

# Theoretical Charters of African Intellectual Discourse

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## **Abstract**

Human beings have a dignity whose essence should be the concern of all scholarship. This dignity should be central in the formulation of goals of intellectual projects of research and analytical discourse. The essence of humanity deserves respect from all laws, paradigmatic formulations and discourses and the bridging of the gaps between theory and practice. Louis Althusser says that each individual must carry within himself or herself the whole human essence, even if only in principle. The Althusserian conception of essence implies an idealization of human essence not just in scholarship but also in leadership. Althusser, however, does not seem to grasp the totality of human existence in triad terms of the spirit, soul and body that seems to pervade the African universe of existence. In my view, essence is not separable from ideology that defines it. For Marx, essence must not be understood as an abstraction inherent in each single individual. Marx, was concerned more with the fate of the collective since individuals are personifications of economic categories; embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. All social discourse and the parameters it defines for political and social leadership should have a bearing on the interpretation and pursuit of projects that claim to address societal concerns with the essences of human life. This ought to be at the centre of the project of the social reconstruction of our societies in Africa. This reconstruction of society based on the essence of man as a universal attribute, must reflect the role of ideology in Africa in this era of globalization since ideology is a feature of all social relations. A just and moral scholarship prescribes a moral order for leadership that gives society its basic social structure and ethical referents in an organizational framework that facilitates expeditious management of its social institutions. Such scholarship and the leadership it defines and legitimates must be a feature defined by ideology and culture. Ideology is a system of mass representations which presents the forms in which people live their lives. It represents a real and lived relation to the world.

Every community has the ideological logic of its social institutionalization. That is to say that its social institutions must be loaded or impregnated with ideological imperatives. The state is closely linked to the politics and ideology of society as an organizational instrument of education as a basic right to information and knowledge and the leadership of its academy not just its political leadership. It is a political creation of society to serve its various ends. It is created to undertake certain functions, serve specific interests, and meet material and political needs of the community that has produced it. The leaders who are in control of the state live in its organizational ideology. This ideology constitutes the

relation between the political and social categories in control of the state and their conditions of existence. The state, therefore, occupies a centre stage symbolically and materially over the society whose interests, needs and aspirations it has been constructed to meet. But the demands of the ideology guiding research and the production of knowledge goes beyond the state. As an organizational apparatus, the state is limited in its ability to organize pan African frameworks of discourse. This demands efforts that go beyond the state that appears to merely establish an organizational hegemony within the boundaries of its sovereignty. That does not mean that there are no social struggles against assaults of the ruling ideology which seek to stifle intellectual discourse at state levels. Politics as a form of social struggle is an absolute pre-condition for the development of popular struggles. There is need for Pan African organizations in Africa to insist on the production of a specific type of knowledge and ideological consciousness that has a historical purpose of transforming Africa from its backwardness. There is need for African scholars in these organizations to engage themselves not just in research with a view to increasing output of empirical data but also engage in the theorization over that data and formulate paradigmatic alternatives that will guide ideological production on the continent. This paper seeks to demonstrate the importance of theoretical production in the formulation by engaging some of the existing theories that have been formulated from outside Africa. It will demonstrate the dangers of externally driven paradigmatic hegemony in social discourse in the African academy. A number of operational concepts and notions require to be redefined in new paradigmatic terms in a manner that teases out the nature of African socio-economic processes and their inherent dynamisms from their current foggy theoretical currents.

In the current difficult conditions of theoretical and ideological production in Africa, this paper seeks to undertake a thorough going critique of post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonial theory, new historicism, post-emotionalism, moral economy and other related theoretical protocols that have found their various niches in African discourse. Foucault states that language plays an important function in representation in the sense of its nature and its virtues as discourse. For him, discourse is merely representation; it is represented by verbal signs. Thus, language is a system of signs that enables humans to signalize representation. Along these lines Derrida picks up the Foucauldian concept of discourse and states that discourse as a construction of text is reflective of social reality. He states that there is nothing beyond the text and insists on textualized access to history. In Althusserian terms, language is a system of defining differences following his philosophical and methodological collapsing of the Marxian base (substructure) into the superstructure. According to Althusser, there are four major autonomous spheres of production; the economic, political, ideological and theoretical. Culture is a set of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society as a social group. It covers the arts, humanities, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs that require to be reflected in our scholarship on the continent that has badly been ravaged by theoretical banditry starting with the so-called Hamitic Myth as this paper will demonstrate. The folly of the Hamitic Myth associated with the Cushites in Africa is that some scholars wrongly associate with the so-called Cushites, hitherto termed as Hamites, any organized work in East and Central Africa as if the leadership of other communities was absolutely sterile. It creates an ethno-centricism that mystifies cultural differentials. It has resulted into writing of

history through mythological universalization that trivializes their humanity (**Ubuntu**). Instead of crediting the indigenous communities with discovery, creativity, innovation and propensity for societal development, any evidence of complex social and economic system is attributed to the influence and historical exploits of the mythical migrants called 'Hamites' (Cushitic people) from the North. Political organization is a function of organized social power. Social power must be conceived to be either a cause or consequence of organized social activities not just in the political and cultural spheres but also in the sphere of research and knowledge production in the African academy. This paper makes a call for an in-depth theoretical engagement and the carrying out of philosophical analysis so as to attempt a meaningful historicization of all social questions by reconstructing the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial social networks and political institutions upon which the legitimacy of scholarship and leadership should rest.

Michel Foucault states that for many years historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods of history. They have done so as if beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they are trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances. They have been looking for the irreversible processes, the constant re-adjustments and the underlying tendencies that gather force and are then reversed after centuries of continuity. They have a knack for movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events. In this paper we demonstrate the dangers of his approach in Africa that produces a body history apologetic to imperialism based on a certain unity of critique without a unity of theory. Serious intellectual projects have no time for that kind of subterfuge that Foucauldian post-structuralism, post-colonial theory and post-modernism has inspired in sections of the African academy as this paper will demonstrate despite Foucault's call for a new form of history that develops its own theory. A history that goes beyond distinguishing various sedimentary strata, linear successions and formulates new concepts to enable us to conceive of discontinuity in form of the threshold, rupture, break, mutation and transformation. A history that will not only establish of continuities, formation of single patterns and demonstrate how they are preserved, but also demonstrate the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances and repetitions. This Foucauldian demand for a new history that develops its own theory is loaded with an ideological baggage that seeks to conceal the ills of imperialism.