

Re-introducing the “ People Without History “: African Historiographies

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Introduction

It has become fashionable to think of continents, communities, identities, belonging, tradition, heritage and home as imagined, invented or created entities. The idea of Africa has been tantalizing to the West since Homer imagined the flight of the Greek gods from mount Olympus to Africa, there to feast with the blemishless Ethiopians. In the fifteenth century a Papal Bull imagined Africa as a *terra nullius* and proceeded to divide it between Christian Spain and Portugal. The English poet Jonathan Swift imagined a yon Afrique where geographers were wont to fill the blank spaces with elephants for want of towns. The partition of Africa at the Berlin West Africa Conference in 1884 – 1885 carved out Africa to European powers ostensibly because the continent had an ignoble history of slave trade and slavery which could only be stamped out through European colonization. Thus the former citizens and subjects of African kingdoms and of stateless communities were dubbed as the peoples without history. Instead it was asserted that there was only the history of Europeans in Africa. European authorship from Hegel down to H. R. Trevor- Roper asserted that Africa constituted a blank darkness, and “ darkness was no suitable subject for history” [Trevor – Roper 1966:9] The colonial period was a time of distortion through power: “power was used to force Africans into distorting identities; power relations distorted colonial social science, rendering it incapable of doing more than reflecting colonial constructions “. [Ranger 1996: 273] One of these distortions was that of Africans as peoples without history.

The other Africa, the actually existing Africa of the Africans, did not participate in this discourse. History being a record of man’s past, and philosophy of history being second order reflections on the thoughts of historians about the historical process, engaged the oral historian Mamadou Kouyate of the empire of Mali as much as it did the Moslem scholar of the same empire at the same time, Ibn Khaldun. This tradition of the production and engagement with the memory of their own histories continued through the ages into the twentieth century, the age of Africa’s peasant intellectuals. [Feierman 1990] By tradition is meant here “ the socially consolidated versions of the past, and particularly accounts of origins of institutions, which served to define communities and underwrite authority in them. Memory refers to those traces of past experience present in the consciousness of every human being, which provided the essential but problematic basis for the sense of personal identity, as well as the constraining or enabling basis for future action. Tradition was social and hierarchical, memory was individual and open- access”. [Peel 1998: 77]

Overview

Precolonial historiographies of Africa consisted of oral histories as well as written accounts. The oral histories included myths, legends, epic, poetry, parable as well as narrative. They varied from dynastic accounts and kinglists that were a record of the royal courts and the state elites to the clan histories of the stateless societies. Because of their selective valorization and silences they constituted historiographies in themselves. These oral renditions were the resources that the first Christian African elites drew on to write their histories in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: Apolo Kagwa in Buganda, John Nyakatura and Kabalega Winyi in Bunyoro, Samuel Johnson among the Yoruba, Akiga Sai among the Tiv and J.Egbarehva in Benin. Similarly among the stateless peoples the clan histories were to become the resources for writing the wider histories of the Luo by Paul Mbuya. [Ogot 1997]

The written sources of African history belong to three different historiographical traditions. First was the enormous corpus of Muslim sources from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries C.E. Written by Islamic missionaries, travellers and scholars to Sudanic and the eastern coast of Africa these included the works of Al Masudi, Al Bakri, Al Idrisi, Ibn Batuta, Ibn Khaldun and al Wazzan [Leo Africanus]. These sources consisted of direct and reported observations of local societies. The sources were biased in favour of Muslim rulers and said little positive about the non-believers. After the sixteenth century African Islamic scholarship emerged that incorporated the local oral traditions in its renditions. This scholarship took centre – stage with the emergence of the *Tarikh al Sudan* by Al Sadi of Timbuktu in 1665, *Tarikh al Fattash* [1664], and *Tarikh Mai Idris* by Imam Ahmad Ibn Fartuwa. As well Swahili Islamic scholarship emerged from the eighteenth century, embodied in city- state histories like the *Pate Chronicle* or in the nineteenth century resistance poetry from Mombasa, *Muyaka*. The same happened in the Hausa states, giving rise to the *Kano Chronicle* as a generic format. These documents focussed on state power rather than the wider social processes. In the nineteenth century vigorous Islamic scholarship flourished in the Sokoto Caliphate as well, represented by the extensive writings of the founding Caliph Shehu, Usuman Dan Fodio and those of his successors.

The second corpus of written sources consisted of European traders and travellers' accounts dating from the fifteenth century. They imparted the image of the exotic as well as a primitive Africa often at war with itself, particularly in the nineteenth century. The third strand of scholarship came from the Africans in the Diaspora in the Americas, beginning with Olaudah Equiano in 1791 on to Edward Wilmot Blyden in the nineteenth century, and W.E. B. Dubois and Leo Hansberry in the twentieth century. This trend marked the opposite of the European

endeavour: it sought to glorify the African past. Within Africa Cheikh Anta Diop endeavoured to prove that the foundations of ancient Egyptian civilization was Black and African. This tendency has been seized upon by the school of Afrocentricity in the USA led by Molefi K. Asante.

Colonial historiography produced its own knowledge of Africa, based on the premise of European superiority and the civilizing nature of its mission. Colonial historiography presented the Europeans as the main actors in any significant transformation of the African continent since its “discovery”, exploration and conquest. Elspeth Huxley’s *Lord Delamere and the Making of Modern Kenya* [1935] was typical of this genre. The Africans were seen by the administrators, missionaries, historians and anthropologists alike as being static and primitive, the passive recipients of European progress. Africa’s self-evident artistic achievements, its historic monuments, its political kingdoms that resembled any other western-type bureaucracy, and its complex religious institutions were attributed to foreigners, the Hamitic conquerors from the north-east. The “Hamitic hypothesis” [Sanders 1969] was ubiquitous and was used to explain east coastal urbanization as well as the Yoruba myths of origin. The external factor in the twentieth century was European colonialism, seen as a civilizing mission among inferior peoples. History served as an ideological legitimization of Europe in Africa. In the eyes of at least one African historian this was “bastard historiography” [Afigbo 1993:46.]

