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Toyin Falola

## Writing and teaching national history in Africa in an era of global history

Their ambiguities notwithstanding, nation-states<sup>1</sup> are still alive and they remain, for political leaders, the media and many analysts, the framework to understand political and economic realities. While the very notion of 'nation-state' may be controversial, even contested,<sup>2</sup> it remains the most common political mechanism to organize people into boundaries and governments, and history writing and teaching are partly formulated around it. For the powerful countries, the agenda of 'global history' is actually to retain their dominance, to build prestige around their location as the centers of the world, and to construct patriotism in such a way that their citizens see the advantages of birth and membership in a nation, such that migrants can be attacked and expelled when necessary. It is the weak nations that are being asked to adjust, to subordinate their national histories to the threatening agenda of a global world and a global history. While strong powers protect their economic and political interests and prevent poor and struggling migrants from entering their borders, weak nations are being accused of reactionary and chauvinistic tendencies, fundamentalism, and excessive traditionalism.<sup>3</sup> In this essay,

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1 Nationalism, nationality, ethnicity, and other ambiguous terms have complicated the definition of the 'nation state.' In the context of this essay, nation-state refers to a sovereign 'state' with a government presiding over a 'country' with boundaries recognized by other countries and international law. National history refers to studies on the 'nation state' and its component elements as in, for example, the history of South Africa, the history of the United States, or the history of Germany.

2 Phil White, 'The Future of the 'Nation State'', unpublished paper. Cited with permission. White advocates the abandonment of 'nation state' as a term on the basis of three reasons: 'First, its assumption that each of the world's sovereign governments includes peoples of only one ethnic group does not accord with the reality that ethnic mixes exist in nearly all of them. Second, if widely implemented the idea would surely exacerbate international animosities. Third, by creating an enormous number of new governments focused on ethnic concerns it would worsen the already critical difficulty of securing international cooperation to address a host of world problems.' He uses 'nation state' interchangeably with ethnicity and nationality, and calls for a nameless alternative, the 'creation of civic or political/territorial nationalities in which the government seeks to serve the interests of ALL people in its territory without regard to ethnicity.'

I would make a case for national histories, and close by recommending a syllabus as a guideline to those who want to keep a commitment to teaching them.

Global history is no more than a transitional narrative to globalization. Strong advocates of global history and globalization see the process of expanding capitalism, postmodernism, and post-industrialism as inevitable. Global civilization, it is argued, will tear down the nation-state, reordering the nature of social institutions, production and accumulation.<sup>4</sup> Almost without any apology, one scholar gives us this 'preface' to the new orientation of global history:

The 1990s is one of the great watershed decades in economic history. The postwar division of the world economy into the First, Second, and Third Worlds has ended. Not only has communism collapsed, but other ideologies of state-led development that were prevalent in the Third World for decades have fallen into disrepute. If the United States and the other industrial countries act with wisdom, they have a chance to consolidate a global capitalist world system, with profound benefits for both the rich and the poor countries.<sup>5</sup>

Global history may be triumphantly presented to weak nations as the end of national history, that is, the nation as the object of study. Global history, as a narrative of Western power and its expansion, provincializes history, turning the national history of one great power into the metanarrative of global history. National histories of Africa represent one of the powerful counters to the attempt to provincialize history. The very first task of writing and teaching national history in Africa is to understand the agenda of global history, the problems represented by the forces and pressures of globalization, and the wisdom to understand that when the United States and other industrial countries 'act with wisdom,' it is not going to benefit rich and poor countries alike. World history has never seen such an ideology—intellectual, economic or political—that benefits the rich and poor at the same time. African intellectuals are part of a 'globalized world,' as consumers of products and ideas. Their frameworks and universities benefit from national and global resources and ideas. The kind of connections we make, the preferences and

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3 To be sure, not all the teachers and texts of 'world history' preserve the Western narrative, an approach which treats global history as Western civilization 'plus' a few other places, with Africa dismissed in a few pages.

4 See, for instance, Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (New York: Harper Business, 1990); Jim Davis, 'Rethinking Globalization,' *Race and Class*, 40, 2/3, pp. 37-48; A. Sivanandan, 'Globalism and the Left,' *Race and Class*, 40, 2/3, 1998, pp. 5-19; and Jerry Harris, 'Globalization and the Technological Transformation of Capitalism,' *Race and Class*, 40, October 1998, pp. 21-35.

5 Jeffrey D. Sachs, 'Consolidating Capitalism,' *Foreign Affairs*, 98 (Spring), p. 50.

choices we establish between national and global history may compel us to answer some of the many questions posed to us by Arjun Appadurai regarding our activism and pedagogy.<sup>6</sup> In the quest to defend global history at the expense of the national, do we become agents of imperialism, the propagandists of capitalism? We cannot regard global history as an alternative to national history, only as a pressure. And as a pressure on national history, we have to understand the ideologies and agenda of global history and globalization in order to meaningfully pursue the interests and concerns of national history. In withstanding the pressure, the aim is not to reject theories, ideas, and epistemologies that may facilitate our understanding of African issues irrespective of where they come from.

