offer interdisciplinary, comparative, and international courses, including minors, majors, and degree programs which only they are capable of designing and

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<sup>62</sup> Stanley Aronowitz, "The Last Good Job in America," *Social Text*, 51 (1997): 108.

delivering.

Developments in the sciences are instructive in this regard. "The production of graduate education and research in the sciences and engineering," observe Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter, "is taking place in [the] interdisciplinary units, relegating discipline-based departments to the task of educating undergraduates."<sup>63</sup> To be sure,

such units are better resources in the sciences and engineering than in the social sciences and humanities. This is predictable, given the supply-side focus on productivity and wealth creation: interdisciplinary units in sciences and engineering center on solving problems and creating commercial products that laypersons see as important; such units in the social sciences and humanities tend to turn problems into verbs (as in, 'problematize'), identifying problems and generating textual products that are unrecognizable to laypersons.<sup>64</sup>

The point is that it is possible for area studies as interdisciplinary units to carve out curricular space for themselves that is currently unfilled or impaired by the disciplines. Certainly, they ought to challenge many of the interdisciplinary studies programs introduced since the 1970s, such as women's studies and cultural studies, which can often be as ethnocentric as the disciplines. For example, women studies programs tend to focus on American and European women, while women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are relegated to the less prestigious and applied women in development or gender and development programs. As for cultural studies, it does not always offer an antidote to the cultural arrogance of the disciplines; it merely reproduces it in trendy clothing. Ivan Kamp finds it "professionally and personally troubling that the great mass of Third World peoples—especially rural Third World peoples—are simply left out of the Cultural Studies equation, or are treated as an appendage to the cultural activities of minority and Third World peoples who work and live

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<sup>63</sup> Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter, "Academic Capitalism, Managed Professionals, and Supply-Side Higher Education," *Social Text*, 51 (1997): 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

in the urban and Western metropolitan centers."<sup>65</sup>

Despite the aspirations of many in the academy to be isolated from the mundane concerns of the masses in their ivory towers of idle contemplation or research, the university is, for better or worse, embedded in society and beholden to its collective aspirations, as much as it is often ripped apart by the social cleavages of race, gender, ethnicity, and other social markers. The question of the academic community's civic mandates and constituencies becomes critical. The extra-academic constituencies of scholarly knowledge production include various segments of the public, the state, and the ubiquitous international community. Much of the reorganization going on in American universities in terms of administration, employment, enrolments, and programs reflects, and is a direct response to, changes in the wider society. The corporate culture of accounting, productivity, downsizing, commercialization, and competitiveness, all grounded in a neo-conservative discourse, has invaded university campuses with a vengeance. Reinforcing the universities own ruthless research culture, as Zelda Gamson calls it, the result is the decomposition and recomposition of the academic labor market, and the restructuring of programs and governance.<sup>66</sup> The new culture of academic capitalism and supply-side higher education is seen in growing authoritarian managerial control, threats to tenure, rising tuition fees, declining public expenditure, and in the swelling faces of the lumpen-professorate, part-time or nontenure track faculty, whose numbers nearly doubled from 1970 to 1991, increasing from 21.9% to 43% of the senior instructional workforce.<sup>67</sup>

It is easy to submit to, or rail impotently against, the forces of academic capitalism and supply-side higher education that are restructuring and ravaging the academy. A more productive and difficult response, argues Jeremy Smith, is political engagement, born out of the realization that the "crisis in higher education has been paralleled in the wider society by falling wages, welfare cuts, the breakup of communities, huge increases in the prison population, and the commercialization of

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<sup>65</sup> Ivan Kamp, "Does Theory Travel? Area Studies and Cultural Studies," *Africa Today*, 44.3 (1997): 287.

<sup>66</sup> Zelda F. Gamson, "The Stratification of the Academy," *Social Text*, 51 (1997): 67-73.

<sup>67</sup> Rhoades and Slaughter, 20; Vincent Tirelli "Adjuncts and More Adjuncts: Labor Segmentation and the Transformation of Higher Education," *Social Text* 51 (1997): 75-91.



cultural expression."<sup>68</sup> He challenges professors "to harness themselves to political movements... Professors must engage in the conflict with power that authenticity demands - not just in the realm of ideas, but in practical politics."<sup>69</sup> In other words, programmatic struggles in the academy reflect, and must be latched on to, wider struggles in society. Smith's counsel would be understood by many in African studies, where the fortunes and misfortunes of the field have been embroiled with domestic and international struggles and transformations. It requires us to pay close attention to, and mobilize, the shifting public constituencies for Africa.