The nationalist movement was in part a challenge to this notion of Africans as a people without history. With the attainment of independence in the 1960s emerged a postcolonial historiography centred within the continent but with significant external liberal support as well. Liberal historiography in the 1960s sought to help Africans recover and reclaim their own histories in consonance with the attainment of political independence; to distinguish the history of Europeans in Africa from the history of African peoples, and to write history from “the African point of view”. Conceptually the liberals worked within an interdisciplinary framework alongside archaeologists, political scientists, and economic historians. Methodologically, they developed the field of oral history, and appropriated and extended the range of questions to be asked concerning social change by social anthropologists. The favourite theme of the period was African resistance and its opposite, African oppression. The dyad of resistance and oppression [Cooper 1994] inspired magisterial research on Samori Toure by Yves Person, on the Maji Maji war in Tanganyika led by John Iliffe and Gilbert Gwassa, on the Chimurenga war in Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] by T.O. Ranger, and on the Herero/Nama revolt in Namibia by Helmut Bley. “The people in African resistance” became a mantra for the period. An early demur suggested that within African communities there obtained a paradox of collaboration and resistance; that within the textures of African

societies the resisters of today would be the collaborators of tomorrow, thus creating “ the paradox of collaboration” [Steinhart 1972 ; Atieno -Odhiambo, 1974]. Still the dyad held say in African historiography in the 1980s.

In the 1960s Dar-es-salaam University became most associated with this enthusiasm for the recovery of African initiative. The Dar-es-salaam school of history was created under T.O. Ranger. It sought to explicate the explanatory value of African history as a discipline; to give Tanzania its national history; and to engage in debates relating to the building of *Ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania. The short-lived (1965-1974) nationalist thrust of this historiography began to be challenged in the early 1970s for its failure to engage with the imperial and global contexts in which actions and agencies were undertaken; and with its tendency to narrow down complex strategies of multi-sized engagements with forces inside and outside the community into a single framework to emphasize African activity, African adaptation, African choice and African initiative.

This radical response to the paradigm was prompted by the emergence of Marxist historians, anthropologists and political scientists in the 1970s. It fore-grounded class analysts at the global and local levels. [Rodney 1974] Economic history became the first locus of the liberal / radical debates. One school called for substantive analysis focused on culture as the operative force in African economic history, and applied western market analysis to African economic activity. The liberal approach privileged individual action ; while the radical approach saw political power and economic constraints as the principal operative feature of the historical process. (Newbury 1998:304). The radicals traced the history of African poverty in the context of global capitalism.

The Recovery of Initiative

The setting up of western type universities in Africa on the eve of independence marked a significant milestone in what African scholars came to regard as the recovery of African initiative. The new departments of history established the teaching of African rather than European history at the core of the curriculum, with a full commitment to the Africanization of learning through an African faculty, trained in Europe and the United States by individuals with backgrounds in imperial or mission history. In turn they assumed the leadership in African universities created at Ibadan [Nigeria], Legon [Ghana], Nairobi [Kenya] , Dar-es-salam [Tanzania]. Their biggest challenge was methodological : history as understood in the west was based on written documents. The greatest break came with the acceptance and refinement of the methodology of oral traditions as

a means for recapturing the African voices from the past. Jan Vansina's *De la Tradition Orale* (1959) translated into English as *Oral Tradition* (1965) wielded enormous influence .

The traditions were treated as narratives, and later scholarship has defined them as comparable to primary written documents, and also as representations of secondary interpretations with kernels of original texts. The establishments of relative chronologies was another major innovation as calendric dating of events based on lists of rulers in African states, solar and lunar eclipses were correlated with written sources . Ancillary disciplines, particularly archaeology and historical linguistics extended the time scale of the deep past as the C14 technique provided archaeologists with dates going back four millenia. [Thornton 1997] As well, glottochronology and more complex comparative methodologies enabled historical linguists to provide dates going back two millenia in places like eastern Africa. Thus the origins of ancient civilizations, the spread of iron working, Bantu migrations and settlements, key issues in the historical discourses of the period, found resonance in the allied disciplines.[Ehret 1998]

The acceptance of oral traditions facilitated tremendous expansion in graduate programmes at African Universities as the first generation of African scholars undertook the supervision of the many students who sought to give histories to the many ethnic groups that hitherto had no history. In addition the requirement that undergraduate history majors complete a research dissertation enabled thousands of students to undertake oral and archival research, leading to an engagement with local histories as students spent two to three months interviewing oral experts in the field. This input brought academic history in contact with the wider society and helped to build links with the academy and the public over a period of twenty years before funds for the universities dried up in African universities. The existence of well over six thousand of these dissertations are a marker of the recovery of the initiative sought by the pioneers and to the institutionalisation of history within Africa. As well, the effort resulted in some quality essay publications .McIntosh 1969; Mutahaba 1969; Webster 1974 ;Atieno – Odhiambo 1975]

Thematic Variations

From the beginning of the 1970s, African history branched into various specializations. Studies of the Atlantic slave trade, first inspired by P.D. Curtin's work [1969] flowered into debates about the numbers ;the nature of domestic slavery in Africa before and after the Atlantic phase ;the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on African economies, demographics and development ; comparative slavery in the East African coast and in the

new world ; and the slow death of slavery in 20th century Africa. The historical study of African religions, Christian missionary, independent African Christians, and African traditional religions, attracted T.O. Ranger, Isaria Kimambo and B.A. Ogot . A.G. Hopkin's *Economic History of West Africa* (1973) applied the substantivist analysis to African economic behaviour. David Henige's journal, *History in Africa* emerged as the premier journal of method, critiquing the uncritical usage of both European and African traditions.

