

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Through the Eyes of the Lion: A Call to Relevance

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Never shy to quote African proverbs. Achebe writes in the first chapter of his novel *Things Fall Apart* that proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. Thus, in the seminal work *Home and Exile* Achebe resorts to an African proverb which in seventeen words encapsulates an ontologically and epistemologically significant message (2001: 73): ‘Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter.’ Significant, because the proverb - in the Achebean context of its use – not only points to the need for balance in the knowledge churned out by the academy, but also constitutes a clarion call to African writers, historians and academics to confront the challenges of the academy through African eyes. It is an appeal to African scholars and academics to not only seek relevance to the world stage of ontological and epistemological undertakings, but also to remain relevant to their African heritage.

Let us dwell a little more on the lion-hunter analogy. The lion and the hunter have different perspectives of the hunt; and the hunter, privileged to have the historian on his side, presents a version that suits him best and glorifies his efforts – but all at the expense of the lion. The story is about the hunter; the lion is but the backdrop – the Other. To counter the one-sided version of events, the lions must produce their own historian; that is to say, they must project their own version of the hunt, from their own perspective. The task faced by the lions, therefore, is threefold: to give a balanced picture of events, to enable the reader see the ‘other side,’ and to defend its integrity because the hunter is inclined to twist the facts to his advantage.

African academics need to occupy the centre rather than the periphery of studies relating to the African continent, ethos and experience. African views and knowledge should not be ‘otherised’ by the Western conceptions of knowledge. How else do we explain the oft-quoted argument, in the early 60’s, by Hugh Trevor-Roper, that Africa had no history before the coming of the colonialist? In an article entitled ‘The Rise of Christian Europe’ (1963: 871) the Oxford University history professor wrote: ‘Africa had not history prior to European exploration and colonisation, that there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness.’ Going by Trevor-Roper’s argument, history is only that which is written, and since writing was only introduced to Africa by the colonialists, there was no African history before then. He conveniently ignores the fact that every human society started off with oral traditions before writing was invented and, therefore, every society used oral means to promulgate its history and customs.

The net effect of the Trevor-Roper viewpoint is an example of what Ngugi calls the ‘dis-

membering' of Africa, which terms as an 'act of absolute social engineering' (Ngugi 2009: 2). Part of the process of dis-membering the African continent, Ngugi argues, involved dividing the personhood of Africa into two parts: the continent and the diaspora, the latter precipitated by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Further, the continent itself was dis-membered through the partitioning that took place at the 1884 Berlin Conference where Africa was literally divided into Anglophone, Lusophone, Francophone, German, Belgian and Spanish enclaves. The dis-membering process did not stop there: in occupying the territories they gave to themselves, the European powers humiliated the African people, trampled upon their history and culture, and relegating them to the periphery. The academy was dominated by Western thought and the work of the early anthropologists did not help the African cause.

Thus, unless African scholars assert themselves in the world of academia by taking African perspectives on their research, the knowledge they discuss and share will continue to be dominated by western epistemological paradigms. This is not a call to African scholars to withdraw into a shell of narrow viewpoints about academic issues or research. Rather it is a call for them to be relevant not only to the world academy, but also to their own societies and cultures. They have to come to the academy with African perspectives. This means, in addition, that African universities must, to the extent possible, design programmes and courses that contribute to the re-membering of African culture and knowledge.

The articles in this issue of the Journal of Law and Social Sciences, which were initially presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Linguistic Association of SADC Universities (LASU) hosted by the Department of Literature and Languages of the University of Zambia from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019, to a large extent reflect the progress Africans have made in terms of placing African themes and areas of research front and centre of their work. The articles, dealing with linguistic and literary issues, reflect a broad range of topics drawn from the African context. Some of the topics would not be of interest to non-Africans; at least, non-Africans might not see the need to write about them, let alone research on them.

The articles in this issue of the Journal of Law and Social Sciences fit into two broad categories: literature and language. A central ingredient of each of the two categories is African culture or African perspectives on matters of literature and language. Literature is a form of cultural expression and cannot be expressed without language. As Nkosi argues, 'the relationship between language and national cultures cannot be too strongly emphasised.' The articles in this issue largely reflect the cultures of the contributors especially because they write about topics that are relevant to their nations and cannot, therefore, be detached from their national cultures.

The cultural factor is very evident in articles such as Nancy Kula's 'Developing an Areal View of Intonation in Eastern Bantu' which focuses on Bemba, a Zambian language, or the article 'Affrication of Voiced Labials (/b,v/) in Changana' by Mozambican

academics Armino Ngunga and Celia Adriano Cossa. Similarly, in their article ‘Exploring New Scientific Methods in the Teaching and Learning of Sesotho’ Mosisili Sebotsa and Malefane Victor Koele discuss issues which can only be best presented by individuals familiar with the Sotho culture and education system. The same can be said of Syned Mthathiwa’s ‘Allusiveness, Language and Imagery in Francis Moto’s *Gazing at the Setting Sun*’ which analyses a collection of poems within the cultural and historical context of Malawi.

The articles in this issue of the Journal of Law and Social Sciences will go a long way in contributing to the re-membering of Africa in terms of what the continent brings to the academic and field of postcolonial studies. Only African scholars could have written the articles the way they are written because of their peculiar knowledge of the culture and experiences of the continent. These are some of the historians that the lions have produced.

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