Nationalism is not dead either. Indeed, so-called internationalism has not undermined the power of so-called nationalism or even fundamentalism. The agenda imposed by a superpower is no more important than the one demanded by weak nation-states in the international arena. Global history, if its motive is to create a center for the world, will only awaken nationalism that will make national history writing and research important to the so-called periphery. Africa had previously witnessed the attempt to impose a global (European-centered) history on its people, as part of the colonial project of imposing Western civilization on so-called primitive people. The 'colonial library' that emerged ultimately failed, not because its creators were no longer alive to keep it going but because African nationalism was powerful enough to create alternative histories. Indeed, nationalism and the defense of national history and its identity has given me this conclusion to present: the study of the nationalist movements as well as the writings by nationalist leaders, in their non-elitist forms, remain the essential (and one can argue, timeless) aspects of African history. Whether it is Jomo Kenyatta and his culturalist-oriented writings, or Amilcar Cabral and the socialist orientation, or Kwame Nkrumah the Pan-Africanist, or Nelson Mandela and the anti-apartheid intellectuals, or a crowd of North African nationalists drawing on Islam (e.g., Anwar Sadat of Egypt), all the issues they raised define what Africans will continue to live and struggle with in today's global era. Simply put, the core of the issues revolve around Africa's engagement with its indigenous past, with Western/Christian traditions, and with Arab/Islamic ones; in sum, with modernity.<sup>7</sup> Global history is ultimately linked to globalization; national

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6 Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,' in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1-21.

7 J. Ayo Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970: Documents On Modern Political Thought From Colonial Times to the Present* (London: Rex Collins, 1979); Molefi Kete Asante and Abu S. Abarry, eds., *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (Philadelphia:

history will respond by creating identities and nationalism to protect local interests and prevent the erasure of multiple (even different) voices.

If a valuable lesson is to be learned from the writings of these political pioneers, as well as intellectual leaders such as Wilmot Blyden, Anta Diop and K. O. Dike, it is that there is no need to apologize for writing about national history in a particular way or manner. The goal of national history, as these pioneers saw it, was not to produce works to be consumed by outsiders or to seek global acceptability, but to see the nation and its people as the 'context' of study, and to give agency to Africans who had been denied a history. Procedures and universalist rules of writings were not necessarily questioned or ignored, but they wanted to write and teach in a way that history was connected with the concerns of the nation. Indeed, they accepted the notion of difference: that African history could be different in many ways from other histories or from how historians in other places defined and wrote African history. The pioneers faced the problems of 'global history' and imperialism, just as we face them today. They wanted to create the 'nation,' but we also face today the crisis of the nation-state in a global world. Africans have to cope with the crisis of the state, the burden of inherited Western legacies, and the turmoil of globalization. We are not as far removed from the pioneers as we would like to think. Like the pioneers, we cannot relegate national history to the backwaters, and ask African students to know more about the United States or Europe than Africa. Some kinds of global history have a tendency to belittle African national histories, to undermine the significance of national identities, and even to pretend that other forms of identity within a nation constitute an obstacle to the spread of Western values. National history, when it becomes a mere appendage of global history defined in an imperialistic manner, becomes a tool to consolidate Western hegemony and imperialism.

History, like all forms of knowledge, is obviously not neutral. African historians are being asked to make hard choices, to balance the defense of Africa (and their countries) with those of global forces and history. If they defend Africa to an extreme, they become 'nativists' who lack a sense of proportion; if they extol global history to an extreme, they become 'xenophobic.'<sup>8</sup> Ideological options may be inevitable, but a starting point is to invest national history with its own dignity, and to deal with its contradictions without turning knowledge into an instrument of state repression.

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Temple University Press, 1996); and Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2001).

8 The criticisms of these attitude can be found in Thandika Mkandawire, 'Globalization and Africa's Unfinished Agenda,' *Macalaster International*, 7, pp. 71-107; and Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner, eds., *Articulating the Global and the Local* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1997).

## The past in the present

Before anyone can complain about my having to run to the past to seek answers to the issues of the present, let me quickly say that Africa is not new to this global experience, to the vigorous attempts to erase the experiences of so-called local identities, sweeping the dust of the ethnic under the carpet of the national, and the national itself under the table of the universal. What was the slave trade if not a global trade, with Africa as part of the triangle in an evil commerce? Africans were exchanged for goods, notably objects of leisure and violence. We have a major topic already defined for us. Global history cannot marginalize the place of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the African diaspora, which have to be studied on their own right and in comparisons with other diasporas, forced or voluntary. Compared to other diasporas and global migrations, for instance of Europeans to the New World, the trans-Atlantic slave trade still remains the least studied, not to mention our weak knowledge of the Indian diaspora to Africa, Caribbean, and Southeast Asia.

Globalization is not new. The slave trade is but one of many of its manifestations. And as the trans-Atlantic slave trade shows, globalization is not limited to the traffic in goods, but also in ideas. The idea of racism circulated more widely in the Western world, with Africans regarded and treated as the most inferior of all races. The ideas have taken firm root, and national history in the era of global history must confront it. Modern globalization tends to disguise the idea of race in the notion of cultural inferiority, marketing so-called universalist cultures and values as superior to indigenous ones. The World might have changed since the nineteenth century, but the perceptions of Africa remain.

'We believe that the Negro people as a race,' wrote Du Bois in 1897 as the first article of the racial creed that he proposed in *The Conservation of Races*, 'have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity which no other race can make.' This was a confident statement made against the background of racism in the late nineteenth century. But over a hundred years later, even if the tone and tenor have changed, Africans are being challenged to justify their humanity and existence. History cannot survive without responding to the challenge. Du Bois and others pioneered an approach which academic scholars popularized after the Second World War: nationalist historiographies. The idea then, one which should not be abandoned even now, is to interpret the achievements of the past. Without this approach, knowledge about the great kingdoms, the vibrant political institutions, and the enduring economies would never have been known. If the 'colonial library' wanted to suppress the knowledge about Zimbabwe, nationalist historiography rescued it.

