

Life-writing, (De)Colonisation and the Dilemma of Pan-Africanist Vision: Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* and Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey*

David Ekanem Udoinwang, PhD

Abstract

*This paper interrogates the pan-Africanist ideals portrayed in the autobiographies of the leaders of national liberation movements during the (de)colonisation experience in Africa. Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey* (MO) and Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* (NYU) are two out of the bulk of nonfictional stories that flourished in the midst of the socio-political upheavals that marked the anti-colonial struggles. The prefigured united, strong and self-sustaining African superpower nation/states that sustained the momentum of colonial resistance across Africa gave rise to the generic tradition of political autobiographies that was widely practised during this period and even thereafter. The historical context of these narratives, weighed against the vision and aspirations of the leaders and supporters of the resistance movements, elicit humiliating reversals and disillusionment that ensued at the end of national liberation struggles. The thrust of this paper, which is based on postcolonialism as analytical tool, is to investigate the veracity of this narrative trope as a veritable intellectual tool for re-conceptualising the pan-Africanist vision that gingered the momentum of the national liberation struggles in Africa.*

Keywords: *Life-writing; Pan-Africanism; (De)Colonisation; African superpower; Post-independent despair*

David Ekanem Udoinwang, PhD

Department of English

Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria

davidudoinwang@aksu.edu.ng; davudoinwang@gmail.com

+234 (0) 8023723663

Introduction

Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* (NYU 1967) and Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey* (MO 1970) represent the flourishing generic trope of emotion-packed, despairing and moving non-fictional political narratives from across the colonised territories of Africa that re-enact the trajectory of national liberation struggles. In their typical allegorical sweeps, these texts vividly re-create the reckless onslaught of European colonial imperialism in Africa and the turbulence of colonial pains that marked those “tempestuous periods...of the anti-colonial struggle” (Omoriegbe 2018:5). The widespread involvement in self-narratives by the nationalist leaders and other revolutionary participants opened a fresh vista of storytelling tradition that became ennobled in the African cultural form. The resister-narrators found in the autobiographical platform a cogent intellectual weapon with which to voice out the agonies of colonial domination, the injustice of the exploitative and oppressive system, and the strategies by which the colonised responded to the colonial world-order in Africa.

The autobiographies gave the narrators ample occasion to retrieve the distorted identities that were imposed on the colonised and to reconstitute their cultural self-worth and historical heritage in the face of racial repudiation that marked out the people of African race in Africa and in the dispersals with latent incapacities. The chosen postcolonial texts, like every other postcolonial narrative, are construed to challenge colonial narratives about the reality of the colonised. The seminal work on postcolonial writing constructively detailed in Bill Ashcroft et. al's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), sets the critical template for analysing postcolonial textualisation. The postcolonial text is traditionally categorised as writings that are “diametrically opposed to colonial literature” (Boehmer 1995: 4). According to Tsaaor, “the postcolonial text, inevitably, imposes on itself the project of recuperating and reconstituting the social and cultural histories of the postcolony as part of the knowledge infrastructure with which to assert its energies and cultural self-presence (2010:6).

In the given context, Karl Weintraub and Georges Gusdorf describe the pre-occupation and utility of autobiography as a literary genre that serves not only as a medium of self-rendition but also as a form of

“construction of self through narrative” (Holden, *Missing in Action*, 2011:1). The stories of the 'life-and-times' of the narrators are intertwined with the actual experiences encountered in their quests for historical self-redemption and national liberation from colonial bondage. Therefore, to conceptualise the identity construction concerns of narratives of nationhood, Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (2001:8) assert that “the study of life narratives is not only wedded to actual and particular life-worlds, but turns into a laboratory of possibilities for human identity construction”. Thus, the narrators in the genre of nationalist autobiography used the autobiographical platform for the articulation of the vision of self-determination from European racism and colonial bondage. But the sore point of this narrative tradition is the dominance in plot style of three-legged thematic stand of 'despair-hope-and-reversals' that defines the movements for national liberation. The reversals at the end of the narrated struggles and what remains as irredeemable condition of conflict and fragmentation in the post-independence discourse has given rise to the thought of the Black race as still “the world's underdog” (Oyebola 1976:47), while it has no substantial intellectual reasons for remaining so.

