



A HISTORY OF AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT

A Critical Synthesis

Y. G-M. Lulat



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Studies in Higher Education
Philip G. Altbach, Series Editor

PRAEGER

**Westport, Connecticut
London**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lulat, Y. G. -M.

A history of African higher education from antiquity to the present : a critical synthesis / Y. G-M. Lulat.

p. cm.—(Studies in higher education)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-313-32061-6 (alk. paper)

1. Education, Higher—Africa—History. 2. Africa—Colonial influence—History. I. Title. II. Series.

LA1503.L85 2005

378.6'09—dc22 2004028717

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004028717

ISBN: 0-313-32061-6

First published in 2005

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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working in Africa.

With deepest gratitude,
to
Philip G. Altbach,
educator and comparativist par excellence, and a mentor
to many—who probes, questions, complains, persuades,
but above all, encourages and supports.

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Preface

In the four main fields to which this multidisciplinary work belongs, African studies, comparative and international black studies (studies of the African diaspora), comparative and international education, and higher education, the number of books that deal exclusively with a unified continent-wide historical survey of African higher education amount to, amazingly (such have been the sorry fortunes of that continent even in the academic arena—see, for instance, Martin and West 1999), just one. That one book of course is Ashby (1966). Given this circumstance, then, any new work on the subject should be considered a welcome addition (however self-serving this may appear), regardless of the scope of its terrain—further justifications for its publication being superfluous.

Still, it would be of some service to the reader to know how this work differs from Ashby: it differs from it in three essential ways: temporally, geographically and analytically. That is, this work covers a much longer historical timeline (from antiquity to the present) than Ashby does; it brings almost the entire continent in its purview (Ashby's geographic focus is India and sub-Saharan Africa, but even in the case of the latter he excludes many countries); and analytically it is written from a critical perspective (by and large Ashby is an apologia for British colonial higher education policies—compare, for instance, Nwauwa [1997]). However, despite these differences, on its own terms, Ashby remains an important work; consequently this book seeks to add to Ashby, rather than to replace it.

This work differs from Ashby in another significant way: an effort has been made to situate the history of universities in Africa in a global context. Specifically, in Appendix 1 and 2 the story of the provenance of the university at the generic level and Africa's place in that story is examined. By structurally placing this particular topic at the end of the book should not, however, be taken to imply marginality of relevance in terms of the main body of the work; rather it speaks simply to the desire to lessen the burden on the lay reader who may only have passing interest in this specific aspect of African history, given the complexity and range of issues one must perforce consider when tackling this topic—for instance: the ideological formation of Europe, the Westernization of an Eastern religion (Christianity), the emergence of the Afro-Islamic civilization and empire, the East to West diffusion of knowledge in the Afro-Eurasian ecumene and the origins of the so-called scientific revolution, the global consequences of the “Columbian error” (Christopher Columbus's inadvertent arrival on the shores of Hispaniola), the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, the geographic specificity of modes of production, and so on. In other words, if the reader with an avid interest in African history generally, and African higher education specifically, were to seek guidance in reading this work then the recommended itinerary would take this sequential form: Chapters 1 and 2, and then turning to Appendix 1, 2, and 3, followed by Chapters 3 through 8. (As for all others, they may do well to simply adhere to the run of the contents listing.)

Even though history was not intended to be their primary focus, this work is also an effort to supplement the useful but brief continent-wide surveys produced on behalf of the Association of African Universities, Yesufu (1973) and Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996); and the much, much longer and detailed geographically comprehensive multiauthored volume edited by Teferra and Altbach (2003). Of the three, the last requires special emphasis; for it is absolutely in a class of its own (and one wishes there were similar works available for other regions of the world). Even though, as just noted, history is not its primary focus, the analytical depth (thirteen thematic chapters on all the major topics of relevance to higher education in Africa, ranging from finance through language issues to student activism), the scope of geographic coverage (fifty-two detailed chapters covering every country on the continent) and contemporaneity is such that it is indispensable to anyone who desires a grounding (the choice of this word here is deliberate) in the current circumstances of African higher education. The reader would be well advised to have that book handy while going through this work. In fact, omissions in this work imposed by constraints of space can be addressed to some degree of usefulness by consulting that densely printed tome.¹

As one would expect with a project that has been many years in the making (to the deep chagrin of the editors—sorry!), one is bound to accumulate heavy debts. However, there is a common tendency among scholars, while momentar-

ily in the grip of ecstatic relief at completing (such is the nature of the scholarly enterprise) what is usually nothing less than an embodiment of blood, sweat, and tears, to profusely thank all and sundry, including those only tendentiously connected with the project—such as the family dog, Toto! I will resist this temptation by making a distinction between those whose help was graciously welcome, yet without it this project would still have gone on to completion *and those without whose assistance this project would not have seen the light of day and/or were instrumental in improving its quality*; it is the latter whom I must publicly thank.

At the very top of the list is Professor Philip G. Altbach (who first suggested I write this book and patiently stayed with the project);² and next in line is my departmental chair, L. S. Williams; followed by the late L. Stewart (in Capen); and those in the dean's office, most especially M. Malamud, who together made it all possible. Very special thanks to T. M. Jennings for her assiduity and patience in taking care of the final prepress stages of production. The rest I will mention alphabetically: R. Clarke; G. Johnson-Cooper; R. V. Desforges; P. P. Ekeh; J. Heidemann; K. Henry; D. Hewett-Elson; A. M. McGoldrick; J. G. Pappas; K. L. Reid *and her extremely helpful crew at the circulation desk*; P. Stevens, Jr.; D. Teferra; the folks in the interlibrary loan department (Ann, Fran, and Sandy); the staff at the publishers, most especially E. A. Potenza; and my physicians. A million thanks guys!

I must also thank the U. B. College of Arts and Sciences for financially assisting with the preparation of the index; and the permissions and copyright department of Bantam, a division of Random House, Inc. for allowing me to reproduce a few verses of Dante's *Inferno* from Allen Mandelbaum's translation of *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Of course, it goes without saying, that profound thanks are also due to the numerous scholars, past and present, whose works I have drawn upon, or occasionally railed against, listed in the bibliographic section at the end of this work. Yes, absolutely, I take full responsibility for any errors, fallacies and misinterpretations that may still remain.³

NOTES

1. Remembering that the present is always tomorrow's history, mention should also be made here of the recent launch (in 2003) of the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* (edited by Damtew Teferra), jointly by the Boston College Center for International Higher Education in United States and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Senegal, that promises to be—judging by the several issues that have already been published—an important source of research, information, and hopefully serious *debate* on African higher education, in years to come. Note that the journal also maintains a companion website. See the website for International Network for Higher Education in Africa, an initiative of the Boston College Cen-

ter for International Higher Education, at www.bc.edu/inhea. The center also issues a quarterly scholarly newsletter titled *International Higher Education* (accessible for free through their website at www.bc.edu/cihe) that should be de rigueur reading for any one interested in issues of comparative and international higher education. Consider, for instance, one of its latest issues (summer 2005) which has two sections that are of relevance to the issues raised at the end of Chapter 8—one section is titled “Globalization, Trade, and Accreditation” and the other is titled “Private Higher Education.” Updates on the current status of national higher education systems are also available through the International Bureau of Education website (accessible by a link at the UNESCO website).