Ecology, Control and Economic Development in East Africa, by Helge Kjekshus (1976) was the founding text on environmental history in East African historiography. Intent on restoring the people as agents of African initiatives, the author sketched how pre-colonial societies controlled their environment and were victors in the ecological struggle to the end of the nineteenth century when rinderpest and smallpox devastated both human and livestock populations. This breakdown was exacerbated by the violent conquest by the Germans, forced recruitment into the first world war and the British policies of forced settlements, labour recruitment, wildlife conservation and economic exploitation. The resulting population declines gave "nature" the advantage, and tsetse fly infestation, sleeping sickness and decline in agricultural production set in. In the ensuing two decades this historiography has become more complex as both archival and oral histories have been used to illuminate the complex relations between environment, people, history, culture, and political and economic structures. In *Custodians of the Land* [Maddox & Gilbin 1996] colonized Africans are portrayed as pushing on in spite of colonial adversity, learning not only to survive, but to thrive under new sets of challenges. The work enriches the analysis of the relationship between population changes and political economy. In the opinion of a reviewer it marks a state of the art research into the relations between ecology and history: suggesting that the present ecological condition is a product of a complex and contested interaction between the environment, local initiative and imperial drive over the past century. (Maddox & Gilbin 1996). African demographic, medical and labour histories emerged, the latter driven by the Marxist structural interests in class struggles and the emergence of working-class consciousness. [Cooper 1995] Peasant studies emerged with Collin Bundy's *Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (1979) and commanded sustained elaboration in central and Eastern Africa. This field has become flourishing as Agricultural History. [Vail & White 1980, Mandala 1990]

The global agenda on women inspired the first histories of women in Africa relating to women's role in economic development, and African women and the law. These were enriched by the multi-disciplinarity facilitated by feminist , gender and literary studies, resulting in a historiography that is distinct from the more orthodox specializations in its familiarity with conversations from other continents. The first wave of studies of

women in the 1970s focussed primarily on the economically productive activities and social agency of African women. This work turned on women in development, especially agrarian change, land tenure, urbanization, and women's role in formal and informal economies. The second wave focussed on the colonial period, and studied questions relating to colonial domesticity, customary law, motherhood, reproduction, sexuality, and the body. Luise White's study of prostitution, *The Comforts of Home* (1990) is representative. The most recent cultural wave has covered gender and masculinity, social and institutional identities, and generational, homosocial struggles (Hunt 1996). The lexicon of cultural history has covered gender meanings, modernity, coloniality, postcoloniality, consumption and public culture. Thus there has been a paradigm shift from women's history to gender history, foregrounding gender as a set of social and symbolic relations. [Cohen & Odhiambo 1992; Robertson 1997]

The historiography of Christian religious history has moved from missiology to the inculcation of Christianity by the Africans as Christian communities felt able to move from the margins of society closer to its centre and to appropriate something of the values of a past that was once seen as being inimical to it. [Spear 1999] This later movement has led to the study of the appropriation and adaptation of traditions in order to place Christianity within African history. Earlier work on missiology included Roland Oliver's *The missionary Factor in East Africa*. [1962] The study of independent churches since B. Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets* [1948] has been preoccupied with the perceived and real discrimination within the mission churches. They have stressed African autonomy, continuity with elements of past African cultures, instrumental focus and use of faith healing and the search for "community". The spiritual communities of independent churches offer a place of belonging, *A Place to Feel at Home*. [Welbourn & Ogot 1967]

A powerful trend in the historiography of Christianity emerged in the 1980s, one that depicted religion as an indivisible aspect of general change and even of specifically economic, political and social change [Fields 1986]. This contrasts with the work of African theologians who continue to maintain a focus on religion as a specific autonomous realm whose central text is the Bible as translated into cultures [Sanneh 1990], a mix of transatability and radical cultural pluralism—the ability of Christianity to transcend cultural boundaries. [Spear, 1999 : 10]. In the 1990s scholarship has focused on intellectual history, exploring the missionary contribution to the ideas of ethnicity, environment and gender. [Hoehler _ Fatton 1996] Debates on the social history of Christianity seek to bring a dialogical and dialectical understanding to the history of colonial evangelism. The work by Jean and John Comaroff [1991, 1997] married the social sources and ideologies of the missionaries and

ethnography of the Tswana. The innovative range of evidence they researched included cultural, economic, and political encounters, and lent weight to the symbolic. They employed the notions of hybridity and bricolage to demonstrate how both the missionaries and the Tswana made and remade themselves. Current historiographies seek to move the discourse on vernacular Christianity from the mission station to the village, thus foregrounding the roles of youth, women, and migrant elites. In emphasising the social significance of religion, these studies explore the theme of inculturation from below: a process through which Africans appropriated the symbols, rituals and ideas of Christianity and made them their own. The salience of the local is made manifest. [Landau 1995]

To summarize. From the vantage point of the end of the century, African historiography has moved from the institutional to the economic, then the social, and now cultural history. The rubric of social history captures much of the more recent historiography. Its strength has been its multidisciplinary and its multivocality. The insights of history, political economy, historical anthropology, literary studies and other forms of social science have been combined to illuminate the following parameters of understanding: landscapes of memory and imagination, the constructions of identity, the colonization of consciousness, colonial texts and transcripts as social practices, the consumption of leisure, the production and risks of knowledge, the occult and imaginary [Luise White, forthcoming], and the rituals of power. The anatomy of “experience, identity and self expression which link the glories of past independence, the miseries of domination and poverty, and the hopes of a fully autonomous future” (Austen 1993: 213) are very much at the core of this endeavour, at *ReInventing Africa*, to borrow Andre Brink’s apt title.

Institutional Impact

In terms of institutional distinction, the “Ibadan school of history” had its origins in the 1950s when K.O. Dike and Saburi Biobaku took up academic appointments at the university. Dike’s work, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* [1956] paved the way for the study of African initiatives and struggles at the moment of contact with European imperialism in the nineteenth century. Those scholars associated with Ibadan came to dominate Nigerian scholarship for three decades. Dike, Biobaku, J.F. Ade Ajayi, E.A. Afigbo, E.A. Ayandele, J.E. Alagoa and Obaro Ikime. In turn they trained generations of younger scholars who have emerged in their own right since the 1970s. The Ibadan school has been characterised by its concentration on trade and politics, the missionary impact, the Islamic revolutions, and the emergence of the Nigerian State. The initial concern was to

establish a chronology and reconstruct political and military events. Archival materials were supplemented with oral traditions, and a framework of political history for Nigeria was laid. Schematically the Ibadan school dealt with trade and politics, the new African elites created around mission stations, the struggle over the control over modern institutions such as churches, professions and government posts, and finally the tracing of a genealogy of nationalism. With the expansion of universities in Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s, the Ibadan influence was extended to the new campuses. The major challenge to this trend came from Islamic legitimists based at Ahmadu Bello University led by Abdullahi Smith who called for a return to “time-honoured ideals and traditions of scholarship which had formed the basis of intellectual endeavour in the Islamic world for centuries: traditions and ideals which the ancient universities in the Islamic world had founded to preserve” .(Lovejoy 1986: 202) As Nigerian politics have grown increasingly polarized the Ibadan school has continued to hold sway in the Southern Universities while Islamic legitimists have held forth in the north.