The Tangled Footage of National Liberation Struggles

The key nationalist resisters adopted diverse strategies to oppose colonial system in Africa and, as narrated in their individual stories of this experience, they used every means imaginable and mustered the power of historical memory to re-construct Africa in its pre-colonial, traditional 'ideal' until the European incursion that distorted and destabilised the pre-colonial stability and order. The texts also render sobering accounts of how the nationalist leaders mobilised their population towards freeing their societies from the agony and reproach of colonial bondage. The liberation struggles narrated in the texts were all-encompassing, involving every means that could be found to advance the cause. The core value of the writings was all about writing back to the imperial centres that the narrators committed their energies. Tsaaio gives further insight to the situation:

In the vanguard of this resistance were artists and writers who also enlisted their voices and invested their literary and critical energies in the

decolonisation process. A constitutive part of the rhythms of political resistance against the imperial programme was cultural nationalism which witnessed the assertion and affirmation of African cultural traditions, mores and values. Many African writers committed themselves to the anti-colonial rite of writing back from the margins to the imperial centre (2013:56).

In the life-writings of the colonial resisters, such self-narrating, politically embellished stories foreground the historicity of Africa. They essentially interrogate colonial script and its widely advertised worldview about African reality. The narrators also used it as a strategy for re-conceptualising roadmaps towards the realisation of the anticipated self-governing and egalitarian African nationhood that would be free from all forms of colonial prejudices and racial indignities that the colonised were subjected to.

These authors illustrate their commitment to the collective quest for the uplift of Black humanity in the light of colonial realities. Matlou (2009:9) states that all the nationalistic efforts and zealotry at different levels of society during the liberation struggles were geared towards propagating, advancing and integrating African values in the cause of restoring the dignity of the Black humanity in the face of racial denigration and colonial servitude. In his words, “the Pan-African Movement, originating from the 19th century, is built on four pillars: a common historical heritage; common descent, identity and destiny; resistance to colonialism and racial discrimination; and determination to create a new Africa or African renaissance”. Echoing the same sensibility, Chinweizu (2010:37) asserts that the mandate of national liberation movements and the vision enunciated in the Pan-Africanist agenda by the nationalist patriots were aimed “to ameliorate the harsh conditions that had been imposed on the whole of Africa by its European conquerors, and to enable Africans and their global descendants to achieve their true civil and political rights.”

These flourishing autobiographical stories embodied the soul of pan-Africanism and a radical development of African continent. For the autobiographers, their stories were energised by the tempo of patriotic

feelings. The colonial system was restrictive and devastating to the societies that passed through it. The experience of this history has a prolonged effect on the psychic mould of Black personality. This infliction has continued to impinge on the present postcolonial Africa. Ayo Kehinde avers that the African writer, “plagued by the density and morbidity of societal ills”, is left with the option of exploring any strategy that “adequately presents the subject matter” (2003:6), especially with the reality of the prevalent postcolonial predicaments. Molvaer (1997) asserts, “writers hold a mirror up to their society. A society finds expression through its authors, and in this way it is the co-author of literary works...In its literature and art a society reveals its “soul”. (cited in Makokha 2011:8). The pan-Africanist vision for African renaissance embedded in the autobiographies of national liberation embodies the soul of Africa dreamt of during the national liberation struggle.

The unpleasant parable of African condition is that of continued failure to correct the wrongs done the victim societies since the attainment of independence. In an article on the historical statement of Chinua Achebe in *There Was a Country* (2012), using Nigeria as a typical case of a postcolonial, post-independence Africa's failure to deal with the backlog of the colonial weight, Achebe made a statement that has been analysed as follows:

Achebe crafts a poetically captivating 'eye-witness' account of his experience...diagnoses Nigeria's continued rancorous politics of fragmentation, instability and socio-economic backwardness to colonial legacy, recurrent circle of post-independence leadership failures, endemic corruption, and aggravated insensitivity of the political elite to the gravity of the gradual descent of the nation... in his quest for therapeutic self-repair, and underscores how the writer appropriates historical memory as powerful tool for national re-construction, while disrupting the apparent state of amnesia in Nigerian political leadership (Udoinwang, 'Abstract' 2014:1).