2. It is impossible to identify all teachers who have had a hand in one’s intellectual development over the course of a lifetime; however, there are some whose contribution is such that they occupy a permanent seat in that place of gratitude in one’s mind reserved for one’s greatest teachers. One such person is my teacher and mentor, Professor Philip G. Altbach. (Does he share all the conclusions reached in this work? No, of course not.)

3. One more thing: A pet peeve that I cannot resist articulating: teachers who underline personal books (and who encourage their students to do the same) ought to be put away—the habit invariably migrates to books that belong to others: such as library books! Obviously they never learned that books are sacred.

Introduction: Setting the Parameters

It is a truism that any survey of a much neglected subject, in this case a history of the development of higher education in Africa, carries the weight of its importance entirely by itself. Not much need be said further; even an introduction may be an exercise in superfluity. However, because this is a work of history it carries with it a special obligation (the accomplishment of which is one of the twin objectives of this introduction—the other is the indication of aspects of method); it is one that stems from this fact: all history is inherently a selective chronicle (at the very least for reasons of limited time and space—memory/book pages—if for no other), the composition of which, whether one likes it or not, is the prerogative of the historian. In other words, “historical truth” is always relative (though not, one must emphasize, and as will be explained later, in the nihilistic sense)—it is in the nature of the enterprise; therefore, the best that one can ask of a historian under the circumstances is to render transparent his/ her historiographical intent. It is obligatory, then, to begin this work by enumerating briefly the broad historiographical parameters that will dictate the choice of the historical record that will be highlighted in the chapters to follow.¹

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PARAMETERS

(1) The short interregnum occupied by colonialism (astounding as it may sound to many, lasting no more than a mere seventy to eighty years for much of

Africa) in the long history of a continent that spans millennia, does not embody the sum total of all there is to know about African higher education. That is, such a vast continent as Africa has had a sufficient level of cultural diversity for parts of it to boast the existence of institutionalized forms of higher education long before its Westernized form was introduced to it during the era of European colonialism. This belies the still-persistent notion (albeit no longer subscribed to by most Western academics, except *sotto voce*) best captured not so long ago—in fact in historical terms only yesterday (1965)—by that well-known British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper in his what one can only describe as a gaumless response to calls for the teaching of African history: “Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history...[other than a means to] amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe; tribes whose chief function in history, in my opinion, is to show to the present an image of the past from which, by history, it has escaped” (p. 9).²

(2) The mode of Africa’s insertion into the post-1492 trajectory of global history (see Appendix II), of which the colonization of the continent by Europe was simply an expression of its final phase, left an imprint on the development of its higher education, as on much else, that has not always been advantageous to the overall healthy development of the continent. Specifically focusing on colonialism and its impact on the development of African higher education, consider the Janus-faced character of colonial education policies (encouraging the liberatory potential of the colonially mediated introduction of education in general, even while simultaneously undermining it with educational policies ensuing from the exigencies of maintaining the colonial subjugation of the continent), Africa’s colonial education inheritance was not only quantitatively paltry, but ill-suited to the demands of escaping the straightjacket of an externally defined neoclassical economic notion of Africa’s “comparative advantage.”

(3) Buffeted by the twin scourges of proauthoritarian regimes (in part nurtured by the massively disastrous Cold War policies of the principal dyadic protagonists), and a neoliberal vision of the role of the African state vis-à-vis development held by those in the West controlling the purse strings of foreign development assistance, the postindependence history of African higher education in much of the continent highlights a continuing saga of trials and tribulations of survival and relevance. Even in the case of societies at the extremities of the continent (North Africa and South Africa), with comparatively different historical traditions from the rest, one can observe disquieting symptoms of disequilibrium, albeit for different reasons, that undermine one’s optimism for the future. In other words, the promise of a prominent role for higher education in the national development effort trumpeted so loudly in those heady days of

the first glow of the postindependence era would soon founder in the sands of the Western neoliberal obsession with the unbridling of the forces of global markets where capital has been allowed a completely free hand to dominate, exploit, distort, and destroy national economies across the length and breadth of the continent.

(4) There is an aura of unrealism in much of the literature on the history of education in Africa (and probably elsewhere for that matter) in which there is a failure to acknowledge that however much modern African elites came to demand Western secular education, it arrived in Africa as part of the colonial cultural package and to that extent it was “tainted.” In other words, colonial education, at all levels, was always a political enterprise too. As an instrument of colonial hegemony, at the very least there were efforts to use it to neutralize resistance to the colonial project, but most certainly not to encourage it. Consequently, how much of it, at what levels, in what forms, and for who among the colonized it was to be provided was ultimately a function of a deliberate political calculus (this was true at the beginning of the colonial project, as well as at the end). This is not to suggest by any means that the colonial subjects were merely passive targets of colonial educational strategies, but rather that it is impossible to view any history of colonial education (at any level) separately from the political and economic contexts in which it was situated.³ One should also point out here that because it was a handmaiden of the colonial project, the institution of higher education would acquire roles that were inimical to the long-term interest of African countries: elitism, curricular irrelevance, and so on.

(5) Historically, long before the arrival of European colonialism, those parts of Africa that possessed institutions of higher learning could boast of a tradition of higher education that included the belief that the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake was a worthy endeavor that any society would want to encourage. In time, however, following the arrival of colonialism, this approach to higher education was, by and large, jettisoned in favor of an exclusively utilitarian view of higher learning. Consequently, while to the planners of higher education during the colonial era its task was primarily political (social control), whereas during the postindependence era it has been economic (human capital), the truth is that higher education (like all education) is not so easily targeted. For it is an inherently unwieldy “weapon” that any state employing it will discover sooner or later. The reason is obvious, but somehow, time and again, it escapes the social engineers—education’s stock in trade is the human mind, which is inherently unpredictable (so unpredictable that we have a whole field specializing in it called *psychology*). During the colonial era, education in general, and higher education specifically, far from serving as a means of social control, turned out to be a source of subversion of the colonial order. In the postindependence era, even in once highly authoritarian dirigiste societies, such as that of Nasserite Egypt at one end of the continent and former apart-

heid South Africa at the other, there were limits to the use of higher education for state-engineered ends. Related to this point: no matter how logical, elegant, scientific, and efficient a particular plan may be for a higher education system or institution, at the end of the day it is politics that determine what kind of a plan will be implemented. It is not “experts” but politicians who decide what is best for society, for good or ill.

(6) Following from the preceding point, for all its ubiquity today, *formal* education (the key word here is formal) still belongs to that sector of society that in the greater scheme of things is not particularly important *in and of itself*. Educators will of course take considerable umbrage at this statement, but one has history to turn to for support. Major human transformations (empire building, economic revolutions, political revolutions, and so on) were a product of on-the-job training, not formal education. In the great pantheon of achievers, regardless of their spatial and temporal domicile, scholars are rarely to be found (and even less so in their role as scholars). This point immediately brings up the matter of the role of higher education in a national development effort (a burning issue in Africa today as different panaceas are brought out to attempt to jumpstart what is now by all accounts a failed postindependence development trajectory). The question that is often raised is in the context of scarce resources and mass illiteracy: What comes first, the provision of higher education or general national development? The truth is that neither one nor the other comes first, they are *dialectically* intertwined—meaning that while higher education can be harnessed in the national development effort, its own development is contingent upon the very same effort (but which in turn brings to the fore for consideration that entire panoply of internal and external variables that may be subsumed under the term “the political economy of development,” which range from internal political stability to global trade and financial regimes). Support for this position—which neither the detractors nor the promoters of African higher education will find to their liking—comes from considering, for instance, the cases of the following seemingly disparate countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, and apartheid South Africa.