Nationalist historiography links Africa's present to its past, the past existing in the memory of the present, as the present lays the foundation for the future. National history, in the conception of nationalist historiography, becomes a sort of 'political charter' linking history with the nation, the nation with nationalism. We cannot forget that the 'nationalist historians' were themselves the creation of nationalist movements. In defining themselves and their careers, national history was paramount: they would decolonize history and decolonize the minds of their students. If politicians were afraid of history, for fear that it could promote the politics of ethnicity, nationalist historians wanted to use history in the service of nationalism, according pride to their people, demonstrating their rich heritage, showing that they once had capable leaders who managed complex societies, and that their people had the skills and talents to create better postcolonial nations. While the nationalist historians were elite who lived in two worlds—the modernizing/Western and the indigenous/local—they were not always able to resolve the tensions of the culture divide. However, what they clearly understood was the need to build strong national histories, even if the components of change would be Western, as in the creation of schools, hospitals, factories, or even of their own jobs with the privileges enjoyed by colonial officers. In the words of Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi, one of the pioneers:

When foreign learning began to be grounded on oral culture, it became enriched, energized and creative. That was the secret of Ibadan's innovations not only in African Studies, History, Psychiatry, etc. but in the ethos of the whole university as an institution of higher education. It was also the secret of the literary success of such giants as Soyinka and Achebe, brought up on European literature but decided to be creative and tell Africa's story in their own way, even in the medium of English.<sup>9</sup>

This 'secret' should become open enough to guide the mission of national history in the age of global history: traditions, localism, communities, and ruralism. Indigenous knowledge should inform what we do against the background of external ideas and 'universal' methodologies and approaches. For example, even to those who regard nationalist historiography as elitist or obsolete, the stress on 'oral culture' remains valid.

The writing and research on national history reflects the conflicted minds of the intellectuals: should they stress aspects of globalization and

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9 Toyin Falola, ed., *Tradition and Change in Africa: The Essays of J. F. Ade Ajayi* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000), p. 401. On the works embodying the ideas of nationalist historiography, see also Toyin Falola, ed., *The Challenges of History and Leadership in Africa: The Essays of Bethwell Allan Ogot* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2002); and Toyin Falola, ed., *Africa in the Twentieth Century: The Adu Boahen Reader* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, forthcoming).

modernization? Should they defend the ethnic origins and the aspirations of their local constituencies? As elite, have they become removed from the reality on the ground, using the privileges of Western education to distance themselves from the masses? National history, like the nation itself, was in the process of formation. Colonially created countries are artificial, and history writing and teaching is trying to 'homogenize' disparate identities. National consciousness is in the process of formation, and the tensions are captured in various writings. Even then, the promotion of national consciousness, supported by nationalist historiography, has not stopped the rise of ethnic fundamentalism and struggles leading to wars in many countries. In the case of Nigeria, many defenders of the nation in the 1950s supported secession in the 1960s. And in spite of the commitment of many to the idea of Nigerian national history, none of the pioneers was able to write a definitive single-volume history of the country.

Whose history? And whose nation? Become two of the questions that have complicated nationalist historiographies as they address national history with an excessive focus on kings, queens, merchants and states. Both will continue to face us even today, as we factor into national history the forces of class, ethnicity and culture. As professors struggle for power within and outside the universities, they, like the politicians, give politics a primacy that may fragment the very nation they seek to protect. National and 'tribal' histories can become the handmaidens of politics for an elite in search of wealth and power. What nationalist history in Africa has carried too far is not the kind of nationalism that produced racism or ethnocentrism in the West. Indeed, one could argue that most African countries have yet to even generate consensus on national histories that could build the platform for patriotism or racism. It is also clear that they have yet to succeed in using history to create national pride. As my students at the University of Ife in Nigeria asked me: 'Why should we care about the Oyo empire if our future is bleak?' On the contrary, nationalist historiography is propelled by nationalism rather than the documentation and theorization of nationalism as an ideology. And when independence was attained, as the case of Nigeria shows, many scholars abandoned national history (and its advocacy) in preference for 'ethnic histories.' Many also drew from various perspectives of the day (modernization, dependency, and Marxism) to offer various devastating critiques of the state. The extreme critique of the nation, rather than its defense, became a passion. A critic is not the enemy of the nation or of national history, even if political dictators think otherwise.



## The imperatives of development

In the search for relevance, history writing and teaching are gradually being forced to demonstrate their 'practical-ness.' Without showing how it is connected to development, history becomes criticized as one of the most irrelevant disciplines in the humanities. Even students ask their teachers what they are supposed to do with the degrees and the relevance of the topics they teach them. Globalization and global history cannot but make the demand for relevance more aggressive, more salient. African countries are now being forced to deal with globalization, not necessarily on their own terms. Elements of imperialism are at work, without gun boat diplomacy or the use of Gatling and Maxim guns. The relations among states are more intense, the scope more broad. Market and popular cultures spread rapidly, threatening and displacing traditional, aristocratic and Islamic cultures.