From the plot styles of some of these narratives, the repercussions of colonial domination have outlived independence. Antony Anghie (2004:1) rightly puts it that the Empires might have passed away by law but the haunting truth remains that “they have altered the world forever; their passing away is their least significant feature”. It is humiliating that non-African countries who passed through the same colonial route have made significant progress, but African states still lagged behind. A manifestation of any radical departure from the old colonial order is grossly lacking and the leadership elite seem to have lost contact with vision of the liberation struggles. Kwesi Praa (2009:13) affirms that “African post-colonial elite consistently failed to provide the sort of leadership which is needed to improve the quality of life of the teeming masses of African humanity”.

The autobiographies of national liberation struggles primarily configure the vision of African renaissance against the backdrop of the fragmentation that was brought about by colonial usurpers who introduced divide-and-rule and brought pre-colonial African societies on their knees of incapacitation and reproach. It is clearly interpolated in the *Igbo* proverb which Chinua Achebe in *There Was a Country* recaps: “a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body”. Achebe states further:

The rain that beat Africa began four to five hundred years ago, from the “discovery” of Africa by Europe, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the Berlin Conference of 1885. That controversial gathering of the world's leading European powers precipitated what we now call the Scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa's ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states (2012:1).

Nnamdi Azikiwe's and Oginga Odinga's autobiographies, in diverse ways, intertextualise colonial societies and the decolonisation experience with the opposition, conflicts and violence by which self-determination was negotiated and with the repercussions that have lingered till the post-independent, postcolonial present. The two authors give accounts of their lives as eye-witnesses, participants and as key role players in the national liberation movements. From their narrations we could explore the cleavages between the past and the present. The stories elicit exemplary lives of selflessness and courage, patriotism and

endurance in the face of oppression. Because of these life-modelling roles played, the stories depict the colonial world as an ambience of socio-political upheavals. Emenyonu has it that such stories reverberate “sentiments generally shared by the first generation of African writers”, that reveal “the travails and tremors of nation-building: to dramatise complex human experiences so that people and generations caught in similar circumstances, can make the right choices and decisions” (2015:1-2). But it remains most improbable whether such narrated zeal, patriotism, vision and selflessness could be traced to the present despairing manifestations of leadership cluelessness, self-glorification and outright roguery that have become the hallmark of present postcolonial, postmodern experience in African states.

In the plot style of this generic trope, the narrators use the privileges of their leading roles to guide their societies to an envisaged egalitarian world order. In their pan-Africanist solidarity and thinking, they render accounts of the individual and collective torments in the hands of the settler European immigrants in their societies to illustrate how the repercussions of colonial encounter had stifled any form of sustainable development in their societies. The narrators, while characteristically whipping up pan-Africanist ideal and their cultural and historical self-worth, often resort to reminding their audience of the glorious and dignifying past of African people before the intrusion of European settler immigrants, as part of their strategies for confidence-building. Mkandawire puts it succinctly as follows:

One task of ideas in both the enslavement and colonisation of Africa was to dehumanize the enslaved and the colonised by denying their history and denigrating their achievements and capacities. The colonialists' claims to universalism for their culture and values, and the demotion of other cultures to only particularistic and exotic significance, could not but provoke response and resistance. It is perhaps not surprising that some of the earliest intimations of pan-Africanism invariably included a vindication of the cultures and

histories of peoples of African origin
(2007:5-6).

This pan-Africanist sentiment or ideal was cultivated among the colonial subjects by the nationalists towards creating a sense of history and dignity in them. Such pan-Africanist consciousness was crucial for many reasons, obviously towards the programme of realising self-determination for the colonies. Ojo-Ade (1996:9) asserts, “Without Pan-Africanism, which was a reaction to Black colonial situation, our condition would no doubt have been worse than it had been”.