The first four countries permit us to render moot these traditionally highlighted impediments to development: the absence of capital (Libya has plenty of it); the colonial legacy (neither Ethiopia nor Liberia was colonized in the same manner as much of the rest of the continent); and the curricular and structural imbalance in which there is an inordinate emphasis on the humanities at the expense of science and technology (Egypt has managed to correct this imbalance, in fact some may argue that it has gone in the opposite direction). The failure, so far, of countries such as Libya and Egypt to leverage (to borrow a much beloved term of U.S. businesses today) their higher educational systems in the service of growth and development—and in the case of the former amidst a plentiful supply of capital—points to the immense difficulties of prying open the international economic order purely on the back of higher educa-

tion. Tinkering with higher educational systems in themselves—as Egypt’s Muhammed Ali found out more than a 100 years ago—is but only one side of the equation (domestic and international political economy broadly understood is the other). As for former apartheid South Africa, its experience provides us with the conclusive case: Its relative economic success, compared to the rest of the continent, depended on a unique combination of political and economic circumstances that were rooted in the period when it was colonized (in the seventeenth-century, that is prior to the “Scramble for Africa,” when Europe was still relatively weak) in which higher education was not the most important variable. Yet apartheid South Africa came to boast the most developed higher education system on the entire continent—even though it was highly inequalitarian. On the other hand, going outside the continent for a moment, consider the current experiences of China and India. Their relative explosive national development effort is taking place amidst circumstances where each of them accounts for high rates of illiteracy among their populations—perhaps as much as 30% in the case of India. This fact, however, has not dissuaded them from placing great stress on higher education, including in the form of overseas study (the majority of the foreign student population studying in the United States today come from these two countries alone).

(7) The late Professor Edward Said, in subjecting an important cultural artifact, the European literary discourse on the imperium, to his ruthlessly incisive razor-sharp analytical scalpel, came away with the conclusion: “What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of the ‘mysterious East,’ as well as stereotypes about ‘the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind,’ the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples” (1993: xi; parenthetical material in the original). To turn to a different source, to the horse’s mouth as it were: In his advocacy of a Western (British) form of education for India, that nineteenth-century British Parliamentary Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay (already a legend in his day for his oratory) would comment: “I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.... It is I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England” (1935 [1854]: 349).

And the point of these two references? From men like Macaulay, Rudyard Kipling, and on to the present, apologists of European imperialism have often pointed to education (in its institutionalized sense) as among the many gifts of “civilization” it bequeathed to the barbaric and “benighted” masses of the Afro-Asian, Australasian, and American ecumenes. Their detractors, on the other hand, have legitimately pointed out that the education that was brought by im-

perialism was not in its genuine liberatory form, but rather it was a tainted form of education, aimed simply to serve as yet one more device in the arsenal of *cultural imperialism*—the effort to dominate the human mind through cultural artifacts in the service of subjugation and empire building.⁴ This argument has been best and most explicitly advanced by Carnoy: “Western formal education came to most countries as part of imperialist domination. It was consistent with the goals of imperialism: the economic and political control of the people in one country by the dominant class in another. The imperial powers attempted through schooling, to train the colonized for roles that suited the colonizer” (1974: 3). Be that as it may; the truth, however, is that the biggest indictment of the education that the imperial powers brought to Africa was not so much that it was tainted (which it was), but rather that *even in its tainted form it was not enough!* That is, there should have been more of it. To the postcolonialist crowd, this may indeed be a startling statement. To explain, in the context of Africa at any rate (this argument, perhaps, may not be applicable to other parts of the European colonial empire—Asia, for instance), the colonial powers did not make a sufficient concerted effort (except at the very end) to cultivate a vibrant *indigenous* capitalist class—an effort in which higher education of course would have loomed large. Imperialism was not about egalitarianism and social justice; it was certainly not about socialism; it was about capitalism. However, the tragedy is that even on these (its own) terms, it came up very short. The helter-skelter effort made toward the end, on the eve of independence, to develop universities merely left the excolonies with a “castrated” elite incapable of masterminding the development of their countries; for in the one most important area it was powerless: the economic sphere. The outcome of this circumstance was anticipated long ago by Fanon; in describing the characteristics of the postindependence African elite, he observed: “Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neocolonialism.” He continues, “In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth” (1978 [1961]: 152–53). The legacy today, of course, of this belated birth of what Fanon labels as the “national bourgeoisie” is all too evident: an elite consumed with what he called decadence, *but without the means to sustain it* because of its lack of ownership of capital—especially in its productive sense (after all some of the petroleum-producing countries in the north of the continent do own considerable amounts of capital), the outcome of which has been circumstances ranging from rampant self-destructive rent-seeking and kleptomania to political disintegration.⁵

On European Colonialism and Education

(8) The subject of colonialism and its legacy raises a broader problem of historiography (as it has been unfolded in the pages of this work), which can be described this way: Although the duration of the time period occupied by European colonialism in the history of the continent, is, as already indicated, a short one, it has to be conceded that its legacy (a topic of discussion in the concluding chapter) has proven to be anything but short; in fact, it endures to the present day. Consequently, it is necessary to consider the following key features of the *generic* Western colonial enterprise that shaped everything else that ensued, *including the development of colonial higher education*.

(a) We can begin by observing that at the heart of every colonial enterprise, and modern Western colonialism was especially marked in this regard, is the commandeering of the actual or potential resources of the colony—whatever form they may be in: human, land, flora, fauna, and so on—for the development of the colonizing (metropolitan) entity.⁶ Further, that this objective must be met, at least over the long-run, without provoking permanent debilitating resistance from the colonized, but on the contrary must elicit their cooperation (even if only grudging), and to this end the following two are essential prerequisites: the exploitation should not be so severe as to jeopardize the colonial enterprise itself (the goose must not be killed), and yet, at the same time, the exploitation of resources should provide a sufficient largesse such as to permit the inclusion of a significant enough part of the colonial population in its expropriation—specifically the part destined to play a compradorial role.

