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EDITORIAL

Reflections on Africa and African Studies: in Memory of Cherry Gertzel¹

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The lead article in this issue of ARAS is by the Head of the Archie Mafeje Research Centre at the University of South Africa, Professor Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni who makes an important and meaningful contribution to the recent literature on de-coloniality in his piece entitled, “*Decoloniality in Africa: A Continuing Search for a New World Order*”. Defined in greater depth within his essay, he provides a genealogy of decoloniality through a critical examination of the impact of colonialism (and coloniality) as a global process of exploitation to find better ways to theorise the meaning of liberation and freedom (and its associated history) together through the concept of ‘re-membering’. He argues that the intent of decolonization has only succeeded in addressing the ‘physical empire’ whilst the ‘metaphysical empire’ and its associated structures remain. Through examining the epistemic,

¹ This Editorial is based on Tanya Lyons’ paper “Understanding Contemporary Africa in Australia and New Zealand: Reflections on the African Continent” presented at the AFSAAP 2015 Annual Conference – Deakin University, October 28-30, 2015, and has been adapted here by Lyons, Marlowe and Thornton.

ideological and theoretical crises linked with this history, he presents decoloniality as a response to the ‘crisis of imagination’ and ‘epistemic limits’ of, post-modernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism.

Solomon Gbanie, Alec Thornton and Amy Griffin’s article entitled “*The Diamond of Western Area is Land’: Narratives of Land Use and Land Cover Change in Post-war Sierra Leone,*” is also a demonstration of the strength of African Studies and research, led by African students based in Australia. Gbanie was awarded the 2013 AFSAAP Postgraduate Prize for his original paper that this article is based on, and here his team has provided an updated and revised version. This is an example of the excellent field work and research being done by Australian based scholars researching on Africa, and their host institutions should be commended for supporting them. The authors in this case argue that the post-conflict period for Sierra Leone has significant issues for land use and people-environment relationships, with changing population pressures and land prices impacting urban land use and land cover change.

Thomas McNamara’s article, “*Development, Witchcraft and Malawi’s Elite*”, provides a critical analysis of witchcraft and how it intersects with development using Malawi as a case study. By arguing how the academic and development literature fails to contextualise understandings of the supernatural, he shows how Malawian narratives of development are often placed in tension with witchcraft. Whilst such narratives are powerfully positioned by the state, the nation’s elite and international donors, McNamara demonstrates how the associated discourses can actually further entrench and reinforce witchcraft beliefs and position the rural poor in a relationship of dependence with the development elite.

Ibrahima Diallo’s paper entitled “*Lexical Borrowing from Arabic to Pular: Context and Features*” provides a background about the interaction between Arabic and African languages. By focusing specifically on the language contact between Arabic and Pular in the Fuuta Jallon, a language widely spoken in West Africa, Diallo demonstrates how this has impacted on lexicon development and expansion. After providing a historical account that explains the interaction between these two languages, the study focuses on the borrowing that Pular has taken from Arabic to demonstrate how this interaction has led to the coining of new words and associated meanings and the substitution and deletion of sounds and suffixes. The paper makes an important contribution on language contact and how this influences language construction and associated meanings.

Aparna Hebbani and Megan Preece's article, "*Spoken English does matter: Findings from an exploratory study to identify predictors of employment among African refugees in Brisbane*", presents an exploratory quantitative study that shows how spoken English proficiency relates to achieving employment with a group of 56 former refugees who identify as Sudanese, Somali or Congolese. Most particularly, they found that spoken English proficiency increased the changes of employment. Whilst noting synergies and discrepancies with the wider literature, the authors position English language proficiency as part of a larger socio-political context which can either help or impede access to employment for former refugees. By focusing on visible and linguistic difference, they show that English language competence needs to be considered within the wider experience of acculturation and integration within Australia to achieve meaningful employment opportunities.