As values spread, mainly from the West to Africa, in ways reminiscent of the colonial era, many people begin to talk of the end of the boundaries of nations. Globalization is in part about the interactions of nations and the changes that come with them.<sup>10</sup> History writing and teaching must pay attention to its impact on Africa, and confront its negative aspects just as cultural nationalists did in the first half of the twentieth century. If globalization intends to narrow the distance between nations, we are at a loss in understanding what roles Africa is allowed to take and how these are different from the exploitative colonial arrangement. No one is denying that Africa needs all the gains of modernity, but historians must measure the cost. For instance, what is the impact of migration and the brain drain on the overall development of the continent? Is African labor not being exploited? It is clear that the various uses to which labor has been put is not always positive to Africa's needs.<sup>11</sup>

Globalization, like imperialism, supports a development ideology. The orthodoxy which emerged from colonialism is that of 'free enterprise'; that of globalization is the same. The thread is exploitative capitalism. This is a subject for us. When Africa's contact deepened with the West during the colonial phase, so too did the economy become organized around exportable items. Globalization has enhanced communication flows, and information technologies have become so widespread that one can now use a cell phone from a remote village in Nigeria to speak with someone in New York. Physical boundaries are not disappearing, but the distances in space appear to shrink with the use of the telephone, fax and computers. In its public face, globaliza-

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10 See, for instance, K Griffin and K. Khan, *Globalization in the Developing World: An Essay on the International Dimension of Development in the Post-Cold War Era* (Geneva: UNRISD, 1992).

11 See, for instance, J. Mittleman, 'Rethinking the International Division of Labour in the Context of Globalisation' *Third World Quarterly*, 16, 2, 1995.

tion sells itself as capitalism; in its hidden face, it may be nothing more than imperialism. One of our goals should be to evaluate the impact of developmental ideologies on national history. Neoliberalism calls on African countries to see the 'market' as the center of economy, with one suggestion to privatize and transfer land from thousands of peasants to a handful of investors. Historians will be the first to show the failure of centralized state economies, of previous agendas of socialism and economic nationalism. But we also have data to expose the limitations of neoliberalism, the dangers of reducing peasants to economic agents with little political franchise. Capitalism wants to empower the market by expropriating the principal agents of production, and, at the same time, hopes that there will be peace and order in the land.

The ideology and orthodoxy of development will inevitably force us to pose serious questions on the impact of the West on Africa, similar to the inconclusive debates on the agency of colonialism in Africa. Just as the colonial officers regarded colonialism as the positive agency of change, advocates of globalization use similar words to paint a rosy picture for Africa if it embeds itself in a global world. How far more should it be embedded, having been incorporated into the world economy since the fifteenth century? To the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Africa should seek greater incorporation. The failed Structural Adjustment Programs are nothing but part of this incorporationist ideology, with the World Bank arguing that the end results will bring massive upliftment to the majority of the African population.<sup>12</sup> Many of the gains of a globalized world have been mentioned, in part to keep attracting Africa to it: greater flows of goods and ideas, an integrated financial world, and better trade. The World Trade Organization, in spite of many wide-scale demonstrations against it, continues to sell the idea of a unified world, even in the face of rising poverty in Africa.

Although not always in the Marxist tradition of the 1950s and 1960s, scholars of the radical persuasion see little but misery in globalization, as they argue that Africa will see woes, inequities, domination, marginalization, and underdevelopment.<sup>13</sup> Global history, presented in the image of Structural

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12 World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects and Developing Countries* (Washington DC: World Bank, 1996).

13 S. Zeltzer, 'Global Victory in Seattle: Workers, Students, Activists Defeat World Trade Organization,' *Revolutionary Democracy*, 6, 1, April 2000; J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, 'Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming' *Public Culture*, 12, 2, 2000; D. Ghai, *Structural Adjustment, Global Integration and Social Democracy* (Geneva: UNRISD Discussion Paper, 1992); J. Mittelman, 'The Globalization Challenge: Surviving at the Margins,' *Third World Quarterly*, 15, 3, 1994; A. Roy, 'Imperialist Globalization and Labor,' *Revolutionary Democracy*, 3, 2, September 1997. For more radical critique of globalization, see, among others, Claude Ake, 'The New World Order: A View from Africa,' in H. Hans-Henrick and G. Sørensen, eds., *Whose World Order: Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold*

Adjustment Programs, becomes in part a discussion of the expansion of economic liberalization and privatization, in ways similar to the expansion of the West in the late nineteenth century. The metaphors and imageries of Western expansion sound familiar: in the nineteenth century, it was against the background of a so-called Dark Continent; in the post-SAP era, of a repressive, backward continent. If the idea of 'progress' dominated discourse in the colonial era, the themes of post-SAP Africa revolve around democracy, good governance, human rights, and human dignity. To be sure, all these topics are important, but one of the tasks of national history is to deconstruct them, domesticating terminologies and applying them within specific contexts and historical milieu.

Neoliberalism is powerful, more so as it is being sponsored by external powerful forces in Africa in a way that is not just reshaping the economy but also intellectual ideologies. A number of practical issues also enter the academy to shape historical knowledge. As Non-Governmental Organizations grow in numbers and power to express opposition, so too have contemporary national histories grown to include topics on civil society. We are being forced to evaluate the role of Africa and its component states in a global system.