(b) Although some of the literature on colonialism in the latter half of the twentieth-century (up to the present) has correctly pointed to the enormous human and other costs to the victims of the colonial project in the colonies, one should not forget that European colonization also exacted a heavy price from the rank-and-file citizenry (the masses) in the metropole, as well. For, given that the Western colonialist project took place during the era of capitalist imperialism (as distinct from the “imperialisms” of the precapitalist era—such as that of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, etc.), the principal beneficiaries of that project in the metropole, in relative terms, were primarily the transnational capitalist enterprises (such as the British South Africa Company, or the *Compagnie Française de l’Afrique Occidentale*) and their ruling class allies, and not the majority of the citizenry as a whole (the working classes and the peasantry). Under these circumstances—and especially against the backdrop of an era when Western countries were beginning to be buffeted by the winds of democracy, thereby bringing to the fore the matter of accountability of actions undertaken by the state—the cooperation of the citizenry in both the financing of the project (taxation) as well as the donation of their bodies in those instances where resistance in the colonies needed to be overcome by military means (soldiers), required the deployment of what may be termed as a “persuasion packet” comprising three basic components: coercion (e.g.,

mandatory conscription), economic incentives, and ideology. The last two were generally fused together in the promise of upward mobility *while engaged in undertaking moral good*, which was expressed, in turn, through five avowments: the colonial project would enhance economic growth at home, which consequently would create jobs (employment) and overall prosperity for all; it would provide opportunities for a better and a richer life through emigration to the colonies (colonial settlement); it would enhance the status of the nation in an increasingly competitive world—economically and politically—(nationalism); it would permit the work of God to be carried out (Christian proselytism); and it was a morally desirable undertaking because it would allow the backward and the primitive to become civilized (“white man’s burden”—Christian charity).

The last requires further elaboration; for, the ideology of the “white man’s burden”—which on the surface may appear to be riddled with the naivete of do-gooder innocence but yet at its core rests on a potent combination of racism and self-aggrandizement—has in fact proven to be particularly enduring in various guises, and has never really been jettisoned completely by the West, to this day.⁷ Among the earliest manifestations of this component of the Western colonial ideology in Africa arose with the Western colonial projects in Islamic North Africa (beginning with the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt). The West would argue (vide: Napoleon’s proclamation mentioned in Chapter 2) that the European colonization of the Islamic countries was an act of altruism aimed at freeing the populace from, on one hand, the tyranny and oppression of the traditional Muslim rulers (e.g., the Ottoman Mamluks), and on the other, the economic backwardness that these rulers had imposed on their countries. In other words, colonialism was not only an altruistic response to oriental despotism (read Islamic despotism), they argued, but that it was a response that was *invited* by such despotism.⁸ What is more, the truth of this reasoning, they felt, was self-evident in the inability of these countries to militarily resist the West. (In this twisted reasoning so characteristic of the architects and champions of the Western imperialist project, the inability to resist imperialist aggression was itself presented as a justification for the very aggression.) Now, while objectively it may have been true that these were the conditions prevailing in Islamic Africa, *they were significant only in the context of the post-1492 transformations that Western Europe was undergoing and which were propelling it toward global hegemony* (see Appendix II). Despotism or no despotism, the source of Western imperialism lay within the West; it had nothing to do with the conditions prevailing in Islamic Africa (or the rest of Africa for that matter). There is also, of course, the small matter of these same post-1492 Western transformations underwriting the relative economic backwardness of the Islamic countries in the first place on the eve of European colonization!⁹ Anyhow, the veracity of the foregoing (regarding ideological justifications) was demonstrated by the refusal of the colonial powers (such as the French) to permit the further devel-

opment of the preexisting *madrasah* system (with one or two exceptions—as in Tunisia), not because they were educationally inefficient (which they had now become as a result of colonially mediated changes in society at large), but for fear that it would be an incubator of oppositional movements.¹⁰ Moreover, even when the French did begin to develop an alternative secular education sector, it was a half-hearted endeavor at best.

Of the several forms that colonialism took (colonies, protectorates, spheres of influence, trust territories, etc.), the protectorate and the trust territory were considered by the West as the truest embodiment of Western altruism as represented by the concept of the “white man’s burden.” Western colonial powers promised to assist the protectorate to modernize and thereby facilitate, in due course after an appropriate dose of tutelage, its elevation to a level *almost* commensurate with other “civilized” (read Western) nations; in other words, unlike in the case of a “true” colony, the stated objective was not permanent occupation and emasculation of the target.¹¹ It was always made clear to all interested parties, from the very beginning, that the colonial presence would be transient. While such a belief may have been genuinely present among some of the ideologues of the colonial project, the truth, however, lay elsewhere. For one thing, the unrealism of such declarations was evidenced even on the ideological terrain alone by the inability to indicate the fount of this newly discovered altruism—recall that in the case of Islamic North Africa specifically, it was a region that once (and some may argue that this continues to be the case today) hosted societies that were implacable enemies of the West.

However, it is when considered from the perspective of the national purse (which, except in the rarest circumstances, has little patience for altruism) that the truth readily surfaces. A protectorate was acquired for the same fundamental reason as a colony, to enhance the economic wellbeing of the colonizer directly (if the protectorate happened to have known actual or potential natural and human resources) or indirectly for geopolitical benefits.¹² Ergo, the difference between a colony and a protectorate was in essence simply a matter of difference in approach at realizing this same objective. In the case of the French this difference was captured in the concepts of *assimilation* and *association*. Now, one of the elements of the concept of association was the principle of *indirect rule* where the indigenous rulers were not swept aside, as the logic of a colonization project would have dictated, but were permitted to continue governing, but under the watchful eye of the colonial power and on terms set by its agenda (the authorship of which was the exclusive preserve of the colonial power). There were two obvious benefits of this approach: it was, in relative terms, highly cost effective; and it was easier, again in relative terms, to command acquiescence from the target. It is against this backdrop that we must evaluate the objectives of, for example, the French in seeking to preserve the traditional *madrasah* system (even if they may have attempted to tinker with it here and there in the interest of structural efficiency) for the masses, but while

also encouraging, simultaneously, some modicum of alternative secular education for a tiny elite that they hoped would play the necessary compradorial role in the colonial (protectorate) project.

(c) While keeping the foregoing in mind, when one examines, for example, the colonial histories of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Algeria on one hand, and Nigeria, Guinea, and Benin on the other, following on Thomas (1994), a significant historical fact that is too often forgotten when surveying European colonial practices in Africa (and elsewhere for that matter) becomes readily clear: that colonialism was not a unitary totality. That is, whether or not one buys Thomas's central thesis that "colonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress[; r]ather, colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process; its discoveries and trespasses are imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives; even what would seem its purest moments of profit and violence have been mediated and enframed by structures of meaning" (p. 2), it is true that even when considering the colonial practices of a single colonial power there were meaningful differences among competing models of colonialism that grew out of a dialectic between the nature of the *temporally specific* forces in the metropole that believed in and demanded the implementation of the colonial project, and how those who were to be colonized reacted to the project. From the perspective of higher education, specifically, these differences translated into, for example, how the different colonies experienced the presence (or absence) of colonially mediated higher education—immaterial of sharing the common denominator of a single colonizing power.¹³

(d) Inherent in the logic of colonialism was expansion; that is, colonies were a precursor to the expansion of the metropole—geographically, economically, politically, and culturally. Therefore, directly ruled colonies were a transient stage on the path toward their eventual economic and cultural absorption by the metropole—which even if not envisaged at the beginning, in the end that is the strategy that was pursued by most Western colonial powers in the face of nationalist struggles for independence.¹⁴ Now, if possession of colonies was to be a transient phase then everything was to be done to ensure continued political, legal, economic, and cultural linkages (both institutional and ideological) between the colonies and the metropole, so as not to disrupt the actual and potential avenues of advantage established during the colonial phase that the metropolitan transnational capitalist enterprises enjoyed vis-à-vis emergent indigenous, postindependence enterprises (as well as enterprises from other rival metropolises); and, further, where there were colonial settler populations, their interests too be preserved. In other words, and most especially in the context of the spiraling Cold War that emerged at the very time that the winds of political independence were about to blow across the continent, it was of absolute importance to the ruling classes of the West that their former colonies in-

herit ideologically like-minded compradorial ruling elites—one need not be a rocket scientist to deduce the importance of a metropolitan inspired higher education in this regard—who would develop their newly independent countries along the path of stable compradorial capitalist democracies, and not along some radical alternative path, such as that represented by the totalitarian bureaucratic socialism of the then USSR (or China or even Cuba). (Some have termed the relationship that such connections embodied as one of modern imperialism or *neocolonialism*.) Notice also that even the Cold War was couched in terms of the “white man’s burden”: the Africans (as well as others in the PQD world) needed to be saved from the scourge of evil atheistic communism.

