

# IDENTITIES, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

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Knowledge Lab Presentation

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**Time:** 8.30am-1 300pm

# STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

**Introduction:** identities, discrimination and violence

## **PART 1: FRAMING THE ISSUES**

- Paradigm of difference, will to power & paradigm of war
- Slavery & emergence of black identity
- Modern colonial project & colonality of being
- Three tormenting questions

## **PART 2: AFRICAN IDENTITIES**

- Historical & discursive contexts of African identities
- Mapping modern African identities
- Reinventions of African identities
- Transcendental black identities: Black consciousness & Pan-Africanism
- Postcolonial nation-state project & reproduction of colonality

## **PART 3: DISCUSSIONS: DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE**

- (i) Racism, xenophobia & homophobia
- (ii) Gender, sexism & gender-based violence
- (iii) Ethnicity, regionalism & tribalism
- (iv) Religious fundamentalism & violence

# INTRODUCTION

## IDENTITIES, DISCRIMINATION & VIOLENCE

1. The problems emerging from identitarian politics such as discrimination and various forms of violence (gender-based, race-based, religious-based, ethnic-based, sex-based) must not be seen as **aberrations** (a departure from what is normal, usual or expected and thus unwelcome); rather they are constitutive of the logics behind the making of the modern world, how it works, and how the modern global political itself, is conceptualised and practiced.

2. Pius Adesanmi in his book *You're Not a Country, Africa* (2011: 60) posited that:

*'Prejudice has been the force majeure of so much human history. Our pantheon of small-minded hate is formidable: Christian prejudice manufactured the unbeliever; Islamic prejudice manufactured infidel; heterosexual prejudice manufactured the faggot; patriarchal prejudice manufactured the hysteric; European prejudice manufactured the native; American prejudice manufactured the nigger; German prejudice manufactured the Jew; Israeli prejudice manufactured the Araboushim; Afrikaner prejudice manufactured the kaffir; Not to be outdone, black South Africa manufactured the makwerekwere as its unique post-apartheid contribution to this gory pantheon of hate.'*

# INTRODUCTION

## IDENTITIES, DISCRIMINATION & VIOLENCE

1. However, I must say that prior to Euro-North American modernity, there were other logics that informed the making of the world, how it worked, and how the political itself was conceptualised and practiced.

2. The pre-colonial African world was driven by other logics and three of them are worthy sharing:

a. **Multiplicity**: gods and goddesses were multiple, forms of marriage was open to multiplicity, forms of currencies were multiple, identities were multiple and fluid—the paradigm of the ‘singular’ was not the norm, for example the idea of one God is an imposition on Africa. Colonialism erased multiplicity while introducing racism.

b. **Circulation and mobility**: there were no rigid borders and boundaries physically speaking and genocides were impossible.

c. **Compositionality**: Ubuntu is a good example—humanness underpinned by relationality and always in the process of becoming informed by the ethical interaction with others. The ‘Other’ is ‘Another’ me—the ‘Other’ is not outside myself—I am my own other.

# THE PARADIGM OF DIFFERENCE, WILL TO POWER AND PARADIGM OF WAR

1. To understand our present problems of alterity, discrimination and violence, it is important for us to go back to the question of 'Modernity' simply because it has become the most dominant frame for social and political thought not only in Europe but across the world—we are all modern subjects!
2. Modernity can be defined as a paradigmatic moment in human history underpinned by two key assumptions: rapture (colonization of time which is cut into pre-modern and modern) and difference (colonization of being human itself, that is, the social classification and racial hierarchization of human species resulting in radical differentiation of Europeans from other people).
3. Coloniality of being: speaks to complex politics of inventions and reinventions of being human, processes of subjection and subject formation: social classification of human species in accordance with invented differential ontological densities and racial hierarchization of human species: This is what is known as ***coloniality of being (crude dehumanization vs. hyper-humanization)***.
4. Zone of being & Zone of non-being: regulation & ethics vs. expropriation and violence
5. Will to Power: Frederick Nietzsche: naturalization of the will to dominate others— as the motive force in the constitution of 'the political': Carl Schmidt and Chantal Mouffe—friend/foe dialectic in politics—antagonism-Karl Marx—class struggles—Charles Darwin—survival of the fittest!
6. Paradigm of war: Carl von Clausewitz: the naturalization and routinization of war as a way of practising politics.