Senegalese historiography is university-based and privileges the past five hundred years of contact and exchange with Europe and the Atlantic world. The Senegambia region lends itself to a unified field of study beyond the confines of the nation-state, and has been treated as such by generations of scholars. The historiography reflects the predominance of French traditions of scholarship and prioritization, as well as Anglophone north American prominence in research endowments. Local scholarship based at Dakar has been overwhelmed by these metropolitan influences, and has been stifled through the long period of gestation required for the French *doctorat d'état*, plus the basic sub-imperialism of the French Africanists. [Gondola 1997, Cahen 1997, Chretien 1997,] Thus the “Dakar school” of history--- history produced by the Senegambians themselves --- has been a junior partner in this tricontinental endeavour. Nevertheless it does have an impressive pedigree. First pioneered by Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly and Joseph Ki-Zerbo in the nineteen fifties, there followed the generation of Djibril Tamsir Niane in the 1960s. The concern then was with nationalist political history stressing the African resistance paradigm and foregrounding the proto-nationalists like the Lat Dior Lator Diop, Bai Bureh and Ahmadu Bamba. In the 1970s the generation of Cissene Moody Cissoko, Boubacar Barry, Abdoulaye Bathily, Mamadou Diouf and Rukhaya Fall embraced the methods of the social sciences for the understanding of the crises of underdevelopment and dependence in the modern period, and sought to reinterpret the last five hundred years as a period of continuing decline in the fortunes of the region. This perspective informs the yearning for the dissolution of the colonial state boundaries and a return to the historical unity of Greater Senegambia. [Barry 1998]

The East African region, home to numerous stateless communities realized most gains from acceptance of Oral Tradition as a legitimate method of history. The founding historian B. A. Ogot had successfully argued that this method could validly be used for non-state societies. His *History of the Southern Luo* (1967) inspired research and publications at Nairobi and Makerere universities, and later in Malawi and Western Nigeria through the influence of J. B. Webster. The construction of ethnic identities and history took central place initially, giving scores of “tribes” a history of their own. [e.g. Ochieng’ 1974] Oral interviews became the accepted fieldwork methodology for colonial history as well, especially since the ordinary Africans were hardly represented in the official archival record as makers of their own history. Thus the recovery of the histories of African resistance, peasants, migrant labour, squatters, regional trade, religious history, agrarian struggles, women’s histories, intellectual history, rural discourse and issues of moral equity were all achieved by undergraduate students and by foreign and local historians over two decades. The relatively benign research atmosphere in Kenya until the end of the 1970s enabled the build-up of a solid historiography in the wake of the Ogot initiatives.

An important aspect of the professionalization of the discipline was the founding of national Historical Associations, most prominently in Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania, complete with their own journals like the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* and the *Kenya Historical Review*. The associations served as bridges bringing together high school teachers and university academics at regular annual conferences. A major by-product of these efforts was the publication of suitable textbooks for use by teachers and pupils in high schools, most notably Jacob Ajayi & Ian Espie’s *A Thousand Years of West African History*, [1960] and B. A. Ogot & J. Kieran’s *Zamani*. [1969] As well, the Historical Association of Tanzania produced a series of authoritative pamphlets on important topics by historians of the Dar Es Salaam faculty such as: *Early Trade in East Africa* by J.E.G. Sutton, Edward Alpers’ *The East African Slave Trade*, and *The West African Slave Trade* by Walter Rodney. The early destruction of Makerere university by Idi Amin led to the death of the Makerere Historical Papers series of pamphlets soon after the publication of M. Kiwanuka’s *The Kingdom of Bunyoro – Kitara: Myth or Reality?* and John Rowe’s *Lugard in Kampala*. Of note as well was the Pan-African journal *Tarikh*, also a product of the Historical Association of Nigeria, whose essays were much used by the undergraduate students. A lasting legacy of the African economic and political crises has been the demise of all these professional outlets since the early 1980s. Much hope is therefore invested in the emergence of the South African Historical Association under Arnold Temu in 1999.

Nationalist History: Eastern Africa

“The faithful phantom of Africanism can be represented in the two sides of a coin: with the state on one side and the nation on the other. Whether one tries to ignore it, work within it, or adore it, history, whether written or publicly recited, does not escape the state “. [Jewsiewicki 1986: 14] The meta-narrative of the nationalist historiography begins with Thomas Hodgkin’s *Nationalism in Tropical Africa* [1956], a populist text which sought to equate nationalism with any protest phenomenon generally.. With the attainment of political independence a nationalist historiography emerged. It sought to study the origins and course of African nationalism through the lenses of modernization theory , and emphasized the emergence of the African elites and the launching of western-style political parties. A strand of the genre sought to lay bare the connexions between the primary resisters to colonial conquest, the modernizing elites of the interwar years, and the later territorial nationalists of the 1950s that saw the goal of nationalism as being the attainment of political independence. This facilitated the writing of the history of the new states as the history of the “African voice” , and of this voice as the voice of these elites. [Ranger 1970] These elites were conscious of the aspirations of the masses and were able to attract a broad following and to articulate popular concerns, speaking on behalf of “ those who had not spoken “. Radical rural movements were thus linked through the local notables like the Samkange family in Southern Rhodesia to the wider canvas of nationalist discourses. [Ranger 1996] Thus in the case of Tanganyika, the political elites like Julius Nyerere found common cause with local organisations challenging everything from unjust marketing regulations to restrictive crop controls , and from cattle dipping to further European land alienation. In the context of an imperial Britain that was ambivalent about its need to keep Tanganyika and anxious to stem the spread of Mau Mau – like activities there, Julius Nyerere and his allies in TANU galvanized the grassroots demand for independence . [Illiffe 1979] The most recent historiography has criticized this narrative for its male-centeredness by arguing for the centrality of women in Tanzania’s nationalist movement, emphasizing their role in rural and urban political party politics. Thus a more inclusive version that integrates the political, cultural and symbolic work of women into the past and present of nationalism has emerged. [Geiger 1997]