Africa lacks the power to curb the excesses of capitalism, and its so-called 'economic liberty' that may affect the continent in a less than-compassionate manner. Those who live by the market may die by the market. The responsibility of historians may be to explore the ways to prevent Africa from dying with the market as defined and imposed by globalization and imperialist domination. Many of our predecessors have devoted time and energy to seeking answers that we can continue to learn from and improve upon. The globalizing tendencies of colonialism generated dissent; so too is contemporary globalization creating its own critics all over the world.<sup>14</sup> While some see the global trends as novel and distinct, there are those who regard it as a phase that will soon pass.<sup>15</sup> Global history can capture the contradictions and dysfunctionality in the world system, talking about consensus and contests. The elements of fad and fashion in global history should not blind us into seeing the reality that faces Africa.

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War (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1995), pp. 19-42; and Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed, 1997).

14 See, for instance, P. Cerny, 'Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalisation,' *Government and Opposition*, 32, 2, 1997.

15 Compare and contrasts the works by D. Held, notably *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); D. Held and J. Hazel, *Dispelling the Myth of Globalization: The Case for Regionalism* (New York: Praeger, 1992); D. Held, A. McGrew, and D. Goldblatt, and J. Perraton, eds., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

## Specifics and suggestions<sup>16</sup>

Some have denied the possibility of national history in an era of globalization and global history. Some others think that writing about national history in the era of globalization should be characterized as a paradox. To acknowledge the existence of globalization, as some believe, is to grow beyond the boundaries and limitations of national history into a trans-national approach.<sup>17</sup> Nationalist frameworks are regarded as either weak or untenable in the face of 'transnational formation,' to use the phrase by Paul Gilroy.<sup>18</sup> My own response is to pose just one question: where will the African voice be located? We have seen how a number of so-called global histories erase African voices. National histories may not be able to escape from the context of globalization, as nations deal with the impact of received ideas. To cite some cultural studies as examples, David Coplan's study on South African music, Cole on concert party, and Savishinsky on reggae in West Africa<sup>19</sup> outline how ideas from other parts of the world travel to Africa to popularize musical genres and shape popular cultures. Even in the spread of ideas, we see globalization at work, but we also see local creativity, intelligent adaptations and great talents that all validate the power of national history.

I am aware that not all national histories can be clearly defined. Even if it could be defined, national history can generate a consensus only for a limited time in history, as in the case of Africa during the years of decolonization. Without an hegemonic elite in power, it is always difficult to construct a consensus. The lack of a consensus does not mean that there is no national history, only that it is a contested one. I am also aware that generalizations that

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16 I have, more or less, treated writing and teaching history as facing similar challenges, although I have made some comments about the attitudes of students and provide a long section on the syllabus. Another distinction that can be made is the evolving role or possibilities for history at an undergraduate survey level vs. at the graduate research level. My suggestions reflect ideas drawn from various continents, deriving from my own personal experience of growing up in Nigeria and now working in the United States.

17 For some current debates, see Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1990); Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) and Arif Dirlik, Vinay Bahl, and Peter Gran, eds., *History after The Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

18 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), ix.

19 David Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (London: Longman, 1985); Catherine M. Cole, *Ghana's Concert Party Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Neil J. Savishinsky, 'Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of Jamaican Socioreligious Movement Among the Youth of West Africa,' *African Studies Review*, 37, 3, 1994, pp. 19-50.

apply to all African countries may carry some risks, as countries do differ of course from one another. Nigeria and South Africa are not the same, even if they have to deal with a number of common problems such as the eradication of poverty and bridging the gap between the poor and the rich. Yoruba ethnicity and identity are not necessarily the same as those of the Zulu, and the consequences they produce may also differ. The differences underscore the importance of national history, providing historians with the opportunity to consider contexts and specific histories as they relate to various localities and countries.

The dangers of global history to Africa are clear to see. Implicit in the idea is that of a unified world, or what some call a uni-polar world. Global history has been presented as the rise of Western civilization, and now as the hegemony of the United States. Africa becomes the distant province in the construction of the center of a uni-polar world. National histories cannot see their nations and peoples as mere provincial elements and second-class citizens. Rather, Africa has to be the very center of history while others, in spite of their dominance, are put at the margins. When Europeans tried this in the colonial era, consigning Africa to the irrelevant margins of history, African nationalist historians put Africa at the center, exploring the power of resistance and nationalism. As we follow in the impressive footpaths of the pioneers, our own challenge is to use the challenges offered by economic development and political instability to combat the perils of global history. The current uni-polar world should be treated in the same way that nationalist politicians and historians treated the colonial world order: to be resisted for its imperialistic combativeness. Global history, in its orthodoxy of liberalization, may not be totally different from the totalitarian ideologies of colonialism. It is the very orthodoxy of liberalization that may produce insurgent scholars who see the need to defend the nation and its history.

We must not only insist on the insertion of African voices, but we must empower national history such that historians are able to contribute to the gargantuan project of nation building. I have indicated the relative timelessness of the writings of independence leaders such as Leopold Senghor, Amílcar Cabral, Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah and others, as well as those leaders involved in the non-aligned movement. Practical and intellectual efforts to find paths between capitalism and communism continue to have resonances with the current era in dealing with Africa's "triple heritage": indigenous, Arab/Muslim, European/Christian. These political and intellectual leaders saw in national history an agency of liberation, of decolonization: history became an 'ideology' to remake the nation.

While one sleeps, global economy and culture are at work. Not only do we have to analyze how globalization works, but also its outcome on states and societies in Africa. During the nineteenth century and for most of the colonial era, African scholars and educated elite wondered about the impact

of the European encounter on African cultures. Today, we have to address issues around culture and capitalism, the extent to which they impact national histories. The fear is that a unified culture will marginalize Africa, rather than empower it, turning its citizens into consumers of imported items. Imported goods and ideas will merge to give supremacy to capitalism and a political order defined largely in Western terms. African cultures that fail to succumb become condemned as obstacles in the way of constructing a grand narrative of global history.