The articles thus featured in this issue of ARAS demonstrate the growing interest in African Studies in this region, and the international attention that this journal - which the late Cherry Gertzel formerly established and edited - has now attracted. In particular, the authors and researchers of these articles bring together the literature which not only focusses on what is happening in Africa, but what is happening for the African diaspora. ARAS' strength is in bringing these two strands together in one journal. Below, we reflect on the following question – one often discussed with our former mentor—*how we know and understand Africa, and why it is important to understand, particularly in Australia and New Zealand?*

Africa has been imagined by the west as the 'Heart of Darkness' ever since Joseph Conrad depicted this bleak view in his 1899 novel of the same name. Conrad's character Kurtz's depiction of the "horror, the horror" has thus remained etched in the international psyche as of undeniably African origin. These images of 'darkness' and 'horror' are regularly reinforced by the media's fascination with representations of the regular violence that occurs during civil wars and conflicts, all too commonly reported 'out of Africa' (Ofuho, 2003, pp. 151-164; Marlowe, 2010). Yet, relying upon these historical and contemporary 'images of Africa' as sourced via the popular media or classic literature, results in a very limited understanding of what Africa *was, is and is becoming*.

What is Africa? This is not an unwarranted question in Australia, because there are many assumptions that Africa is just 'one place' – and very little awareness that it is a continent with arguably 55 different

countries (if we include Western Sahara). There are also many other assumptions of 'Africa' as 'one place' that is affected by the same social, political and economic forces, with the same social political and economic outcomes. Furthermore, any examination of contemporary 'Africa' must acknowledge and include all of the associated regions - Southern Africa, East Africa, West Africa, North Africa and the Horn of Africa - together with the politically defined borders of the nations within. While this is clearly challenging to International Relations theorists (Engel and Olsen, 2005), it is necessary because of the interconnections and issues that transgress the entire continent.

However we define Africa then, it can be argued that there is a general lack of awareness and understanding about the history and political intricacies of this continent, and this dearth of knowledge, globally, limits the potential development of African countries in a globalized world. Why is this so, when the 'modern' history and politics of Africa *has* been well documented by historians and social scientists? (see for example Reid, 2012; Gordon and Gordon, 2001; Thomson, 2000; and Chazan et al., 1999). Thematically their texts have fitted neatly into the discourse of *African Studies*. With its origins in the 'colonial project', African Studies has since gone through a myriad of changes and transformations, including receiving insights from postcolonial, feminist and postmodern theories, and more recently from the 'decolonial' perspective (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), which calls for a new 'decolonization' to occur across Africa, encompassing the desire for Africa and other postcolonial states to be rid of all of the baggage inherited at independence (the colonial hang-over), and the associated neo-colonial legacy. Indeed, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's article in this issue of ARAS envisages a new horizon articulated through a de-colonial perspective where the longer lasting and further reaching impacts of coloniality (which far outlive the experience of colonization) no longer define the frame.

Furthermore, whether dominated by anthropology, geography, history, politics or sociology - African Studies (from outside of Africa) remains a predominately Eurocentric and American 'Field of Study' (Lyons and Dimock, 2007; Feierman, 1993, Mudimbe and Appiah, 1993, Chazan et al, 1999). Thus, for Australian and New Zealand based academics and researchers, this means operating from the margins of this discourse, with smaller audiences for their ideas; a lot of competition for access to the limited publishing opportunities in the so-called "A ranked" journals (Lyons, 2015); even fewer opportunities to engage in academic teaching about Africa; let alone opportunities for

students to thus study Africa, which I have previously lamented about (Lyons, 2013). This is why the *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific* (AFSAAP) is such an important association in this region. Not only to bring researchers together at its annual conference, but to publish their research in this journal - the *Australasian Review of African Studies*. Although, we do need to acknowledge that more Africans need to become involved in the leadership team and executive of this association and its journal. Potentially and hopefully, as we see increases in the numbers of African-Australians and African/New Zealanders rising up in the university sector, we should also see these desired changes correspondingly.

Understanding Africa's contradictions

In 1994, two separate events in two different African nations demonstrated the contradictions and vast differences across the continent, making it hard to comprehend Africa 'as one place'. Firstly, in April 1994, South Africans celebrated the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new democracy and the 'rainbow nation' led by one of the most respected of African leaders, the late Nelson Mandela. However, at the same time, the small central African nation of Rwanda erupted into genocidal violence, during an unprecedented civil war, that the international community failed to both comprehend and prevent. This 'heart of darkness' overshadowed the successes of the global anti-apartheid movement, and created 'pessimism' and long-standing incomprehensibility about Africa.