Azikiwe's *MO* and Odinga's *NYU* exude despairing episodes of risky moves against an overwhelmingly colonial power. The two quintessential nationalist autobiographers in their stories cast exemplary pictures of humaneness, empathy and justness; they pose symbolic illustrations of self-assertiveness and self-dignity, business acumen and such distinctive values as to demonstrate their potentials and capacities as representative and emblematic portraits of their collective humanity against the points of view of their common oppressors. Inez Reid states of the colonial ferment:

Instead of recognising Africa's place in and contributions to the history of humanity, Europeans and Americans commenced a period of character assassination by attempting to drum into the minds of the inhabitants of the world at large that Africa was indeed ... inhabited by savages with no history, customs or traditions of value. Marked “inferior product”, Negro American and Black African alike searched for a sense of identity (1968:23).

Boehmer affirms that dating back to “the nineteenth century, the expansion of European nation-states in the form of colonialism had spread far and wide rhetoric of cultural self-determination...which later activated anti-colonial opposition movements” (1995:104-105).

Nnamdi Azikiwe's autobiography reflects on his encounters as a colonial subject and as a Black man in the midst of White world, after giving the initial pictures of colonial West Africa, his growing up and memories of

his childhood. He then describes his epic journey to America in the quest for education and power with which to fight colonial domination in Africa and to demonstrate to the Black race that they (Africans) have the capacity to organise their affairs independently of their European 'masters'. He gives the picture of the colonial situation back home:

I discovered that, no matter if an African had worked for twenty years in a department, as soon as a newly appointed European assumed office whether he was experienced or not, he automatically became the boss of the African. This anomaly was a challenge to me; my soul rebelled against what I thought was an iniquity. I was so restive that it was difficult for me to fit into the pattern designed for African civil servants (*MO* 1970:42).

Like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Oginga Odinga, from his autobiography, had made decisions for higher education and 'book knowledge' as source of power to confront colonial system in his society. He had chosen to study Education at the Makerere University against his initial plans because he felt education was the most potent tool to arm his people with, in the task of colonial resistance and building viable nationhood in the face of the encroaching modernity. He casts his mind back to this experience to portray his life in the process of growth, political consciousness and transformation:

A large part of my life at Makerere was dominated by religion. I found solace in a frequent reading of the Bible... But over the years it dawned on me that I had listened to many preachers and they seemed, all of them, to preach one thing in common – the suppression of African customs... I formed strong prejudices against European priests who preached unity and love, yet lived aloof from the people to whom they preached ... We students were incensed at the British and French imperial records in Africa (*NYU*, 40-43).

Lindfors captures the situation aptly: “even a well-knit African community became divided after exposure to Western institutions such

as the church and school or else reveal how individuals suffered psychological distress because they had become men of two worlds who could not reconcile the African and Western elements of their personality' (Olaniyan and Quayson 2009: 25). This is part of the confusion that was birthed in the colonial crucible that the narrators try to account for while describing the roles they played to mediate the confusion and restore their captive societies.

The narrators' encounters portrayed in the stories coincide with the growth of the nation states from pre-colonial innocence through maturity or self-consciousness to self-realisation in the form of political participation and quest for self-actualisation. Bound by the vision of a new, dignifying and self-sustaining African super-state that would be a redeeming pride to the Black race and would command respect before other races of humanity, Azikiwe narrates how this determination for full liberation was pursued:

I agreed that the time had arrived for the intensification of the propaganda of African nationalism, with a view to crystallizing racial consciousness, yet I was of the opinion that the primary task was mental emancipation ... I thought that an intellectual revolution was more potent as a foundation for super-structure that must inevitably be built (*MO*, 139).

It is important to note in Azikiwe's autobiography, for instance, that the constant change in geographical settings and narrative landscape depicts the diversity of factors that informed the tempo of anti-colonial struggles in his own accounts. In the story Azikiwe weaves his own version of 'journey of education' across the geopolitical divides within Nigeria and other West African colonial territories like the Gold Coast, and later the United States of America and the exposure he had gained concerning the global reality in those turbulent moments of colonisation and racism with Civil Rights movements in America. The influence of Kwegyir Aggrey of the colonial Gold Coast and Marcus Aurelius Garvey, the West Indian Black philosopher and nationalist would exert significant impression on his personality and political worldview. The reverberating statements of these engaging personalities worked the magic of an uncommon awakening in the narrative hero of *My Odyssey*.