We cannot escape the challenges posed by nation building. Responses to global history constitute part of this challenge, as well as the established interests in understanding sources of national division, ethnicity, political instability and other problems. Our predecessors wanted to use history to build pride because their peoples and institutions were condemned by Europeans. They deconstructed the colonial library. The present mission is to engage the postcolonial situations and empower the nations with the knowledge to transform them. Our predecessors wanted to demonstrate that they could overcome the limitations of the artificial nations created for them by colonial powers (they wrote on precolonial groups and nations to show relations and contacts), we have to show that we can work with and overcome the limitations imposed by globalization, as we use the understanding of the present to write about the past. Our predecessors, imbued with nationalism, sought an end to colonial domination, we have to extend their agenda into the task of completing the quest for autonomy, decolonization, and development. As our predecessors sought to empower national history, they did so with a recognition of the crucial role of continentalism; we have to continue with the goal in locating national history within regional and continental histories, seeking the means to forge collective development, regional unity, and the strengthening of Africa in world politics.

Either to benefit from the products and processes of globalization or to resist the fragmentation of their societies and cultures, national history will still be dominated by resistance. Peoples and organizations will pressure their countries and governments to do more for them, as they seek access to modern goods and travel abroad for opportunities. We have to understand resistance and violence as they shape contemporary realities and define the notions of power and democracy. The pressure for democracy may actually promote religious and ethnic fundamentalism, as political actors use religion and ethnicity to organize to gain power or to resist local and global powers. Human rights, freedom, and democracy will all be linked in resistance and violence. The activities of Non-Governmental Organizations continue to multiply and to affect new areas dealing with the environment, prison reforms, changes to land tenure systems, and demands for the rights of children and women. NGOs may be responding to global politics, but as they do, the pressure on the nations is greater than on external powers. Research and teaching

national history have to deal with the frontiers of resistance and violence, symbolized by the activities of NGOs, youth movements, para-military and ethnic organizations, and religious fundamentalism.

African intellectuals, as researchers and teachers, are not always objective actors in the analysis of national and global histories. Their colleagues elsewhere have been implicated in the rise of totalitarian regimes, fascism, genocide, apartheid, and Eurocentricism, to mention some obvious ones. A good number of Western intellectuals are part of the marketing of imperialism and capitalism, disguised as global history, to Africa. If globalization worships the market, African scholars may have to turn to the gods of nationalism and development to write on national history.

As scholars pursue research on national history, they are bound to confront other forms of pressure: local histories, especially where locality is also the basis of forming political units; and ethnic histories, significant in almost all plural societies. Universities are sometimes the creation of ethnic forces, with scholars championing the causes of particular ethnic groups, even using scholarship to promote ethnic interests in ways that may undermine the national. There are also the demands of regional histories, as each country is also part of a region that may seek to unite and benefit from greater interactions. And the pursuit of pan-African aspirations also have to be factored into the presentation of national history. What all these competing forces suggest is that national history is an ongoing dynamic construction with competing agendas and pressures. A unified structure is not always easy to accomplish, as the work of Benedict Anderson suggests.<sup>20</sup>

## Curriculum

As I said at the beginning, I want to provide a set of guidelines on how the suggestions above can be transferred to the classrooms. If I were to be pinned down to be more specific, to offer a sort of a 'syllabus' for classroom use, I would provide the following as a list. We have to keep decolonizing African historiography, to turn to indigenous creativity and ideas, to empower the marginalized voices, to shed light on the tremendous energy and success represented by popular cultures, market women, craft workers, and local cultivators, among others. Oral history should not be abandoned in the face of global history. Students and researchers must contribute to our understanding of a variety of topics: migration flows within Africa and nation-states; regional conflicts; ethnic and religious divisions; inter- and intra-national

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20 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983; revised ed., 1991).

relations within Africa; development and modernization; processes of democratization and participatory practices; neoliberal reforms; cultural transformations; market and economic networks; the Cold War and its aftermath; ecological history and sustainable development; and mass communication. All these topics can be framed as 'national history.' National history—rather than global history—can be the center of the curriculum, with the goal of understanding a country's experience within a regional and continental framework and with other courses to compare and contrast experiences in a global world. National history does not mean that African or regional histories are ignored, or that global experiences are abandoned. Neither should national history ignore broad historical concepts and theories to understand big issues and transnational ideas, lest it become merely descriptive. National history must understand global forces. When students are exposed to global history, the terms may be explicit: to increase their knowledge of global events and their implications on their countries and the continent; to foster global consciousness but without losing freedom and autonomy; and to understand relationships between and among peoples.<sup>21</sup>

In connecting national history to 'global history,' we have to study the relative power of each country (and the continent) in relation to other continents, in particular the degree of autonomy they enjoy with regard to political and economic decisions. The point about autonomy is important if one of the transformations caused by globalization is to marginalize weak states. Issues around economic development are still the primary concerns in Africa. Thus, we have to remain interested in national financial institutions and the extent to which pressures are mounted on them by multinational companies, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the impact of the spread of trans-national production and the use of African labor. International politics and national politics remain connected and important. We cannot fail to understand the role of global financial houses, the extent to which agencies of globalization (such as the WTO) also serve as the agencies of imperialism. New information tech-

