

There is little to add to Zubairu Wai's comprehensive introduction to this wonderful collection of essays. Wai amply sketches out the double task of deconstruction and reconstruction which the volume attends to. As Wai argues, this task is made all the more difficult because Africa is a parallax - exemplifying at the same time the very best and very worst of the human condition. Indeed, to think of Africa with nuance, with complexity, with opacity, with humanity, would be to dis-orient the basic episteme of International Relations (IR) scholarship.

Considering the daunting nature of this challenge, I would like to preface the chapters that follow with four stories. Two are from contemporary Ghana. One from historical Geneva. One from the contemporary Pacific. Together, I hope that they will provide an "underlabour", that is, help the reader to apprehend the depth of the critique and breadth of the retrieval undertaken in the following pages.

First, a visit to Cape Coast Castle. The guide takes us into the dungeon, comprising three or so chambers. The largest is supposed to hold a hundred men. It is small. Two slits in the wall let in the faintest of breezes, and the spray of rain that enters partly washes away the faeces, urine and vomit down two drains chiselled into the floor. Immediately above the dungeon entrance stands the chapel. The floor of the chapel is the roof of the dungeon. Praises to a white Christ above; cries, arguments, chants, moans of the damned below. It is an intentional design.

The European traders, soldiers and adventurers of this slaving fort are surrounded by Africans who they trade with, sleep with, pass by, converse with, who serve them, who sometimes praise with them (one of the pastors of the chapel was once an African). And so, it takes an effort – a soul deep effort – to consign a part of the humanity that surrounds you to hell: to desanctify them, to make of them things, to turn living, breathing, thinking peoples into a colour that represents nothingness. Negre, black. A colour that ultimately returns to represent a whole continent.

Meanwhile, the women captives are placed in a separate prison space away from the chapel. The rite of damnation that the men suffer is horrendous; women are not even considered deserving of that. They are instantly made dehuman. No drains are cut into their prison. Faeces, urine, vomit and menses mix on the floor.

A subterranean passage leads from the men's dungeon to emerge just before the door-of-no-return. Walking through, the kidnapped are deposited on the rocks, by the surf outside of the fort walls, waiting for the boats. After 1833 the dungeon entrance to the passage is bricked-up on orders of the governor. The passage behind remains. Abolition plasters over the horror, and that is supposed to be sufficient. In any case, because the women are held captive right by the door-of-no-return there is no passage to block.

The Ghanaian guide must have given this tour countless times. But this time – each time? – he relives the enslavement and trafficking of Africans as a personal affront, a lesson for humanity, a primer for international ethics. Standing outside the fort, he proudly reveals the other side of the once-final exit. From this position, the door acts as an entrance to the continent. It has a label on this side too: "the door-of-return". Heretically, the time of Africa switches, and the world with it. No longer regressing to black emptiness, now full of redemptive potentialities.

The second story is of a visit to the Legon campus of the University of Ghana. Besides the entrance to the Philosophy and Classics building is affixed a large plaque, donated by the German Democratic Republic, an artefact of Cold War politics that saw Ghana fete both West and East. The plaque is dedicated to Anton Wilhelm Amo, born in the early 1700s in Axim (within Ghana's present-day territory) and at the age of four taken to Amsterdam and then Lower Saxony.

Amo studied law at the University of Halle, writing, in the age of enslavement, a now lost dissertation on the rights of Moors (Africans) in Europe. Gaining his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Wittenberg, Amo then taught at Halle and Jena. He made significant contributions to materialist conceptions of the mind, body and soul relationship, as well as to empiricist epistemologies. When attitudes towards the Black presence hardened, the African-born was compelled to return to his birthplace. Amo was forgotten by – erased from? – the intellectual genealogies that subsequently spun forth Kant, with his racist anthropologies and speculative treatises on perpetual peace. But Amo is remembered, in Ghana, in the Legon School of Philosophy.