There is a marked contrast between Tanganyika , where the idea of a nation was a possibility , and Kenya where the the state has failed to establish its “regime of truth “ on the nationalist narrative . Kenya was a conquest state from the beginning, whose early historiography was anchored on the European Settlers to whom it was a White Man’s Country. Thus British policy towards its colonial African subjects attracted scholarly

attention [Diley 1937] and also generated historiographical debate as tensions developed between Africans and the settlers [Huxley 1944]. The actual making of this colonial order engaged historians in the 1960s as they sought to understand the origins of the state, [Mungeam 1966] of European settlement as part of the frontier thesis, [Sorrenson 1967] and of European stake in decolonization. [Wasserman 1974] Critical Marxist perspectives emerged in the 1970s as the role of colonialism in the underdevelopment of Kenya gained high profile, [Zwanenberg 1975, Brett 1973, Leys 1974] and the overall picture of domination and control was explicated. [Berman 1990]

The local antithesis of this British conquest narrative was anti-colonialism variously understood as African nationalism, [Rosberg & Nottingham 1966] a peasants' revolt, [Maloba 1994], African resistance against colonialism, [Ochieng' & Ogot 1995] or as the historiography of the Mau Mau rebellion as a specifically central Kenyan phenomenon. [Lonsdale 1992] The historiography of the revolt has increasingly moved from the nationalist narrative to the local levels, with significant focus on the squatters, [Kanogo 1987] the Rift Valley, [Furedi 1989] Muranga district, [Throup 1987] and southern Kiambu district [Kershaw 1997]. The participation of Kikuyu women in Mau Mau both as mobilizers and as combatants in south Kiambu have been made explicit. [Presley 1992]. The very power of the 'thick descriptions' of the local has thus created space for the development of intellectual history of central Kenya as a vital component of Kenya's historiography. [Berman & Lonsdale, forthcoming] The power of Mau Mau as a historical event with deep cultural and symbolic meanings for the Kikuyu themselves has been captured by John Lonsdale's work on the moral economy of Mau Mau, a work that gives it ethnic and historical specificity; and totally overthrows the possibility of re-inventing a Kenyan nationalist narrative. [Berman & Lonsdale 1992] The Mau Mau narrative has other power manifested through the many public debates in the public arenas: it has been a trope for critiques of the postcolonial state from below. [Atieno - Odhiambo 1992] These concerns with the internal *problematiques* do not consider nationalism to be a pre-requisite ideology for the construction of a future nation-state. [Atieno - Odhiambo 1999]

Beyond Kenya fascination with Mau Mau has led to concerns with peasant consciousness in the later liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, to debates on the meaning of peasant consciousness, and to an engagement with the wider question of war and society in Zimbabwe. [Ranger 1985., Kriger 1992, Ranger & Bhebe 1996] A narrative of the Zimbabwean society as a narrative of struggle has emerged; but so also has an undercurrent

critique that points to an unholy alliance of the ruling elites and the guerrillas at the expense of the rest of society in the postcolonial dispensation. [Ranger 1999; Kriger, work in progress]

The production of a history in Malawi was stunted due to the overarching idiosyncrasy of President Kamuzu Banda. For thirty years the Banda one-man state sought to control research, writing, teaching, museum exhibitions and discussions of historical topics over the radio and the print media. Academic study of history at the university followed his lead, initially teaching from a colonial archive canon established by Sir Harry Johnston. This archive was to form the basis of professional historical research for much of the 1960s and 70s. These developments took place against a background that increasingly transformed the nationalist narrative into personal Odyssey, and that turned precolonial history into the triumph of the Chewa ethnic group against others. [Kalinga 1998] By the end of the 1960s the triumphalist narrative of nationalism was virtually dead everywhere except in Tanzania. [Iliffe 1979]

The disappointments with the results of political independence from the mid 1960s led to radical pessimism captured by the title of Oginga Odinga's book *Not yet Uhuru* [1967], and to critiques of the nation-building projects that were inspired by Marxism, Underdevelopment theories and by the writings of Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* [1974] was a salient statement of the underdevelopment thesis. This literature was significant for the radicalism that it injected into academic and popular discourses; its impact on actual researches on the ground was more limited. One unintended consequence of it was to raise the question of the possibility of African history at all, given the fact that Africa's autonomous development had been subverted for five hundred years according to the thesis. An orthodox variant of this radical pessimism was marked by the shift in focus from the African elites to the study of peasants and workers as the real wagers of the anti-colonialist struggles. Historians read the works of anthropologists and political scientists as well as conducting oral histories: the result was a major thrust in peasant studies [Bundy 1979, Klein 1980, Vail & White 1980, Mandala 1990] as well as in studies of rural struggles of squatters and sharecroppers. [Kanogo 1987, Onselen 1996]

Bifurcated Historiography: South Africa

South Africa's dominant historiography is orthodox, because it has been constructed by white scholars trained in and adhering to the western canon. It is also contemporaneous to the routine outlines of the development of the historical discipline since the nineteenth century in Europe in assuming the history of the nation as the paradigm of analysis. [Lorenz 1999] The dominating historian of the nineteenth century was G. M. Theal, whose canonical work in the emergent universities in South Africa provided a defence of colonization of the Africans. Theal's treatise was a justification for white colonization, for his Africans were

depicted as being recent immigrants into the country almost contemporaneous with the white populations of the seventeenth century. He suggested that the Africans had a lust for cattle and had been continually fighting among themselves and were therefore ripe for European "pacification". In any case the African population was sparse and so the Afrikaner Voortrekkers of the 1830's had moved into a largely empty territory. The author accepted the segregationist policies pursued by the British against Africans throughout the century on the basis of white racial superiority and African inferiority. In a word, Britain was entitled to South Africa because white power had triumphed over African peoples.

The second stage in this historiography was associated with the liberal tradition of William Miller Macmillan whose scholarship in the 1920s argued against the segregationist policies then being put into place. Macmillan argued for a holistic view of South African history that included the role of the Africans in the making of South Africa's history. He was the first South African historian to plead for the study of "the everyday life of the people, how they lived, what they thought, and what they worked at, when they did think and work, what they produced and what and where they marketed, and the whole of their social organization". [Saunders 1987: 139]. Macmillan, who was not interested in African history except as antiquarianism, accepted that the Africans were less than civilized but denied that racial differences were inherent and permanent, arguing for the study of a complex whole that aimed for the creation of South Africa as a single society, cemented by an economy that linked white landlords, landless white tenants, and African helots.