Twenty years on, similar contradictions continue to thwart our understanding of Africa. For example, in 2014 Nigeria was being heralded as one of the world's fastest growing economies, with the celebrated 'Nollywood' movie industry. Yet, Boko Haram militants operating in the North East of this country are undermining the state's authority with extremist violence linked to Islamic fundamentalism, and threatening regional and global security (Agbiboa, 2015, forthcoming; Sulemana and Azeez, 2015; Sulemana, 2014). This threat continues today, and unfortunately has not been solved even by well-meaning globalized social media campaigns, such as the #BringBackOurGirls twitter feed, and associated Facebook site. Therefore, while it may be obvious to 'Africanists' (or those that study Africa within the academy), that 'Africa' is not just *one place*, and each country has its own history, future, challenges and contradictions, this may not be as obvious to the casual observer.

The impact of colonization has always been considered the most significant factor when understanding 'Africa', however; arguably this factor can no longer be blamed for Africa's contemporary woes. The sentiment of this exercise is inspired by the 1890 speech given by then British Prime Minister, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (the Third Marquis of Salisbury, and yes, they also named the capital of colonial Rhodesia after him), where he noted the main feature of the colonial project – the creation of (artificial) political boundaries - with some irony. Speaking to his Ministers at a banquet at the Mansion House, on the 7th August 1890, the Prime Minister stated:

Perhaps it is that very peacefulness of current affairs in Europe that has removed Europe almost entirely from the ken of those interested in foreign affairs. We think of Africa and of nothing else, not because I think Africa has become more interesting, but because Europe has become less interesting. But I am not surprised at the attention which has been given to the great and splendid discoveries of our explorers, and the explorers of other nations, and the development of industry and enterprise which has taken place in that vast and long neglected continent. Yet I believe that the deep interest which has been felt by political men in recent negotiations in Africa has not been entirely due to a hope that those vast unexplored regions would yield early and abundant fruit to the enterprise of the merchant, or the discover, or the colonist. I rather should be inclined to cite the deep interest that has been felt in Africa as another proof of the strong pacific feeling which is gradually gaining more and more undisputed influence over all the strongest and most ruling intellectuals in the world. Men have welcomed the agreements which we have made, or which we are making, with the principle nations of the world in regard to Africa, partly no doubt on account of the great field which is opened to English industry and enterprise, but much more, I believe, because they recognize that in those agreements we are removing the most probably and the most dangerous cause of possible quarrel between nations who ought always to be at peace. (Cheers.) *We have been engaged in what, perhaps, to a satirist may seem the somewhat unprofitable task of drawing lines upon maps*

where no human foot has ever trod. We have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, but we have only been hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where those mountains and rivers and lakes were (emphasis added) (Gascoyne-Cecil, 1890).

In this speech is the Prime Minister clearly sees Africa as part of the future of the British Empire, and justifies the colonization and carving up of the continent, on the grounds that it would avoid wars between other European nations vying for its resources. This European colonisation was clearly racist in its mandate, as he made no mention of the peoples residing within Africa, clearly negating them as human, and seemed to think it somewhat amusing that the political boundaries were being marked out without knowing where they were. Furthermore, clearly he did not have any care or understanding of the negative impact that colonialism would have in these newly carved out states.

Had he have had any foresight or care, could he have imagined the end of colonization – and the de-colonial period - as the ‘winds of change’ swept through the continent in the 1950s and 1960s? What would this British Prime Minister have made of postcolonial Africa with its violent civil wars, ethnic genocides and religious conflicts, persistent military coups, massive political corruption, ongoing poverty and underdevelopment? There is no doubt that such ‘men’ would have blamed the ‘locals’ (the indigenous political elite) for not implementing independence properly, for not allowing the logic of capitalism to thrive, and thus for not showing good leadership. Ironically, the ‘locals’ have maintained that the blame for Africa’s woes lies squarely on the shoulders of men like this - the colonizers.