Azikiwe's story graphically illustrates the different facets of colonial structure that made the rising of the African competitors in commerce or in the public service a near impossibility no matter how endowed or educated the African was. His personal experience is captured to illuminate such difficulties in the colonial milieu. According to him:

The civil services of British West Africa were controlled then by European elite which eligibly closed the doors of opportunity for the employment of indigenous West African university graduates some of whom were engaged only under the most humiliating conditions of service and at parsimonious salaries on the basis of racial discrimination and segregation ... In other words, this attitude was an aspect of economic imperialism, whose policy was to create and restrict higher employment opportunities in the colonial territories exclusively for nationals of the colonising power (*MO*, 172).

In colonial East Africa the experience was not different. In Odinga's autobiography, the narrator recounts several scenes of his encounter with colonial policies that further fired his resolve to mobilise against the system. He begins by pointing at the repercussions of the 'divide and rule' policy of the colonisers. In his story the pre-colonial tribes of his society lived in unity without prejudice. He extensively narrates this aspect as a strategy to weigh the past against the fragmentation and White-induced impositions that had become the present reality. He tries to recapture the life then and now, and argues that White settlers have brought more harm than good to African societies. He recalls the pre-colonial order in the opening part of his story order:

We learned that different tribal backgrounds were no obstacle to our living together. Inevitably, at the beginning, there were incidents but out of them grew a feeling not of tribal differences, but of Kenyan identity; We learned to live with all the Kenya tribes – the Kikuyu, the Kamba, the Teita, the Meru, the Masai, the people from the Coast and the Kalenjin ... (*NYU*, 37).

Odinga further uses an encounter he had as a school teacher where an English veterinary officer had picked a quarrel with him for teaching pupils 'African History' which was unimaginable in the British colonisers' curriculum. One day the European inspector had overheard him teach in the class, and had called him to his office and begun to reel out what he perceived as Whites' opinion about the African. Says the Englishman to Odinga:

You are very intelligent, but you must understand that your brain is no better than the brain of my six year old son because you Africans have not developed anything.... you cannot think because you have not been brought up to do so ... Your people have not invented anything and it will take you three hundred years to reach the level of the Europeans (*NYU*, 58).

Odinga narrates how the experiences he passed through apparently prepared him for the main battle of colonial resistance until independence would be realised. To this end, Ibitokun asserts, "Desperate treatises which are unfounded and mythological have been rolled out since ages by the white race so as to force their alleged superiority complex down the throats of other races brandished as black and yellow, the black race being their major target of attack" (23).

Azikiwe recalls a similar situation in his story of how he became committed to the national liberation struggles. He recalls the moment of the decision taken in the past to dedicate his life for the struggle:

Having succeeded in realising my dreams for academic honours, because of my supreme determination, resoluteness and will power, in spite of man-made handicaps and other imponderables of human life, I, Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, hereby make this solemn vow, before God and man: First that henceforth, I shall dedicate my life to the emancipation of the continent from foreign rule (*MO*, 174-175).

'Zik of Africa', as he was fondly called then, uses his autobiography to narrate his participation in the national liberation struggles and to

ventilate his vision for an African Renaissance at the end of colonialism. The platform of his nationalism encompasses political podiums, public lectures and intellectual debates and arguments with which he interrogated imperialist narratives and devices. He expatiates on how he had used such propaganda and rhetorical scenes to penetrate the mind of Africans and indeed the world in an attempt to create a sense of common brotherhood and African solidarity among Gold Coasters, Nigerian and world audiences:

I argued that every person had a right to exist, as a member of society, without having to apologise simply because he is black, white or yellow; or because he is animist, or Christian or Muslim; or Ibo or Fanti or Mende or Arab. All Africans, I submitted, were equal, not only before the law, but before God and man ... In the light of contemporary history, I thought that the mind of the African was in a dormant state and needed re-awakening. Hence, I postulated the thesis that mental emancipation was necessary for the miss-educated African to be re-educated and be politically renascent (*MO*, 253-254).