C. W. de Kiewet accepted this economic framework with a synthesis of South African history in the context of British imperial policy in the 1880s. Like Macmillan he was less interested in giving Africans their history than in explaining British policy towards Africans. J.S. Marais who was Macmillan's student followed in this tradition with empirical studies premised on the assumption of a single, if heterogeneous, South African society. Both de Kiewet and H.M. Robertson in the 1930s regarded the frontier as the place of continuous black/white interaction, a site of co-operation where new social and economic bonds were forged. Eric Walker, influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner, developed the frontier thesis into a major plank of South African historiography explaining South African development. [Saunders 1987] All the authors were united in their rejection of racism and segregation as the final ends of government because it could only mean continued white domination.

After world War II there was a renewed interest in the idea of the British Empire and of white South Africa's relationships to it in light of the Afrikaner capture of state power in 1948. The period from the Jameson raid in 1895 to the Act of Union in 1910 was revisited as the great historical turning point between Boer and Briton, leading to the disjuncture between Afrikaner and English historiographies. Leonard Thompson emerged as the imperial historian of this time. A major historiographical landmark came with the publication of the *Oxford History of South Africa* at the end of the sixties. For the first time the history of the Africans was included into the scope of South African history. This gesture was beholden to Africanist scholarship that had emerged in independent Black African universities as well as to the emergence of African history in the United States and Europe. The early chapters outlined pre-colonial African structures and institutions. Its South African birthmark was evident in its concern with the theme of interaction as an agenda for a plural society. With its emphasis on writing a

history of all South Africa's peoples, the *Oxford History* was seen as being "true to liberal humanism, an important milestone in South Africa's historiography". [Butler & Schreuder 1987 : 163] It nevertheless did not address itself to the problem of the relation between structure and power.

This hiatus was to provide the next departure in South African historiography. The revisionist historiography that emerged in the 1970s was influenced by new trends in historical scholarship in the European west to which the new generation of South African white historians had gravitated. Their graduate training was informed by Africanist historiography as well as by the large structures of world history [Barrington Moore III, Eric Wolf, Immanuel Wallerstein]; American writings on race; British and European Marxist traditions [Poulantzas, Althusser, Gramsci and Habermas]; Latin American Underdevelopment debates [Andre Gundar Frank]; the *Annales* school; and by the History Workshop movement. [Marks 1986] The revisionist historians—Shula Marks, Stan Trapido, Martin Legassick, Dan O' Meara, Charles van Onselen, Colin Bundy, F. A. Johnstone, H. Wolpe—introduced new conversations. Marxist historiography infused political economy in all fields, positing the modes of production paradigm as *de rigueur*. Their work on precapitalist social formations led to studies of a differentiated African past successively penetrated by merchant capital and slavery, followed by conquests by imperial armies in the nineteenth century, and transformed by industrialization. The emergence of African women's history also coincided with the emphasis on Marxist and Marxist-feminist modes of analysis at this time. The latter writings centered on the relationship between production and reproduction. They conceptualised pre-capitalist African women as being dominated: control over women and their general subordination in society provided the conceptual basis of analysis. It was the "beasts of burden" thesis arrayed in structuralist garb. [Berger 1994]

The wider phalanx of the revisionists shared these concerns with a materialist analysis of class and race, and with the nature of the South African state and its relationship to capital accumulation. A key marker was their identification of state intervention as being crucial to South Africa's successful industrialization by simultaneously structuring the destruction of the African peasantry and creating a racial hierarchical division of labour. The studies of the state also underlined the crucial power of international capital and settler agencies in shaping the destinies of black Africans. Thus there was a demand for a materialist analysis of class and race. [Magubane 1979] The revisionists therefore accepted the centrality of the political economy of South Africa; the connections between capitalism and the apartheid state, the centrality of the goldmines in the South African industrialization process; the complex dialectics of migrant labour and segregation policies in the native reserves; the blurred boundaries between African peasants, sharecroppers and rural Afrikaners. Typical of this historiography was *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa* [1982] edited by Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone. The volume distilled much of what had been achieved in the past decade in the field of social history. The authors went beyond the concerns of the Marxist historiography of the early 1970s—land labour and capital; race and class—to narrate the lived experiences of the African workers, sharecroppers, women and the family, the arts, music and sports. This revisionist scholarship moved beyond the original Liberal and Marxist precepts in several ways. Whereas the Marxists had limited their studies to the structures of oppression the new history foregrounded the struggles of the oppressed. It was concerned with groups that had been "hidden from history" and with their cultures of survival, opposition, resistance, rural popular consciousness, and revolution. It thus sought to provide an alternative conception of history to the liberal and

positivist tradition of the 1950s and 1960s. In the subsequent mid- 1980s to mid- 1990s decade this initiative has matured with the publication of cutting edge monographs , of which Charles van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine* , a biography of the sharecropper Kas Maine ; and Keletso Atkins' *The Moon is Dead: Give us our Money* , a study of urban workers in Durban are typical of the mastery of the meaning of the industrial revolution for the people who experienced it at the bottom . The pity however is that there are no Black Africans trained by this team in South African universities to bring the African voice to bear on the making of their own histories.

The radical or Marxist historiography was overtaken from the 1980s by the History Workshop movement based

at the University of the Witwatersrand. Its defining characteristics were its commitment to popular history: to the recovery of 'ordinary ' men and women , its concern to make these communicable and accessible to a wider audience, and its interdisciplinary composition. [Bonner 1999] The movement was inspired variously by the emergence of radical pessimism in Black Africa as a consequence of the failure of national elites to emancipate their citizens ; [Gutkind & Waterman 1977] the activism of some members of the movement with trade unionism which led to a quest for a usable trade - union past on the shop floor; the Ruskin College , Oxford history workshop model whose preoccupation was with people's culture , people's experience and popular consciousness ; and by the presence of an activist multidisciplinary team at Wits. The workshop's format consisted of a series of triennial conferences resulting in intermittent popular publications as well as individual monographs. The latter include C. Van Onselen's *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwaterstrand, 1886-1914*, 2 volumes,(Johannesburg, 1982); T Couzens, *The New African: A Study Of The Life of H.I.E Dhlomo*,[Johannesburg 1985] , E .Webster :*Cast In A Racial Mould* [Johannesburg 1985]; B. Bozzoli , *Women of Phokeng. Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, [Johannesburg 1991] D. Posel , *The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961*[Oxford 1991] , I. Hofmeyr , *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told; Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom*,[Johannesburg 1994] ; P. Delius , *A Lion Among the Cattle; Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*, [Johannesburg 1996].