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21 Space does not permit an elaboration of the various perspectives and texts on 'World History.' There are those who use World History as an academic tool to project Western dominance. A common example of the preservation of Western narrative are texts on Western Civilizations, with a few pages devoted to the conquest of Africa. See, for instance, Robin W. Winks, Crane Brinton, John B. Christopher and Robert Lee Wolfe, *A History of Western Civilizations, Vol. 1, Prehistory to 1715* (Prentice Hall, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., 1995); and *Vol. 2, 1614 to the Present* (Prentice Hall, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., 1995). Alternative ideas and approaches exist, with some focusing on themes and comparative ideas, drawing case studies from different parts of the world. On this approach, see, for instance, Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Zeigler, *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspectives on the Past* (McGraw Hill, 1999).



nologies stand to benefit Africa, and the potential to build archives, using resources drawn from various sources and countries, as well as the possibility to broaden knowledge and scholarship are all important. New technologies will assist us to access and present data in more creative ways, but Africa cannot just be on the receiving end of knowledge production. Ideas have to circulate in a global world, such that all countries can benefit. Historians must contribute to the study of wealth transfer. Goods and services now travel faster, thanks to improved communication and information networks. We should teach and research international flows of goods and services, not just to accumulate knowledge but to prepare the minds of students for greater understanding of international political economy. The various topics and issues connect national history to regional and continental histories, as well as to global history without losing focus, without pushing national history to an insignificant margin.

Still on specificity, and to address the concerns of those who demand chronologies while not ignoring themes, the topics above (as well as others) can be divided into four broad areas:

1. **Historical foundations** in the context of 'pre-colonial histories'; the various internal transformations; international networks such as the Atlantic complex; origins of underdevelopment, etc. The issues will enable us to consider various concepts to understand Africa and locate it in a global context. Steven Feierman has suggested some ways that Africa can be studied in ways different from the 'West.'<sup>22</sup>

2. **Colonialism** in the context of state/society relations; social relations and class formation; Western education, world religions and elite formation; exploitation and political economy; formation of ethnicities; social change and social stratification; formal politics; formal economy and gender relations; etc. Contrasts are to be provided with precolonial formations in order to question the motives of the colonizers regarding change, race, civilization, and the constitution of knowledge. One agenda is to see the values of old that are recoverable in the pursuit of nation building and identity. Old kingdoms cannot be recreated, but the values of kingship may be relevant to the understanding of contemporary cultures of participatory government, rule of law, and accountability. Colonial rule established the foundation of contemporary Africa: the origins of the boundaries of modern countries; the sources of ethnicity and wars; the origins of autocratic power; the source of economic de-

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22 Steven Feierman (1999): 'Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories.' In Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press), 182-216

pendence on external power and the creation of monocrop economies; the establishment of police and armies as instruments of coercion and state autocracy; and the creation of a civil service that is prone to corruption.

**3. *Decolonization and Nationalism:*** The emergence of the neocolonial state; modern state formation/structures of society; communal identities, ethnicity, and class formation; gender and generation. As the groundwork for the end of colonial rule was being laid, so too was that of inter-ethnic rivalries, contests over boundaries, neocolonial exploitation, and new forms of nationalism and identities that overwhelm the colonially created nation-states. Inheriting colonial territories became much easier than building on them; the sovereignty that came with independence is weak; the state itself is malleable. Decolonization was often achieved at the expense of cross-border ties, and the relationships between people forged on the basis of pan-Africanism gradually weakened. The dismantling of the colonial state presented national history with a host of new challenges: where is the nationalism to sustain the new nation? what nationalism does the new nation embody? who embodies the 'nationality' of the nation that has no 'father,' 'hero,' mobilizational ideology, or popular political party? how should we characterize the postcolonial state? who has the legitimacy and credibility to govern and what are the sources? which elite (Islamic, traditional, Western educated) should control power and who should be defined as 'national'? The renaming of the colonial state as postcolonial says very little in terms of development and stability.

#### **4. *The Postcolonial State and Society:***

a. State disintegration and collapse—the process whereby states can no longer provide services and security; how can similar situations be prevented elsewhere? Why are some states stable and others are not? Answers involve both the study of specific cases in detail, and comparative works of various countries (e.g., Sudan, Liberia, Congo vs Malawi, Ghana, Gambia). Trends, patterns and warning signs of problems even in stable countries need to be studied/monitored. For instance, what is the future of Algeria and Nigeria against the background of their past history and present politics? To what extent can the political model of South Africa ensure stability and economic justice? Ethnic groups keep consolidating their identities in many countries, but it is clear that each ethnic group cannot constitute a political entity with the sovereignty of a 'country.' Similarly, there are inter-ethnic rivalries that create their own problems, usually less studied. Historians have to keep understanding the relationship between ethnicity and nationality and to join in the debates on the creation of a workable political nationality. Can Africa create a 'civic identity' in place of the ethnic?

b. Statism and neo-patrimonialism, and how they affect the rule of law, accountability, autocracy, prebendalism and economic management. The nature of the patron-client system in a country is necessary to understand the behavior and activities of members of the political class and warlords. Ethnic conflicts and democracy, although contradictory, remain two ongoing phenomena. Statism has imposed two limits on the growth of the nation: the political system is constricted, as those in power use violence to curb opposition; and no mechanism is in place to placate political losers, or find avenues to incorporate them into power.