(e) While this work hews to the theory of the primacy of the economic in explaining the modern Western imperialist project—acting as both a motivator *and* a facilitator (the latter in terms of the necessary resources without which no such project could have ever taken off the ground; something that those who overly emphasize the ideational aspect of the project tend to forget)—it is still necessary to also draw attention to the ideational dimension of the project since it is that dimension that helped to grease the wheels of imperialism, so to speak, both at home and in the colonies.¹⁵ To elaborate, colonialism also required, on one hand, the cultural domination of the colonized in order to obtain voluntary compliance with their political and economic subjugation (that is once they had been militarily brought to heel—a brutal and bloody process termed euphemistically as pacification), and on the other, an ideological justification for the project at home, as just mentioned above, so as to elicit the acquiescence of the citizenry to the massive expenditures (of both public monies and the lives of the working class soldiery) necessary for implementing the project. Concentrating now on the first aspect (cultural domination), it made sense that one of the most important instruments to effect it was colonial education. By means of colonial education, the ideologues of the colonial project often argued, the colonized could be molded into compliant colonial subjects; yet there was an inherent contradiction buried within this strategy: too much of it could lead to recalcitrance, not compliance, because of the very nature of education—its potential to liberate the mind, especially with the acquisition of its core instrument, literacy.¹⁶ There was also, however, a more mundane consequence: The demand for jobs by graduates commensurate with their educational certification. To take care of the potential for both these deleterious outcomes (which in practice would have taken the form of rebellious nationalism on one hand, and on the other, competition for the colonizer’s jobs), colonialists adopted two basic strategies with varying levels of success: truncate and constrict the metropolitan curriculum upon its transplantation to the colony and at the same time place artificial barriers on the educational ladder by providing minimal or no access to postsecondary or sometimes even postprimary education. As Gosnell (2002: 46) puts it with respect to French colonial education policy in Algeria: “Encouraging the intellectual development of Africans would

be like giving sweets to a child: they might taste good but would ruin his digestion."

In Islamic Africa, however, it should be further noted, the colonialists were faced with a third problem: how to neutralize the oppositional potential of an existing education system, the madrasah system. The solution to this problem was sought in one or more of these strategies: starve it off resources by confiscating the *waqfs*; enforce a new curriculum in the system; abolish some of the institutions altogether; freeze it in a precolonial timeframe by preventing its further evolution in terms of content; develop alternative colonially controlled institutions (complete with ulama on the payroll of the colonial state); and, perhaps the most effective, refuse to recognize madrasah education as legitimate for all secular sector employment.¹⁷ The French (and to some extent the other colonial powers as well, British, Italians, and so on.) pursued one or more of all these strategies in Afro-Arab Islamic Africa. In the end, of course, they, like all authoritarian regimes, discovered much to their consternation, that education, counterintuitive as it may seem, was a clumsy instrument of social control. No matter how tightly they may have managed educational provision in terms of content and quantity, somehow, sooner or later, some of its products rose up to bite the hand that fed them.¹⁸ For, it is the products of the colonial education institutions who eventually rose to challenge the very colonial system itself and provided the leadership for its overthrow, sometimes violently and sometimes peacefully.

(f) Given the simultaneity of the following two of the many necessities of the colonial project: political and cultural domination on one hand, and on the other the conquest of its inescapable dyadic logic, resistance (since no society will voluntarily accede to any form of colonial subjugation), acquiescence by the colonized to their domination (their pacification) required the brutalization of their cultures (in the same way that their political subjugation had required the brutalization of their bodies by way of military defeat).¹⁹ In practice this entailed the construction of the racist ideological edifice of social Darwinism—the fallacious application of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to human societies to justify the equally fallacious biologically deterministic division of humanity into hierarchic categories of race, class, gender, and so on, and whose policy consequences would in time include such horrors as the eugenics movement in the United States and the final solution of the Nazis—to underwrite the policies necessary to secure this brutalization.²⁰ To construct this edifice the ideologues of the colonial project turned for help to two principal sources to provide them with the requisite arsenal of racist stereotypes: the discipline of anthropology (which even at the best of times, like psychology, is a suspect discipline considering that its stock in trade is human difference, actual and manufactured—recall that, as a discipline, it began its life in the nineteenth-century on the back of *scientific racism*); and the phantasmagorical tales of the world outside Europe found in travelogues of those European travelers

with unusually fertile, and may we add, sexually repressed minds.²¹ Now, from the perspective of education per se, social Darwinism provided the justification for the tainted form of education that was exported to the colonies in the first phases of the colonial project, which was usually referred to as adapting Western education to local conditions.

Now although the term adapt (and adaptation) occurs fairly frequently in colonial education literature generally, it is very important to distinguish between the two senses of the word in which it occurs historically (for one was far from benign compared to the other). In one sense it was used neutrally to mean the same as that defined by any dictionary, which in relation to education referred to the modification of some features of a transplanted education system (pedagogy, texts, language of instruction, and so on.) to suit the specific circumstances of the recipient of the transplantation on purely legitimate pedagogic grounds. In another sense, which is of particular relevance here, its use implied that the system was to be adapted to suit, on one hand, the mental capabilities of an entire people—judged to be an intellectually inferior people (namely blacks and other colonized peoples)—and on the other, the subservient political and economic status of the same people relative to their colonial masters. In other words, adaptation meant subpar educational provision of Western education to blacks and others on both racist and political grounds. The study by Reilly (1995) provides an excellent example of what this meant at the policy-level in anglophone Africa where he traces the linkages in the first decades of the twentieth-century among the racist ideas of three contemporaries: Thomas Jesse Jones, J. H. Oldham (a British missionary official with great influence on matters of colonial education in British government and missionary circles) and Charles T. Loram (a white South African educator and one time government official whose influence on educational policy in South Africa vis-à-vis black South Africans was just as profound), which were the basis of educational policy for blacks in the U.S. South and in British colonial Africa in the early part of the twentieth-century. Reilly explores in his study how the social Darwinist beliefs of these three came to influence educational provision for Africans in the British colonial Africa generally and in South Africa specifically. That is, all three were firm believers in the *Hampton/Tuskegee model* of education where the primary objective was to increase the productive value of black labor through vocational education, but at the same time deny them access to academic education available to whites so as to keep them subservient to white overlordship (constituting the same recurring theme that has marked the entire history of black/white relations in the post-1492 era: racism as the handmaiden of capitalism and white privilege).