The growing politicisation of history pushed the Workshop in new directions. Such was the thirst for popular history that the Workshop redoubled its efforts at popularisation. Since 1978 the History Workshop has been responsible for three illustrated histories written by Luli Callinicos, the second of which won the Noma award for publishing in Africa; three booklets on historical themes; a series of twenty-nine historical articles written by members of th History Workshop for the weekly newspaper *New Nation* , subsequently published as *New Nation, New History* ; a manual by Leslie Witz called *Write Your Own History* ; a series of five teachers' conferences on new issues in South African history; a number of slide and tape shows; and a six-part television documentary titled "Soweto: A History". All these enterprises have also made extensive use of oral testimony. Callinico's *Working Lives* is organized around the lives of five men and women workers; "Soweto: A History" is driven by video testimonies framed by a minimum of commentary. In the 1984 conference two full days were devoted to papers and presentations on popularisation in which over 100 participants took part. " Festivals of popular culture which concluded the conference proceedings from 1981 onwards also became steadily larger and richer drawing audiences of up to 5000 at their peak." [Bonner 1999 : 11]

What of the future ? In 1987 Richard Elphick predicted that a new post apartheid African government would put a high premium on education, and that historians might soon encounter " a massive thirst for history,

particularly among young blacks and Africaners ". [Elphick 1987 :166] He was singularly wrong in this anticipation. Currently history is very much at the back burner in South Africa. The government has subsumed it under the nebulous umbrella of social studies, and high school graduating students are drifting towards the technikons. The populace is wary of the actual historical import and significance of such historical conjunctures as the hearings before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Practising historians report of a nation that would rather forget the pain of the recent apartheid past , [Bonner ,pers. Comm. 21 May 1999] while young Afrikaner students distance themselves from the sins of their fathers by declaring to President Thabo Mbeki that the past is another country.

Ordinary Lives

" This is a biography of a man who, if one went by the official record alone, never was. It is the story of a family who have no documentary existence, of farming folk who lived out their lives in a part of South Africa few people loved , in a century that the country will always want to forget. The State Archives , supposedly the mainspring of the Union's memory, has but one line referring to Kas Maine. The Register of the Periodic Criminal Court at Makwassie records that on September 8 1931 , a thirty-four- year - old 'labourer' from Kareepoort named 'Kas Tau ' appeared before the magistrate for contravening Section Two , Paragraph One of Act 23 of 1907. A heavy bound volume reveals that ' Tau ' , resident of Police District No. 41, was fined five shillings for being unable to produce a dog licence . Other than that , we know nothing of the man ".[Onselen 1996 : 1]

So begins Charles van Onselen's epic biography of Kas Maine, a South African sharecropper on the northwestern Transvaal . In so doing Onselen follows a tradition founded in the same region eight decades earlier by Sol Plaatje whose writings captured the historical conjuncture of African dispossession of their land in 1913.[Plaatje 1916] Kas Maine belongs to rural Africa , to " the peoples without history " whose agency is all but invisible in the colonial archives much valorized by western scholarship . Historians of Kenya faced the challenge of this absence right from the early sixties as they sought to re-write the Mau Mau into the narrative of the emergent nation. This effort continues to be controversial. A more accommodating approach came with the almost simultaneous appropriation of Peasant Studies from anthropologists by historians of Southern Rhodesia, Kenya and South Africa .[Arrighi 1967; Atieno - Odhiambo 1972; Bundy [1979] .Subsequently historians of rural South Africa sought to recapture their worlds via oral interviews in the last two decades. [Marks and Rathbone 1982, Marks & Trapido 1985]. This has yielded details regarding the part played by Africans in the unfolding historical events, the dialectics of their own history and culturally reflexive accounts of their own experiences. Kas Maine's biography is the the epitome of this restoration. Onselen succeeds in restoring Kas Maine to the mainstream of colonial history by excavating the landscapes of memory retained by the thousands of contacts, transactions, exchanges , fights and hatreds that the inhabitants of this region retained about their own personhood and agency in the making of their long century from the 1870s down to 1985 when his protagonist died. In the process he constructs a historical figure who was never far from comprehending his own sense of worth, and of the "worth of ordinariness " , emphasizing moral equity even in the ravines of race and class , calling on the common humanity of all. [Cohen & Odhiambo 1989 : 119 - 120].

Scholars of folklore studies have significantly explored this terrain as well, by emphasizing performance in context in their interpretation and understanding of oral texts. This approach has proven useful both for the gendered household and family histories in Southern Africa; as well as for the male politics of status and rank associated with the oral poetry of chieftaincy. Cumulatively we have had the re-introduction of the South African Black Africans through the foregrounding of their own perceptions of the unfolding events. The contrasting perspectives of the South African problem by the nationalist Nelson Mandela and the sharecropper Kas Maine are mutually reinforcing in this regard. [Mandela 1994]