# SLAVERY & EMERGENCE OF BLACK IDENTITY

1. **Racism**: the organizing principle of social orders of modernity.
2. Key colonial question: *To who does the earth belong and who is the first citizen of the earth?*
3. Empty lands/terra nullius: *nobody on earth besides Europeans*
4. Paradigm of discovery: *Other human-like creatures were 'discovered' by Europe including other worlds: discover, map, conqueror, name, dominate, and own!*
5. Mercantilism: *world as an unlimited space and market for primitive accumulation by any means necessary including banditry and genocide*
7. The Slave Trade (objectification, capture, removal, minoritization, & dehumanization): *consequence of paradigm of difference and its logics—its foundation of the modern global order and its order of knowledge—birth of 'racial capitalism.'*
7. Blackness: *marker of sub-humanity and inferiority in colonial imaginary but in African self-writing—Blackness is a basis of solidarity and an idiom through which people of african origin announced themselves to the world through resistance.*

# MODERN COLONIAL PROJECT & COLONIALITY OF BEING

- 1. Colonization:** conquest & direct colonial domination and exploitation of colonized people (uncivilized & primitive) (physical empire & rule by physical 'foundational violence' including genocides)
- 2. Colonialism:** system of power that is institutionalised which defines and rules over the colonized—creating 'natives' (subjects) on the one side and colonial white 'citizens' (settlers) on the other (metaphysical empire & rule by cultural, epistemic, symbolic, systemic & institutionalised 'routine & maintenance violence').
- 3. Neocolonialism:** continuation of colonial-like relations after dismantlement of direct colonialism (commercial & financial empire underpinned by such institutions as IMF, World Bank & World Trade Organization—rule by exploitation, structural adjustments, conditionalities, debt-slavery, & economic dependence— 'systemic violence of capitalism' e.g. poverty & inequality)
- 4. Coloniality:** present modern pyramidal global colonial power structure with Europe and North America at the top and Africa at the bottom (cognitive empire/empire of the mind & rule by epistemic invasion of the mental universes of its victims—epistemic violence).
- 5. Postcolony:** pseudo-independent state whose politics repeats all the immanent logics of colonialism and coloniality including its anti-black practices— 'postcolonial violence'

# THREE TORMENTING QUESTIONS

1. Pius Adesanmi: The question of what Africa means has exercised the minds of some of the continent's best thinkers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries—but the question remains unanswered at the ideological core of pan-Africanism, Negritude, nationalism, decolonization and all other projects through which Africans has sought to understand and restore their violated humanity.

2. Aime Cesaire's tormenting questions:

Who am I?

Who are we?

What are we in this white world?

3. Two main paradigms

The idea of Africa (VY Mudimbe): externally defined by others

The African idea of Africa (Ngugi wa Thiong'o): African self-definition





# **PART 2: AFRICAN IDENTITIES**

# HISTORICAL AND DISCURSIVE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN IDENTITIES

African identities emerged from a historical situation that is knowable: racism, slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

**Foundational dismemberment** involving pushing black people out of human family (coloniality of being).

**Enslavement:** fragmentation of African personhood into two-halves: continental and Diaspora and invention of 'blackness' as a sign of inferiority

**Berlin Conference:** fragmentation and reconstitution of Africa into various colonies and 'postcolonial' 'nation-states' with serious ethnic problems

**Colonial governmentality:** colonizer-colonized; citizens-subjects (diverse tribes & subject populations);

**'Postcolony:'** reproduction of coloniality and continuation of social classification and hierarchization in terms of tribe/ethnicity, gender, and class.

**Modern/colonial gender system:** invention of gender as a universal organizing principle even for societies that were never organized in accordance with gender and 'feminization' as a form of dehumanization (gendered white bourgeois relations vs. dehumanization/animalization of the enslaved and colonized).

**Heteronormativity:** denial of other forms of sexuality.

# MAPPING OF MODERN AFRICAN IDENTITIES

Racial identity: blackness, whiteness, yellowness, colouredness etc.

Geographical/cartographical/continental identities: African, European, Asian, Latin American, Caribbean etc.

Capitalist-market-determined identities: classes—bourgeois, worker/proletariat, lumpen proletariat, peasant, master-slave etc.

Colonial political identities: negro, native, kaffir, colonizer, colonized, settler,

Gender and sexually/patriarchally-defined identities: lesbian, homosexual, heterosexual, gay

Culturally-defined identities: women, men

Resistance-determined identities: wretched of the earth, damne, feminists, war veterans, freedom fighters, comrade,

# INVENTIONS & REINVENTIONS OF AFRICAN IDENTITIES

Melville Herskovits: Africa is a geographical fiction: climatic range, social diversity, and product of 'tyranny of map-making'

Valentin Y. Mudimbe: invention and idea of Africa in the Greek stories, colonial library, product of European cartography; scientific racism, intellectual history, imperialism, and colonialism.

Cheikh Anta Diop and Molefi Kete Asante: Afrocentricity, cradle of humankind, and foundational importance of Egypt.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009): African idea of Africa & re-membering initiatives: Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, African Personality, Pan-Africanism, African nationalism, and African Renaissance.