With the end of the Cold War, as Martin and West have suggested, the Africanists' Africa may be falling apart.<sup>70</sup> Interest in African studies, even within the academy, they observe, is more widespread than ever before. This has little to do with the irresistibility of Africanist academic products. Rather, it is rooted "in the renaissance of Africa interest in Black Communities."<sup>71</sup> The Africanists' Africa was linked to Cold War Washington, the foundations, and narrow academic networks, and as these wither with the demise of the cold war, that Africa begins to wilt, unable to secure sustenance from the new resurgent Africas. "It is worth pondering why this has taken place. The most obvious answer is based on the social and political realities of race: those who dominate African studies, the major centers, and the national organizations, are predominantly white and male."<sup>72</sup>

The African agenda is increasingly driven by business interests and popular grassroots organizations in the African American community. Schooled in the civil rights and anti-apartheid struggles, African American political leaders, inside and outside Congress, have been at the forefront of the movement to establish, to use President Clinton's words during his 1998 Africa tour, a new political and economic partnership between the

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<sup>68</sup> Jeremy Smith, "Faculty, Students, and Political Engagement," *Social Text*, 51 (1997): 135.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>70</sup> William G. Martin and Michael West, "The Decline of the Africanists Africa and the Rise of New Africas," *ISSUE: A Quarterly Journal of Opinion*, 23.1 (1995): 24-26 and Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "A Future with a Past: Resurrecting the Study of Africa in the Post-Africanist Era," *Africa Today*, 44.3 (1997): 297-326.

<sup>71</sup> Martin and West, "The Decline of the Africanists Africa," 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

United States and Africa. The initiatives of the emerging policy engagement with Africa include not only the Congressional Africa trade bill, but also the growing popularity and importance of the African and African American Summit, and the launching of the National Summit on Africa, which plans to hold a series of regional meetings on Africa throughout the country in 1999. As might be expected, there are serious conflicts and contradictions among the new constituencies and networks for Africa. How specific African studies programs relate to and utilize them individually and collectively will depend on their institutional histories, locations, and the ideological inclinations of their core faculty and administrators. But engage them they must:

### Conclusion

Clearly, the intellectual and organizational boundaries and constituencies of African studies, and area studies more generally, are shifting rapidly. To some this represents a crisis; it might indeed be a crisis to those who painstakingly constructed the African studies enterprise that we have known in the last fifty years, in which they have invested so much intellectual, ideological, and even emotional capital. But it is tempting to see in such proclamations of crisis millennial frenzy living as we do on the verge of a new century and a new millennium. To me and many others, the fears that African studies and area studies in general are about to disappear from the American academy are misplaced. Immanuel Wallerstein may be exaggerating when he declares that "the whole disciplinary taxonomy is about to crumble" and with it "the distinction between the two cultures"<sup>73</sup> of the disciplines and area studies, but it cannot be denied that we are living in a moment of transition. Like all such moments it is full of both dangers and opportunities. While remembering the multiple histories of the past, we must seize the tantalizing possibilities of the future: to return African studies to some of its earlier Pan-Africanist and global preoccupations; to reconnect it to African American communities; to engage the sciences and professions and join in the construction of new truly international and interdisciplinary studies programs; and to forge a new partnership with Africa and its scholars.

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<sup>73</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Africa in the Shuffle," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion*, 23.1 (1995): 23.

Ultimately, the sustenance of the study of Africa lies on the continent itself, and it is imperative that new forms of intellectual collaboration be established that reflect and take into account the changing contexts of scholarly knowledge production on the continent. Zeleza examines in more detail the nature of the new linkages that ought to be created and cultivated.<sup>74</sup> Suffice it to say here that they should encompass all the key stages and structures of knowledge production, from the conception of research themes and organization of collaborative research, to publications, review networks and reward structures. Critical to that dialogue, to the construction of new intellectual triangular trans-Atlantic conversations—between Africa, the United States or the Americas more generally, and Europe—will be African immigrant scholars located in the North, who in their personal and professional lives straddle the three continents, and frequently cross and seek to bridge the Atlantic, so much the source of our historic pain; and so much the spring of our collective liberation and the future of a truly de-racialized modernity.

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<sup>74</sup>Paul Tiyembe Zeleza, "African Migrant Intellectuals: Constructing New Trans-Atlantic Bridges," Mimeo, 1998.