Still... an “African” philosopher? Did Amo not, after all, spend his formative intellectual years in the Germanic milieu? And was he not influenced by Gottfried Leibniz and Christian Wolff? Surely, he is better considered a practitioner of European philosophy.

The problem, of course, is the colonial imposition of the choice itself: European (thought) or African (colour). Charitably, we might consider making the colour an adjective that qualifies the purity of thought: African philosopher (in Europe). Heretically, none of this seems to be an intractable problem for the leaders of the Legon School of Philosophy. And why should it? Empiricism, materialism et al are not un-African vectors of inquiry. As if “traditional” systems of knowledge and cosmologies are ignorant of such vectors until European enlightenment. One can think empiricism and materialism through multiple knowledge constellations. Consequently, within the geographical entity now known as Europe lie provinces of thought, no more no less.

Reportedly, Amo's motto was: "he that accommodates himself to necessity is a wise man, and he has an inkling of things divine". Here, we encounter the cosmological roots of realism long before they were expressed by Niebuhr Reinhold.

With this in mind, I want to turn to the third story, set in historical Geneva, June 1936. It is the moment when Haile Selassie I, the Emperor of Ethiopia, confronts the League of Nations with its own duplicities in allowing one member (fascist Italy) to brutally invade another member (sovereign Ethiopia). The Emperor suggests that the fate suffered by Ethiopia will soon be the fate suffered by all “small states”. If Africa has always been part of the world, then World War Two begins on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1935 in the East African highlands.

Selassie I's speech has historical acuity, rhetorical force, and is theoretically rich in its utilization of two concepts that will become key to IR scholarship: “collective security” and “international morality”. Who, though, do students read for this pivotal moment in the inter-war period, purportedly sparking IR's “first great debate”? Invariably it is the English historian of Russia, E.H. Carr.

In the *Twenty Years Crisis*, written only a few years after the Geneva showdown, Carr ventriloquizes his philosophical critique of realism and idealism through the voices of white European male thinkers. The historical context that these voices emerge from and respond to is rendered as a European world mostly shorn of its colonial and imperial coordinates. The few encounters that Carr makes with these coordinates are, in the main, by way of examples rather than contributions of substance.

World-historical figures, especially Selassie I, are usually received with equal praise and damnation, and their thoughts and actions are evaluated in a multitude of ways and through a wide normative arc. That is all as it must be. The point, though, is that an English historian and expert on Russia, using abstract European thought, has been made a preferable entry point into IR than an African emperor and scholar who expertly explains the African epicentre of the inter-war crisis.

Could Carr *and* Selassie I be required readings in the first week of semester? Would that be too disorienting?

The fourth story takes us to Oceania, also known as the Pacific. Dumont d'Urville, a French naval officer, botanist and cartographer, returns from a voyage across this sea of islands in 1829 and subsequently divides its peoples into racial zones that are organized into a hierarchy of savage inclinations. Melanesia is damned; Polynesia might be saved; Micronesia is between.

Melanesia pertains to blackness, and d'Urville associates the label with Kaffirs, an Islamic term meaning "one who covers the truth", but that colonial sojourners distil into "African heathen". Teresia Teaiwa, a beloved cultural theorist of Oceania, criticises the way in which, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars began to describe corruption, violence and state failure in Pacific islands as the "Africanization" of the region.

I am presenting my book, *The Black Pacific*, at the University of Hawai'i. In the book I argue that, through the Māori prophetic traditions, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand had claimed Blackness as a liberating force against colonialism, despite being ostensibly classified by colonisers as Polynesians. I am rightfully reminded by Pacific scholars in attendance that similar dispositions exist across Oceania and perhaps with more force amongst those peoples historically classified as Melanesian.

Te Pō can be glossed as the night (or nights). It is the Blackness that we emerge from and to which we return. By colonial mandate, Black is a colour, while Africa is its (non-)space. But besides that mandate, Black is a cosmological constant. Oceanic teachings confirm that Africa has always created; and it awaits its creators.