c. The crisis of the modern African state, in terms of the institutions of governance, leadership, popular cultures, and economic management. Why is the state, a project of development, either failed or not done well? Where citizens regard the state as 'irrelevant,' how do they organize access to schools, jobs, hospitals and other services? How can loyalty to a government be created? Citizens continue to seek the better management of state, especially as many lack jobs or opportunities for improvement. The resources available to sustain a system of political patronage continue to diminish, creating problems for those in power. If many countries are not free of external controls and are plagued by ethnic crises, to what extent are they 'sovereign' and 'independent'?

d. The crisis of economic production. Cases of economic stagnation are many, and rural areas and poor farmers have been devastated by failed policies and lack of development. Income inequality is a serious problem, and the gap between the rich and poor keeps widening. We have to sustain attention on economic history. As countries seek to maximize economic opportunities and develop technologies, governments and leading state officers may see a limited need for history. Indeed, some African governments see the teaching and writing of national history (or any history for that matter) as useless because they relate education strictly to jobs and development. History students, too, are caught in the trap, asking what their contributions to economic production are. Thus, as we expose the crises of economic production, we also have to create a role for national history in the production of knowledge and skills.

e. The rise of neoliberalism. We have to teach and research its various challenges to each country in particular and Africa in general. Students are bound to pose questions relating to its opportunities and threat. If degrees are supposed to be relevant according to some kind of market value, History students may seek the appreciation of their university diplomas along the narrow lines defined by neoliberalism. With the dominance of Western science and technology, popular culture and the market, young African students will continue to demand relevance. To what extent is capitalism working, and to

whose interest? By and large, capitalism has promoted the development of a parasitic cabal, closing the door to genuine investors who lack access to state power.

f. The African state and the international system: a history of foreign relations; analysis of specific issues such as the African states and the Cold War; pan-Africanism and the politics of African Unity; etc. As the world changes, and as the forces of globalization become stronger, Africa and its various countries are forced to adjust. But many cases of adjustments are not all that new—national history has had to deal before with the marginal position of African countries in the world economy and politics. Historians have to capture the relations between countries. Without disparaging knowledge from other lands, we can engage in global history ‘from below’, focussing on the suppressed history of resistance from sailors, slaves, market women, etc., and other forms of resistance that took place in the context of global traffic and therefore involved numerous cultural and political collaborations and borrowings. I cannot deny the possibilities of ‘global history from below.’<sup>23</sup>

g. The African state and international political economy. The role still assigned to Africa is to produce raw materials for Western countries, an economic structure created by colonialism. Competitive advantages based on technology and the production and dissemination of knowledge exclude Africa. Even the advantages derivable from agriculture continue to be weakened with Africa’s inability to control prices and quantities of supply, to stop Western countries from offering protection and subsidy to their farmers, and offering food and textiles cheaper than those obtained from Africa. Such products as rice and used clothes dumped on Africa can undermine local production.

h. The African state and the international system in the global era: post-containment and the rise of globalism; multilateralism, bilateralism; national security; conflict resolution; democratization; democracy and finance capital; democracy and development; the limits of democracy; etc. Globalization is about the imposition of power and hegemonic order on various countries, the integration of African countries into world economies and power in ways that weaken them. Historians have to seek the ways to present national history in ‘a world made up of fragments, of floating signs, of open texts, of flexible economies and ever moving meanings.’<sup>24</sup>

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23 See, for instance, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Beacon Press, 2000).

i. The marginality of African states in the global era. Marginality does not mean that nations are not drawn into a global world, only that they lack power as members and that integration does not bring wealth but poverty. What gains accrue to these countries, and how can they minimize the flow of wealth to developed nations? What does the spread of 'global cultures' mean to various religious and ethnic identities?

J. Migration and Diaspora as aspects of the impact of globalization. Do African migrants play any crucial role as intermediaries for various neoliberal schemes? This is certainly true for migrants such as Indians in the United States. Is there any relation between the challenges of African national histories and diaspora studies that has been dominated by non-African scholars?

k. New global themes in the twentieth-first century: internal and global economic exploitation; demography; the resilience of African societies against the background of chaotic economies and politics; creativity and popular culture, in spite of political and economic constraints; migration and identities; cultural alienation and cultural choices; class formation; gender relations; ethnicities; religious fundamentalism; environment and ecology; science and technology; pan epidemics; communication and information; regionalism and cross-border economy and politics; etc. Historians have to remain interested in social movements, religious and ethnic identities, resistance and nationalism, as these are the places to see how the people and their leaders respond to the challenges of development, power, initiatives for local autonomy, and responses to globalization and the messages from global history. The politics of survival (as a nation and people, and against state authoritarianism and the grip of global capitalism) will be the summary of teaching and writing about national history in Africa in the age of global history.

## Conclusion

National history should not be interpreted as the history of the political class and the state it manages. The nation-state remains a powerful political idea, leaving us with little choice other than to analyze the role of the state. Since we are aware of the divisions in society, national history has to include the discussions of various loyalties and identities within a nation, the means to forge inter-group relations, the understanding of conflicts, relationships between tiers of government, and the kinds of state that may work for Africa.

In conclusion, while I have demonstrated the need for national histories, they are not by any means the only alternative to pursue. Neither is national history the only counter to global history. As I have mentioned above, continental and local histories are equally as important. Tension remains within global history itself, as in the competing paradigm of so-called Western against so-called Islamic worlds. Irrespective of the approach, the principal thing to bear in mind is the survival of African history in an ever changing world.