# INVENTION AND REINVENTIONS OF AFRICAN IDENTITIES

Lewis R. Gordon (2008): 'It is in this sense that Africa is 'invented.' It is invented by ***systems of knowledge constituted by the process of conquest and colonization***, which always erupted with discovery, on the other hand, and it is also constituted by ***processes of resistance*** borne out of those events the consequence of which is an effect of both on each.'

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006): Africa is exceedingly difficult to define, the idea of Africa is complex, cascading from multiple genealogies and meanings, and swinging '***unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency***.'

**Blyden-Nkrumah-Mazrui triple heritage thesis:** trilateralist notion of African identity as a product of a confluence of indigenous Africa, Arabic/Islamic influence and Western/Christian influence.

# TRANSCENDENTAL BLACK IDENTITIES BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS & PAN-AFRICANISM

**Ali A. Mazrui:** 'But what is an 'African'? There are two types—those who are 'African' in a continental sense (like Egyptians and Algerians) and those who are 'African' in a racial sense (like Nigerians, Ugandans and Senegalese). Egyptians and Algerians are Africa's 'children of the soil.' Sub-Saharan Blacks are Africa's 'children of the blood.'

It is clear that Mazrui was here trying to address the North African question (the Arab question) and he coined the term '*Afrabia*.'

What about those people of European descent? Is it worthwhile to speak of '*Africanity by settlers*'—remember Mamdani's question: *when does a settler become a native?* By extension: *when does a settler become an African?*

*What about Africanity by ideological and political commitment to the African struggles?*  
Remember Marcus Garvey, William E. B. Dubois and Frantz Fanon!

# TRANSCENDENTAL BLACK IDENTITIES BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS & PAN-AFRICANISM

Davidson Nicol (Sierra Leone diplomat and poet): *'You are not a country, Africa; You are a concept; Fashioned in our minds, each to each; To hide our separate fears; To dream our separate dreams.'*

Remember Nkrumah: **'Africa was born in me.'** What does that mean?

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009): 're-membering Africa'—recovery of fragments, restoration of life, a quest for wholeness.

Steve Biko & Black consciousness: response to enslavement, colonization and apartheid—birth of a black race in the midst of resistance to racism.

Archie Mafeje: 'We would not talk of freedom, if there was no prior condition in which it was denied; we would not be anti-racism if we had not been its victims; ***we would not proclaim Africanity, if it had not been denied or degraded; we would not insist on Afrocentrism, if it had not been for Eurocentric negations***'

# TRANSCENDENTAL BLACK IDENTITIES BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS & PAN-AFRICANISM

Garveyism and Pan-Africanism: race pride, self-improvement, solidarity and unity of black people—*First All Africa People's Conference* (1958): 'Europeans, scram out of Africa' (Tom Mboya): OAU (1963): Continental perspective

African nationalism: Kwame Nkrumah— 'the essential fact remains we are all Africans, and have a common interest in the independence of Africa.'

Julius Nyerere—'the sentiment of Africa'—sentiment of oneness—created by the reality of colonization and colonial racism.

African Renaissance: Thabo Mbeki— 'I am an African' —not only proclamation of race pride but also commitment to lead the struggle for re-birth of Africa.



# POSTCOLONIAL NATION-STATE PROJECT REPRODUCTION OF COLONIALITY

**Pan-Africanism versus territorial nationalism:** conflicted or complimentary?

**Borders & boundaries:** 1963 agreement to maintain colonial boundaries (inviolability)

**Westphalian template:** 'nation-state' and curse of the nation-state:—question of rootedness of the state in society (African culture & history—as state that has to be consistently dogged and avoided).

**Failure:** to translate anti-colonial nationalism into postcolonial pan-ethnic patriotism.

**Nation-state project:** a flawed idea of a tight correspondence between nation and state inhabited by a people who shared common language and culture. Ahistorical project that ignored multi-culturalism, multi-lingualism and multi-ethnic and multi-religious realities.

**State-driven from above and imposed on society by violence:** 'for the nation to live the tribe must die.' Subordination of minority identities to the identity of the groups that dominated state power.

**Reproduction of practices and logics of coloniality:** patriarchal models of governance, tribalism, regionalism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and oppression including class and gender-based ones.

**Sex of the postcolony:** male—administered by elderly men—women are invited for parity purposes.



## **PART 3: DISCUSSIONS: DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE**



# DISCUSSION: CONTEMPORARY FORMS DISCRIMINATION & VIOLENCE

1. Racism, xenophobia and homophobia
2. Gender, sexism & gender-based violence
3. Ethnicity, regionalism & tribalism
4. Religious fundamentalism & violence
5. Class & class-based violence



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the history behind it?
2. What are the issues at stake?
3. Who is involved?
4. What are its manifestations?
5. What often triggers violence?
6. What forms does the violence take?
7. What are the common site of violence?
8. Who is the victim?
9. How is the violence justified?
10. What is to be done?