The Hampton/Tuskegee model, as King (1971) who did a seminal study on the subject, explains, rested on what was once euphemistically called industrial education. The ideological underpinnings of this form of education is summarized by him as the “disavowal of all political ambition on the part of the Ne-

groes, and a readiness to stay in the South as a steady labor supply" (p. 8).²² Among the clearest statements of what this model meant, however, is to be found in a massive two-volume study of the status of African American education that was done by Thomas Jesse Jones for the Phelps-Stokes Fund and which was published by the U.S. government's Bureau of Education division of the Department of the Interior a year after its completion in 1916 (U.S. Government 1969 [1917]).²³ In that study Jones laid out, though not in so many words, the problem: unenlightened whites (especially in the U.S. south) did not seem to see any value in the education of African Americans; on the other hand African Americans hungered for education, but of the type (literary academic education) unsuited to their political and economic circumstances: against the backdrop of a rural agrarian economy in which most African Americans were mired as cheap labor, one that was shorn of their civil rights in the context of a rapidly evolving Jim Crow driven neofascist political order (though that is not exactly how he described these circumstances).²⁴ A policy for African American education needed to address two problems; that whites needed to be persuaded in the value of educational provision for African Americans, and the latter needed to be persuaded in the value of an education (industrial education) that did not encourage them to challenge their political and economic circumstance. (Note the uncanny similarity to the education problem in British colonial Africa during the same period.)

(g) Looking back at the rapidity with which most of Africa became independent of colonial rule in the late 1950s and early 1960s (replicating, interestingly, roughly the same speed with which it had been dismembered and colonized at an earlier time), there is a tendency to assume that the colonial powers had all along intended it to be so. The fact that the colonial powers were just as surprised as their subjects at this development. Yes, it is true that they had stated that they did not wish to rule the colonies forever (with the exception, perhaps, of the settler colonies), but neither did they plan to vacate Africa so early and so quickly. After all, the war that had been fought against fascism in Europe (1939–45) by Britain, the United States, and other Allied countries, and in which many colonized peoples (including Africans) participated on the side of the European colonial powers, was, despite the propaganda of the Allies, a war fought for the freedom of only the European nations—not the colonized elsewhere. Hence, hopes of liberation from European colonialism that the colonized had begun to entertain as a result of participating in World War II on the side of the Allied forces and lending credibility to documents such as the *Atlantic Charter*, were to quickly founder on the rocks of post-World War II reality in which a new war was about to emerge between the United States and its allies on one hand, and the Soviet Union and its allies on the other: the *Cold War*.²⁵

Initially, then, the commencement of the Cold War, as the 1940's came to a close, would be accompanied by a renewed effort on the part of the European

powers to cling to their colonial possessions, even as they began the long and arduous task of rebuilding their own war-torn countries, and even after having saved themselves from the same fate that they were now so keen to continue foisting on other peoples. In this ignoble task, however, they would have behind them the unexpected, tacit, and sometimes overt support of the United States. From the point of view of the United States, the struggle for freedom and democracy in the colonies, it was felt, could only lead to expansionary opportunities for its Cold War opponent, the Soviet Union; therefore such struggles had to be opposed. Consequently, many colonies in Africa and Asia discovered that contrary to wartime promises made, or expectations falsely engendered, freedom from colonization would entail their own mini-world wars. Colonies ranging from Vietnam through India to Algeria all found themselves involved in various types of bitter, anticolonial struggles in which thousands among the colonized would perish.

Yet within a decade of the beginning of the Cold War (1947–48), most of the colonies in the Afro-Asian ecumene had been granted independence (with the exception of a few, such as the Portuguese colonies in Africa). Why? They had underestimated the resolve of the colonial subjects to end their subjugation; that is in the face of an increasingly intransigent nationalism in Algeria, India, Vietnam, and other places a war-weary, self-weakened Europe found it prudent to release their colonies from formal bondage—and in this task, as an additional motivator, they had the constant pressure of the Soviet Union who had begun to emerge as the champion of the colonized elsewhere even as it hypocritically built its own imperial empire in Eastern Europe. *However, in retrospect, one may boldly venture that perhaps both the nationalists and the European powers were in error in committing so quickly to decolonization.* Independence was not accompanied by a sufficiently gelled political and economic institutional framework such as to give it the kind of stability that would be necessary to undertake the arduous task of development. Higher education is a case in point. It is only when it became clear that independence was just around the corner that the colonial powers began to hastily develop and implement plans for a proper higher education system closely patterned on theirs. All notions of the supposed inferiority of the black intellect suddenly evaporated—nothing but the best would now do. It is against this backdrop that one must view the accelerated development of higher education on the eve of independence.

(h) It is in the context of these principal characteristics of the Western colonial enterprise that one must examine the development of higher education in all of colonial Africa—not just *British colonial Africa*. Now, while the ground-level details of its path of development, as will be shown in the chapters ahead, varied on the basis of place, time, and the colonial power in question, the basic underlying determinants of this path were fairly uniform throughout the continent.²⁶ The most salient of which were these (listed in no particular order; plus

some, be forewarned, are contradictory given the specifics of the historical trajectory that unfolded in both the colonies and the metropole over the approximately 150 years of colonial rule in Africa):

- The subjugation and domination of the African people, both physically and mentally, that constituted the colonial project was facilitated at the *ideological* level by the colonial belief that the Africans were an intellectually inferior people, forever destined to be “drawers of water and hewers of wood”; therefore, while educational provision was necessary, it did not need to be elevated beyond the basic (elementary schooling).
- The logical desire by Christian missionaries, who in many cases were the first to enter the arena of formal education in the colonies, to control the agenda of education for the purposes of facilitating their own missionary objectives meant, in practice, opposition to secularization of higher education—in fact they advocated a very attenuated form of higher education—one primarily targeted at the provision of rudimentary ecclesiastical (priests) and primary school teacher training.
- In colonial settler Africa, the lopsided class competition between the colonial settlers (who, in the colonial context, as a group constituted an elite) and the emerging but dominated African nationalist elites, manifest through racially bounded struggles over the means for upward mobility, resulted in pressures to deny Africans opportunities for access to higher education—an important avenue for upward mobility even during the colonial period.
- The need to reduce the administrative expense of the colonial project required the training of some Africans (especially in areas without colonial settler populations) for administrative and teaching positions, even if low-level; which therefore necessitated the provision of some form of higher education.
- There was a metropolitan reluctance to encourage the full development of higher education given its view, at the policy-level (for both racist and economic reasons), that African colonies were economically destined to, on one hand, serve as markets for mass consumer goods cheaply produced by the metropole, and on the other, as contributors of natural resources and agricultural inputs to the metropolitan economy. (In other words, economic development among the African colonies was not envisaged, even in the long-run, in terms of industrialization—regardless of economic sector: manufacturing, agriculture, science, and technology, and so on.; with the exception, to a limited extent, of the mineral extractive sector.)
- Regardless of which approach was used in implementing the colonial project, *indirect rule* (British colonial Africa) or *assimilation/association* (in the rest of colonial Africa) the logic of these approaches demanded provision of higher education for the Africans; however in the face of such realities as settler pressures, racism, incipient nationalism, etc., this logic was often resisted.
- The combination, on one hand, of Christian missionary proselytism (which provided Africans access to a common language and literacy in places where it did not exist—with the ensuing desire for more secular knowledge, etc.), and on the other, colonialist activities (which helped to erode traditional agrarian economies, and to some degree, particularistic ethnic/linguistic boundaries) in time led to the emergence of a new African elite, a nationalist elite, that in the face of blocked economic and political opportunities came to demand modern higher education as a means for

advancing their economic, nationalist, and trans-nationalist (Pan-Africanism) agendas.