In practical sense, 'Zik Group of Newspapers' as narrated in the story, remains a tool for the radicalisation and intensification of the anti-colonial political movements. The success of *Zik Group* remains a vivid demonstration of the capacity for economic self-reliance, social mobilisation, and ideological renaissance in African anti-colonial nationalism. The entry of such brand name as the *West African Pilot* into the colonial West African media scene, the narrator states, was purposed to bring a new forcefulness and vibrancy to bear on the struggle aimed at accelerating the pace of national liberation movement. *Zik* recalls the momentum of this media company:

I had christened the new daily paper *West African Pilot*, and chosen Dante Alighieri's immortal lines as its motto: 'show the light, and the people will find the way'. The duty of a pilot was to guide the ship entrusted to its care, and I thought that, at that stage in the development of my country, it was not the duty of any patriot to pontificate. It was incumbent on me to turn the searchlight of publicity, in the form of

narration or exposition or description or argumentation on the courses of action affecting my country directly or indirectly, leaving the people to decide for themselves what attitude to adopt and what action to take, under such guidance (*MO*, 290).

The two autobiographers show that there were always strong huddles to such vision of self-determination, political or economic self-determination through the incendiary hands of the colonial powers. In *NYU* Odinga tries to experiment with an economic footing for himself and his native compatriots: “I was convinced that to start the battle against white domination we had to assert our economic independence . . . We had enough of memoranda which addressed the 'D.O' as our father . . . It was time to show we could stand on our own feet in the modern world” (*NYU*, 96-97). The “Ramogi House” stood there as a demonstration that Africans had been doing business before European mercantilists came and that they could still have stood on their own but for the constraints imposed by the colonial system. The stories demonstrate the vision and expectations for a strong, self-reliant, virile and prosperous African continent, but for the seed of discord sown in those turbulent days by the forces of divide-and-rule.

Re-thinking the Post-independence Fragmentation

Then began a resurgence of home-made horror; the long-awaited 'Uhuru' (freedom, self-rule) beginning to sweep through the continent in a sloppy, sluggish descent that at the end birthed a dysfunctional African nationhood simply referred to as 'Majimbo' (ethnic fragmentation) in the local Kenyan lingo. It would ordinarily be expected that towards the end of the *uhuru* (freedom) movements or liberation struggles, the colonial dark clouds hovering over African sky would begin to clear and that the time was ripe for a new dawn and an emergence of the envisaged great and egalitarian continent of progressive and vision-driven, just and peaceful existence; a full recovery from colonial bondage envisioned by the front liners in the liberation struggles. But in the closing part of his liberation struggles, Azikiwe paints a dark picture of what became the struggles towards the end because of the injuries inflicted on the colonised societies by colonisation. Zik recalls enjoining staff members of the media group to

use the platform of journalism to reconnect the various sections of the country that had been so ethnically and politically fragmented, divided and disoriented due to indirect rule system. He addresses his staff thus:

We think it is about time we cried truce to disruptive and disintegrating methods; and it will be our purpose to throw the oil of peace upon our troubled political waters and gradually heal the wounds that have been unfortunately inflicted in the past (*MO*, 293-294).

Instead of the succeeding political leaders cultivating the spirit of unity, solidarity and common purpose that informed the momentum and zeal of the liberation struggles, the new indigenous elite tended to work at cross purposes and began to derail the vision of the struggles. The new elite fitted themselves into the shoes of the retreating colonial masters and began a new phase of oppressive and divisive politics. Maziki Thame affirms that: “Decolonisation...gave assurances that citizenship would be freedom given. In the main, however, the post colony created alienating experiences of citizenship determined by questions of who belonged to the nation, to whom does the nation belong and therefore, who gets rights and privileges within it” (2011:76). This is the sore point and reversal of the nationhood that was envisaged in a long struggle and tedious negotiations for freedom from the bondage of colonial imperialism.

The quest for the moment is the way back to the point of disconnect that has thrown the Black continent into the prevalent state of developmental crisis. This situation, which made Oyebola (cited above) to reason that Black man's contribution to human progress has remained negligible, should drive every conscious African to a deeper sense of meditation. Nwankwo avers:

The quiet agony of imperial humiliation left the new generation of African leaders and many new-bred post-colonial intellectuals who stepped into the master's shoes in a giddy Manichean desire to be like the master. It is there in the different preferences for all things foreign, from the character of infrastructural development to even the basic food the so-called educated Africans eat, from the most shameless malfeasance to the disgraceful gaps yawning between

African rich and the poor, from the hunt for alien paradigms and hermeneutics by African scholars to the choice of sometimes unnecessary exile. This is colonialism still at work (2008:1).