However, how useful is it to keep blaming the colonizers for the many contemporary problems experienced across the African continent? And how useful is it to continue blaming fragile or failed states for their condition? These contemporary problems are of concern to us all, and they can be seen most profoundly by the movement of people, through trade and other relations, but importantly through those forced to flee their homes due to civil wars and human insecurity, thus becoming refugees or internally displaced peoples. Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea have remained among the top 10 source countries for refugees since 2010 (UNHCR, 2014). Images of overloaded boats heading north from the continent, hoping to reach the southern tips of Europe have become common-place. Sadly, the reports of many of these attempts being made in unseaworthy boats,

commissioned by ruthless people smugglers, trading on human misery and resulting in hundreds of deaths at sea, are also commonplace (Loudon, 2015). Getting 'Out of Africa' is now a survival strategy for thousands of individuals otherwise trapped in a cycle of civil wars and poverty. This is not an issue caused by or affecting one state only, and cannot be solely blamed on former colonial rulers, or current leaders.

When the independent African states began to 'fall apart', firstly from their colonial heritage, secondly through the mismanagement and misrule of corrupt or simply bad leaders, thirdly constrained by the politics of the Cold War, fourthly restricted by their physical environments and / or economies and trading relationships (including many landlocked countries with no natural resources), fifthly suffering under the burdens of the foreign debt crisis - which then sixthly led to the disasters of the economic structural adjustment programs imposed by the International financial institutions: it is curious that 'colonialism' the first on this long list of contributing factors, is solely blamed as the 'logical cause' of these African woes, and thus remains a convenient scapegoat for all of postcolonial Africa's problems – and thus obfuscating other causes more directly linked to the postcolonial state. That is, when the postcolonial African state emerged, and through postcolonial theories, challenges were made to western discourses of Africa's past, present and future (Said, 1978), it was obvious that colonization was the culprit. Yet, more than half a century later we must consider that Africa is no longer beholden to the colonial state, and hasn't been for a long time, and that simply blaming the colonizers for all of the problems facing Africa today, no longer has that much traction in International Relations theory (Engel and Olsen, 2005; Murithi, 2014). The problems facing Africa are continental-wide issues and require solutions of similar magnitude. These problems require the multi-disciplinary attention of 'Africanists', both within and beyond the African continent. Despite the firestorm of critique of the African Union (AU) in providing 'African solutions to African problems' (Moller, 2009), interconnectivity amongst *all* African states particularly requires a resolute and contemplative presence of the AU, in facilitating problem solving processes across the continent (Abass and Mystris, 2014).

International Interventions and Civil Wars in Africa

Since the end of colonization, there have been countless 'international interventions' into African crises, either in the name of humanitarianism, international security, or even because of neo-colonial tendencies that hinge upon former and on-going trade and other related

connections. Yet, many of the problems across Africa's 55 (again, if including Western Sahara) countries remain.

The first few decades of independence showed fewer success stories, with the development trajectory of most African countries marred by the debt crisis and structural adjustment programs of the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, the number and intensity of civil wars only increased, in part due to the implications and politics of the end of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War left African states vulnerable to global market forces, and African dictators susceptible to decline (Russell, 1999). The aid and financial support propping up African 'dictatorships' and authoritarian regimes and states, aimed directly at supporting the geopolitical agendas of either the USSR and/or the USA, was stopped. There was no need to continue supporting these countries with direct or indirect aid, because the threat of communism was clearly over, leaving the liberal international capitalist system in charge of Africa's fate. The only beneficiaries were those who could capitalize on the massive amounts of redundant small arms and weapons from the former Soviet states, ready to be sold to any African governments or rebel groups - anyone with the cash or diamonds to pay for them.