Indigenous Historiographies

Beyond the historian's guild the twentieth century has witnessed the production of popular historical literature in Africa, produced locally, often in non-western languages by individuals and collectivities believing in their past, giving themselves their own histories which tell of those pasts, and which have meaning, authority and significance for the local populations. The recognition of this popular work compels a movement from narrow understandings about the nature of history, historical evidence, and what should constitute other peoples' histories. [Cohen 1994] One is led to multiple sites of historical telling: the song, praise poetry, the allegory in the folktale, the silences in the memory of the past, for example. There has been a continuous production of the oral histories of Africa, captured in the rendition that "we live our lives as a tale that is told" [Hofmeyr 1994]. At the same time, the advent of literacy has led to the proliferation of the realm of the written world. Vernacular authors have sought to give their peoples a history. The first generation of Africa's modern men in the twentieth century appropriated the knowledge of the organic intellectuals of the previous century by bridging the gap between orality and literacy through publication. The foundations for this genre were laid early in the century by Apolo Kagwa in eastern Africa and Samuel Johnson in west Africa. [Kiwunika 1970, Ajayi 1998] They collected the oral traditions of their clans and kingdoms and in so doing created a master narrative for the Baganda and the Yoruba. In terms of method they occupied a fairly modern terrain. They interviewed knowledgeable informants, custodians of shrines, court historians and keepers of clan lore. Fifty years later the academy—Jan Vansina in the 1950s and B. A. Ogot in the 1960s—travelled along the same path, interviewing individual encyclopaedic informants, holding formal sessions with court historians and clan elders, as well as reading the missionary and colonial archives to arrive at a history of the Kuba or the Luo that accommodated every major lineage, or left enough room for the malleable accommodation of more recent incorporations into the putative genealogy of all Kuba or all Luo. [Cohen & Odhiambo 1987] Johnson's work has spawned a century of Yoruba Historiography. [Falola 1991] Kagwa's work has influenced western scholarship in the fields of history, anthropology and religion in the region for a century, and spawned a specific Ganda historiography that continues to thrive. [Reid 1997] Critiques of these canons have emerged with revisionist interpretations. In the Great Lakes areas historiography has moved from the original diffusionist conquest model—the Hamitic myth—into a concern with ecological change, and the contextualisation of struggles over authority and wealth. [Schoenbrun 1999, Willis 1999]

A significant byproduct of this accommodationist stance has been the production of regional as contrasted with state histories in both western and eastern Africa, as exemplified by case studies of the Mande and Luo worlds. The wider Mande canvas covers a period of seven centuries, from the rise of the Mali empire under Sundiata Keita in the fourteenth century down to the destruction of the state of Samory Toure by the French in

late nineteenth century. During this period the cultural landscape remained recognizable as a Mande world, the locus moving southward away from the Sahel to the Atlantic coast as a result of the slave trade. [Barry 1998] Likewise the Luo chronology has its epicentre in the cradleland of the central Sudan sometime around 1000 CE .Successive milestones in Luo historiography, from J. P. Crazzolaro in the 1950s, Ogot in the 1960s Cohen & Odhiambo in the 1980s and Ron Atkinson in the 1990s, all assume the constancy of the Luo world . Both Mande and Luo histories traverse several ethnicities , states and polities over the centuries without being confined to any single one of them. Acholi ethnicity evolved during the eighteenth century. [Atkinson 1994]There were Mande and Luo nations and cultural spheres well before the incursion of the colonial state in the twentieth century . Their sense of multiple belongings to the various postcolonial states in the regions suggests an alternative paradigm for writing regional rather than state histories , an alternative that is closer to peoples' experiences with history in the long *duree* than the western historical practiceand which throws up challenges for the student of Comparative History. [Lorenz 1999].

The Production of Locality

In the recent past the productions of local histories has flourished in the Niger delta as villages, neighbourhoods , and administrative districts have laid a claim to the authority on their pasts. Local community histories comprise an autonomous corpus outside the academy. They consist of published books describing the history and culture of towns, villages, clans, or geographical areas. Authored by amateurs they build on issues of identity, and locate individual citizens within the local developmental discourses and environment. This literature belongs to the genre of 'production of locality' from within the community outside the reach of the State. The production and intended consumption of this material remains local. The choice of the English language suggests that community histories are very much a product of modernity. [Harmeit-Sievers 1997] The authors consider that they are writing history, inscribing the essence of the existing society through history, culture and symbols of modernity. The format of these many books is often a narrative of the origins of the village , the arrival of the western missionaries, schools and hospitals, the emergence of the local notables and the latest developmental trends . It is the story of progress as lived and witnessed and lived. It is also a site of contestation . Guild historians , commissioned by the local communities to write them a history, are as often contested over their authority over the mastery of local history and on the veracity of the produced texts . [Alagoa 1997]

Scopic Representations

One version of vernacular history that constitutes a challenge to academic historiography has been genre paintings that emerged in the Belgian Congo from the 1920s.Its first stage marked African inventions of scopic regimes of modernity, ---- the invention of the West in the African imagination via painting . The intellectual and artistic reading of the colonizing West on paper and on canvas began with Albert Lubaki and Tshyela Ntendu in the 1920s and 1930s. " These painters tried to understand what colonial modernity meant, seeking to put the colonialists , their objects and their people on a meaningful framework--- using the plastered walls of houses as well as paper to figure in paint their understanding of the Western perception of themselves and their universe ". [Jewsiewicki 1991 : 139] The paintings depicted the goods and postures of modernity: the Missionary , man on a bicycle, family portraits, the colonial army, the telephone , typewriter , train , car, and steamer. A later generation of the 1940s and 1950s represented by Mwenze Kibwanga and Pilipili were literate teachers of art in schools. The genre of urban painting was "invented " by

and for the literate petty bourgeoisie of the cities in the 1960s. They were characterized by the recollections of the violence of colonial conquest and domination as well as by memories of the political violence after independence. A new generation rose in the 1970s that was dominated by worries of social justice, political arbitrariness, and new gender and generational conflicts. Its leading artists included Cheri Samba, Moke, Sim Simaro and Vuza Ntuko. Their creations are both chronicles of social and political life as well as materializations of the imagination and social memory. Cheri Samba is primarily a moralist and teacher. Bogumil Jewsiewicki reminds us that these are members of the urban petty bourgeoisie with bourgeois aspirations. One must therefore be careful when referring to these artists as "popular" painters, for their hopes and tastes are bourgeois. [Jewsiewicki 1991 : 146] Each painting refers to a story and emits a narrative. Tshibumba Kanda Matulu's conceptualization of his work is that by painting he is doing history. "I don't write but I bring ideas, I show how a certain event happened. In a way I am producing a monument". [Fabian 1996: 14] The social significance of his painting emerges from his contention that he is a historian of his country and an educator of his people. Tshibumba's *History of Zaire* is a narrative of over one hundred paintings that the painter regards as a book, part of Zaire's colonial and postcolonial historiography. "As an interpreter of the history of his country Tshibumba competes with journalistic reporting and academic historiography over chronology and dating, and over contexts and interpretations of certain events. He regards his works as fixations with a message: to make his audience think. [Fabian 1996] For the historian the challenge lies in integrating these representations of history into our scopical canvas.

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