- The realization in the metropole that the probability of granting formal independence to the colonies sooner than expected under the twin pressures of the political-economic fallout from World War II and rising African nationalism—required putting into place cultural strings that would continue to bind the former colonies to the metropole (e.g., development of higher education with institutional linkages to metropolitan higher education institutions), especially against the backdrop of the growing Cold War international rivalry among the post-World War II emergent powers (e.g., China, United States, the Soviet Union).
- In their demand for higher education that was qualitatively no different from that available in the metropole—given the triple pressures of pragmatism (job hunting), modernization (the desire to acquire authentic symbols of modernity), and racism (as a response to centuries of racist propaganda and innuendos regarding their intellect), the Africans insisted that they did *not* wish to be shielded from what others of a later generation would label as “cultural imperialism.”
- The rational desire by the metropole to institute *regional* higher education institutions for reasons of optimum allocation of resources (economies of scale) floundered in the face of intra-regional competition among the colonies during the colonial period, as well as in the postcolonial period (notwithstanding the Pan-Africanist grandstanding of many African nationalists).
- The demand by Africans, which was supported by the metropole as logical, that in the absence of *graduate*-level education in the foreseeable future in the newly independent former colonies required overseas study in the metropole for those wishing to pursue studies at that level, in turn meant that academic standards and structures within the former colonies had to be closely patterned on those of metropolitan institutions to ensure the smooth academic transition of the student.

ISSUES OF METHOD

In identifying the foregoing themes, it should quickly become clear that it is an exercise that highlights a fact about history that historians are generally loath to admit to: that perhaps more than any other discipline, history can never aspire to be neutral; it is by its nature always a contested terrain (however one wishes it to be otherwise). As already noted, the truth is that truth in history is relative. That is, there is no such thing as historical truth because all histories are a form of myths, not in the sense that historical facts are manufactured in the minds of historians (which sometimes does happen of course), but in the sense that histories by definition carry with them the inherent biases of the historians who produced them—emanating at the minimum from such factors as the historian’s ideological world view; the impossibility of considering every known historical fact; the interpretive significance one adduces to a given historical event; the fact that history is always tentative, that is a permanent work in progress given the constant potential for new facts to come to light as new documents are discovered, new archaeological findings emerge, and so on.²⁷

Now, if all histories are myths then the real task is to determine which of the competing myths is the most analytically cogent.²⁸ In other words, it does not imply a nihilistic relativism—a symptom of which, as the late Maxine Rodinson (2002: 116) wryly commented, is the mistaken assumption that one has a license to “surrender to [one’s] favorite ideology since subjectivity will permeate [one’s] scholarship anyway.” After all, as he further reminds us: “If I say there is no truth, how could I argue that this very statement is true?” It ought to be pointed out here that this work has not relied on a single theoretical approach (from the perspective of method). Whether it is the Marxism of E. P. Thompson, or the postmodernism of Jean Baudrillard and Raymond Williams, or the *Annales* approach of Fernand Braudel and Marshall Hodgson, or the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, or the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and Robert Berkhofer, or even the empiricist positivist approach of conventional historians, the stance adopted has been that they all have something to contribute toward the inherently multifaceted task of historical knowing. None of these methodological approaches alone possesses the golden key to the strong room of correct or authentic historiography. What is more, in the case of those like the poststructuralists one must be especially wary of their ideas of what constitutes correct historiography considering that their true vocation, as intellectual eunuchs, is not history per se but the study of the fictitious outpourings of others.²⁹

Consequently, it is necessary to render transparent the methodological signposts that have guided the writing of this work. (1) Writing nearly 700 years ago, the celebrated Afro-Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, observed in his *Muqaddimah*: “History is a discipline widely cultivated among nations and races....Both the learned and the ignorant are able to understand it. For on the surface history is no more than information about political events, dynasties and occurrences of the remote past....The inner meaning of history, on the other hand, involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events” (Khaldun 1967, Vol. 1: 6). It is this latter trait, in addition to the obvious trait of a careful examination of sources, that encompass the concept of critical history in this work. In other words, the critical part in the book title is not an attempt at making the title a little jazzy. Rather, it speaks to two basic elements of method in this work: an iconoclastic approach to cherished shibboleths and a critique of power relations (understood in their broadest sense), in terms of both the sociology of the production of knowledge (here one means, for example, examining the ideological underpinnings of questions asked, conclusions reached, etc., and the historical data itself—for instance the actual course of development on the ground of higher education at a given moment).

(2) Although the conventional nation-state approach to history has been retained in this work, it is tempered by a global approach as well. That is, taking

a leaf from Ibn Khaldun's historiographical method (which, notice, long predated that of the French *Annales* school), this work assumes that a history of an institution written from the perspective of so broad a canvas as an entire continent (which in its geographic expanse can gobble up Argentina, China, Europe, India, and the United States, all at once) and traversing across a huge swath of time measured in millennia, requires exploding all boundaries of time and space. To advance a thesis it may be necessary to go as far east as China or as far West as the Americas, even while Africa remains the focus of this work.

(3) Although the geographic (country-by-country) approach constitutes the principal format of this work, a special effort has been made to lend it an explicit comparative dimension in the analyses that accompany it. There is good reason for this: it is forced on us by the very project itself; for a history that traverses huge temporal and geographic boundaries willy-nilly precipitates questions of a comparative nature. Yes, it is true that every society is unique unto itself, rendering comparisons a foolhardy exercise; still one can carefully negotiate the minefield of generalizations to emerge with useful conclusions. What is more, it is by means of the comparative method that, quite ironically, one can nullify glib generalizations. Consider, for instance, the problem of student political activism. The failure to date to emerge with a coherent unified theory to explain it, despite its ubiquity in Africa (and to a lesser extent elsewhere—in Asia and Latin America), must be credited to the analytical obstacles thrown up by the comparative method. The suggestion, for instance, that student political activism is likely in the context of weak political institutions is negated by the experiences of apartheid South Africa. Or alternatively: that a society with deep grievances and contradictions will attract student activism is belied by the experience of the former Soviet Union, which did not experience a Tiananmen as a prelude to its disintegration. Or the suggestion that weak political states are susceptible to student activism is nullified by the experiences of Egypt. To give another example: no continent-wide survey (and the emphasis here must be on continent-wide) of any topic, including higher education, can fail to throw up the mind-numbing realization that regardless of colonial heritage (British, French, etc.) and regardless of geography (north, south, east, and west), Africa continues to bear the marks of the mode of its absorption into the post-Columbian European-dominated global economic system (see Appendix II); symptomatic of which is the current circumstances of the continent where peace and prosperity are rare far-flung isolated islands amidst an ocean of interminable chaos and misery—highlighted by this sobering fact: the majority of the world's most war-torn and poverty-stricken countries are congregated in Africa. One can go on.