It was not until the 1998 Al Qaeda-linked terrorist attacks on the American embassies in both Kenya and Tanzania, that the international community realized that what happens in Africa can affect the rest of the world, and that more attention and understanding was required. International interventions in Africa now had a clear global security agenda (Rotberg, 2002), but still required a humanitarian goal. However, what this resulted in was the reinforcement of a negative image of Africa - a place to be pessimistic about - from the 'bread basket' to the 'basket case'. Ironically, it was Robert Kaplan in his now infamous 1994 article *The Coming Anarchy* who argued that - "we ignore this dying region at our own risk" (Kaplan, 1994)!

Afro-Pessimism and Afro-Optimism

For too long an Afro-Pessimism perspective had thus dominated the study and analysis of Africa. Indeed Gavin Kitching infamously "Gave up African Studies" at the 2000 Annual Conference of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, held in Adelaide, because he was too 'depressed' and disappointed by the post-colonial liberation leaders, the same ones he had supported in their battles for independence, his faith in them had been misplaced, and they had ruined their countries through corruption and cronyism. His subsequent article (Kitching, 2000), first published in the pages of *ARAS* by then editor

Cherry Gertzel, sparked an international debate on the merits of continuing with African studies (Epprecht, 2003; Postel, 2003), gained him some notoriety, and made it Gertzel's mantra (that she shared with all of her students) to not give up on African Studies.

Nonetheless, it is the Afro-Optimistic perspective of Australian scholars such as the late Cherry Gertzel (see Obituary in this issue) and the late Anthony Low (AFSAAP, 2015), that should be remembered and followed, because, at the turn of the new millennium we have seen Africa trying to emerge out of its never ending crises and long bloody civil wars (Rotberg, 2013), and more positive and hopeful images of the continent have been described and portrayed. Perhaps, it is not too late for Kitching to re-join AFSAAP 15 years on?

The establishment and formation of the African Union (AU) has been central to this 'African Rising' discourse. African states now have the ability, if not the political willingness to 'intervene' in other states when required, to demand a level of security across the continent within and between countries (Makinda, Okumu and Mickler, 2015). There is still a role for the international community to continue to respond to Africa's on-going challenges. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were once heralded as the key to Africa's future (see for example Easterly, 2007; Andrews, Khalema, and Assié-Lumumba, 2015), however, it is now timely to ask, has anything really changed for the better? To answer this question, as Severino and Ray (2011) have pointed out, we need to stop examining "yesterday's Africa" and stop focusing on the usual 'African crises', and instead have a look at 'Africa today' and focus on the 'transformations' that have been witnessed across the continent. Among the growth in economies, urban populations, and youth, there has been an increase in the number of middle-class people, albeit spread unevenly across the continent, and this will have massive implications for African development into the future (see Binns, Dixon and Nel, 2012).

The widespread adoption of modern information technologies (including phone banking, among other technologies) has enabled business and trade, and even social movements to flourish (Okumu and Makinda, 2013). For example the massive protests against authoritarian regimes witnessed across the North African states of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, were popularly labelled 'twitter revolutions'. Mobile phone communications and social media enabled people to unite in a show of 'people power' (Barrons, 2012). The Marquis of Salisbury would surely have been intimidated by this ability to *unite*, when *divide and rule* had been such a success in the past (irony intended)!

Globalisation and communications has thus enabled Africans to impose themselves and make their mark upon the planet as a whole (Brown and Harman, 2013). Furthermore, the fact that African nations make up about one-quarter of the voting bloc in the United Nations, and near one third of the Commonwealth members, means that their voices will be heard in international debates and relations.

We must however, concede that the optimism inspired by the 'Africa rising' thesis is marred by the continuation of civil wars and conflicts in some countries, such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and north eastern Nigeria. African states still dominate the top 20 listed countries in the Failed and Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace, 2015). The 2014 Ebola Crisis across West Africa has also tragically demonstrated that some African states have a long way to go to achieve adequate and sustainable development, and that there is no simple recovery from the violence of the past.

Solutions to these problems do require international understanding, of their causes and consequences. Thus until we can adequately 'define Africa' with respect to decoloniality, – the discourse of 'African solutions to African problems', will remain one of the biggest excuses for international relations' theorists to continue ignoring this region, perhaps at the expense of international peace and security. A call to take up African Studies has thus been made, in honour of the memory of Cherry Gertzel.

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