While pondering the wherewithal of the liberation struggles and the “flag” independence to African heritage, Chinweizu argues that African nations still remain overtly or surreptitiously appendages of Europe. Irked by the continued dependence of African states on the West for almost everything, and charging the intelligentsia to learn from the dreams of the founding fathers and rethink the developmental paradigm for modernised African nationhood, he asserts:

We are not culturally or mentally independent: we are ruled by their ideologies and religions; their music, ideas and images dominate our airwaves and minds.

Their cultural missionaries... instilling in every African the idea that anything African is inherently inferior, degraded and evil ... our languages, our Architecture, our literature, are becoming more and more Europeanised, our governance institutions and norms imitate the European models, yet, we lie to ourselves and say that we have become free from Europe (2010:7).

It may be difficult to re-invent the wheel, but why memories of African experience asserted in the historiographies of the founding nationalists have not been converted into utility for development remains a baffling conundrum. Mohamadou Diallo writes of the values of the historiographies emanating from the nationalists and states that “History concerns us human beings and it is likely that we will always need history, if only for the single reason that we will always remain attached to our past, while we are living in the present and looking forward to the future” (2007:156).

Ali Mazrui has made some thought-provoking input to this effect; he argues for copious appropriation of skills and values that are suitable to re-engineering African nations in the context of global technological reality, especially through the mechanism of Africa's technological economy to radically replace the present neo-imperial dependency. Mazrui maintains:

The African Renaissance requires three major

revolutions—a revolution in skill, a revolution in values and a revolution in gender-relations... The power of skills arises because, by the end of the twentieth century, international stratification and influence are based not on who owns what but on who knows what. In apartheid South Africa, a relatively few whites reduced a continent of five hundred million people to political impotence for nearly fifty years. The skills of whites kept blacks in subjugation for decades (2008:7).

Hi-Tech skill and well articulated knowledge-driven economy remain indispensable for the actualisation of the long-dreamt-of African supercontinent.

Conclusion

The historical contexts of the autobiographies of the nationalist leaders remain invaluable for reconstituting the experiences and the lessons of the African encounter with the Western world. This trope of historical narratives, which has almost gone extinct, forms the bedrock of African thought and struggles. These texts have long been neglected, forgotten or largely consigned to the archives, yet they remain invaluable for illuminating the vision of the nationalist activists and for propagating African thought in the originality of its ethos that could be useful for perpetuating African heritage and for correcting the mistakes of the past, as well as for re-conceptualising the vision of a 'new', strong and powerful African nationhood. Scholars committed to the uplift of African states from the present lowly esteem should turn critical focus to re-engage with this body of narratives for some refreshing lessons towards re-thinking African reality (Bangura 2012:16). As Mbodi puts it, concerning the ways of redeeming the Black image, “we are defeated in the world of competitions” (2006:7), and the need to re-conceptualise the past has long become urgent. There are lessons to be learnt from these life-writings concerning the present condition of African states. African states continue to wander from Europe-America to Asia for assistance, for technological dependency still standing as appendages to

outsiders. Critical scholarship must not continue to “turn a blind eye to the warts and welts . . . and choose to highlight the halcyon days instead” (Anyaku 2012:39), for the truth of the present reality embodied in these autobiographies has to be continually re-engaged for reasons of historical self-repair and for the construction of the long-visualised and long-overdue African superstructure.

The critical discipline should refocus this argument by re-thinking the historical resource material embedded in this body of writings. The African story remains the selfsame narratives of pain and anguish; it is still dominated by themes of disasters, stagnation, senseless violations, mutual brutality, ethnicity, genocides, and poor leadership vision. There is need for a revolutionary touch to the modus operandi of our policy thrust, otherwise meaningful progress would continue to elude African states and we would remain perpetual beggars in a knowledge-driven world. This projected greatness is achievable through quiet, dogged and well articulated pursuits of excellence that would take African states out of the present technological doldrums and humiliation. But the journey could firmly take off from the high expectations of the pan-Africanist ideals visualised in the zealous narratives of the revolutionary nationalism of the founding fathers.

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