(4) It is a truism that history is written by conquerors. Historical works that examine Africa's history covered by the colonial interregnum (which in strictly temporal terms is no more than a mere blip in the continent's long history) can cover acres, to exaggerate somewhat; but works for other periods while grow-

ing are much, much fewer in number. While there are good logistical reasons for this (accessibility of written records for one), it would be also true to say that it has a lot to do with what is considered as worthy history. In this work there is a conscious effort to go beyond the colonial period. Since this is a history of higher education that falls primarily within what one may call *macroeducational* history (one that explores the historical evolution of the nexus between education and society—in contrast to *microeducational* history that studies the history of the content of education), this has meant exploring the historical antecedents of the current state of higher education in a continent that once hosted vibrant institutions of higher education *long before Europe became the West as we know it today*.

(5) There is something deeply schizophrenic about most writings (past and present) on African history: the failure to bridge the gap, as a consequence of the enduring legacy of Eurocentric historical perspectives, between the pre-colonial and the colonial—not in terms of pointing to its existence, but *explaining* why there is this gap. That is, the identification of the processes that permitted the rise of Europe and the simultaneous subjugation of the continent, symbolic of which was the arrival of Jan Anthoniszoon van Riebeeck and his party in the lands of the Khoikhoi (1652), followed later by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798), and still later (1880s onward), the infamous "Scramble for Africa." This failure to explain rather than describe is symptomatic of the Eurocentric assumption of the naturalness of this cataclysmic historical process.³⁰ In other words, it is not enough, to take the specific example of this work, to show that Africa was not as backward as signified by the phrase the "dark continent" by describing the existence of precolonial higher education institutions and then simply jumping from there onto to a description of the development of higher education under European colonialism. True scholarship demands historiographical *analysis* not simply historical description. That is, the demonstration of African historicity carries with it the exegetical obligation to explain the gap between the premodern and the modern in the historical trajectory of a continent that would be host to two of the most advanced civilizations in the world for their time: the Egyptian and the Islamic. However, in the effort to meet this obligation one is forced to undertake considerable digression into exploration of a number of complex variables that all hinge on the basic thesis that the rise of Europe and the demise of the Afro-Asian ecumene were two sides of the same historical coin. Consequently, this task has been reserved for Appendix II. Therein, dear reader, you will find an exploration of the logical consequences for African historiography that all historians ought to confront upon establishing the historicity of the continent (the mandate of Chapter 1).

(6) A proper account of the origin and development of so important an institution as a university cannot be abstracted from the history of the society of which it is a part. Consider, for example, this truism: Institutions of higher

learning always exist at the sufferance of the ruling (or protoruling) classes for it is their progeny who are the first and (usually) the last customers. Consequently, Is it possible at all to explore the history of a given institution of higher learning without also paying heed to the social structural configuration of the day? Not really.

(7) This work is less about the history of the inner details of higher education: the specifics of curricula, calendrical structures, finance, governance, and so on, than the external society/ higher education nexus. This is not because the former is unimportant, but because one must begin by first considering the founding of higher education institutions before one can even proceed to look at their internal workings. Now, with adequate time, space (book pages), and availability of resources, perhaps both could have been treated equally.

(8) In light of the particular historical approach adopted by this work (described earlier), it is true that this can only be a work of a generalist, but certainly not a specialist. In bringing this fact to the fore, the objective is to also question that relentless movement in history departments toward ever greater specialization and where in the academic pecking order the generalist historian is increasingly looked at askance by the specialist. This is an unfortunate development, for the field needs both, neither is more important than the other. The generalist gives meaning to the work of the specialist by rescuing it from the domain of academic navel-gazing; which also implies, conversely, that without the contributions of the specialist the generalist is left with nothing but conjectural story-telling. (This tension is akin to the one between basic research versus applied research in the sciences.) Moreover, there are dangers in over specialization; vide the warning by Rodinson (2002: 117–18) to the Orientalists, which is just as applicable to other specialists:

The demands of specialization and the desire for career advancement—both all-pervasive elements—have contributed to the Orientalists's self-satisfied acceptance of their academic ghetto. While specialization is obligatory to the conducting of serious and profound scientific work, *it tends at the same time to promote a narrow and restricted vision*. Concentrating on an academic career and on the interests of the profession is replete with attractions and dangers: the gratification obtained from recognition, the prestige of earning honor and degrees (not without personal material advantages), the excitement of struggles for power—power the scope of which is wretchedly limited but the possession of which arouses passions worthy of a Caesar or a Napoleon! It is probably inevitable that self-interested career advancement increases the distortions already caused by specialization” (emphasis added).

This problem of course also touches on another sort of generalist versus specialist tension: the disciplinary versus the interdisciplinary approach. Again, given the objectives of this work, it cannot be but interdisciplinary. Anything less would be to emerge with a highly simplistic historical picture.

(9) The historiography in this work has a penchant for multicausal explanations of major historical events. However, this approach may render one open to the complaint that all one is doing is generating a laundry list of factors (everything, including the kitchen sink!) without really explaining any thing; In other words, it is symptomatic of an unsophisticated view of history. This matter brings up a problem historians face all the time. Cain and Hopkins (1993: 51) in defense of their monocausal thesis in their magnum opus that seeks to explain the origins of British imperialism identify it this way:

We can all agree that complex events are likely to have complex causes. By drawing up an impressive list of candidates, historians can readily display their scholarship, and by including everything they can protect themselves from hungry critics on the prowl for omissions. The trouble with this procedure is that it can easily redefine the problem instead of solving it. To accept the infinite complexity of historical events is not to acquire immunity from the obligation to select some segments of evidence rather than others and to judge their relative importance. The appeal to multicausality can easily degenerate into an attempt to duck this challenge by referring to the need to avoid the errors of monocausality and determinism.

In this work, the multicausal explanations offered attempt to circumvent this problem in this way: to include only that set of variables that is of sufficient significance to render the explanation hollow with the omission of any one of them. That is, by assembling all the variables together and then by a process of subtracting/adding them it is possible to emerge with only the ones that are worthy of constituting the multicausal explanation. Obviously, others will have to judge the degree of success achieved in the effort. The truth is that, whether historians like it or not, history does not unfold neatly (except, perhaps, in their books). It is almost impossible to emerge with monocausal explanations for major historical events that transcend huge temporal and geographic boundaries. Consider for example the problem of explaining the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, which was an important precursor to the "Scramble for Africa." Are we to simply subscribe to the explanation advanced by Eric Williams (1994 [1944]) with his emphasis on the economic (and mind you his explanation is highly persuasive) or should we go with Drescher's multicausal explanation in which the movement of the abolitionists and their allies (e.g., the working class) is also an important constituent part (see Drescher 1999). About the significance of the latter: recall that at the time when the anti-slavery Brussels Conference of 1889–90 took place, at which all the major powers of the day (the United States and Turkey included) were gathered, the slave trade was still a highly lucrative enterprise—especially, by that point, within Africa itself.³¹

Does it not make sense, instead, to argue that both philanthropy and politics on one hand, and economics on the other, had a part to play? That is, whereas the first abolitionist was that first unfortunate soul grabbed off the shores of

Africa, the dream of abolition would not come to pass for at least another 300 or more years in which while the antislavery philanthropic spirit was also never absent, it is only after major economic transformations had transpired (as a result of which slave labor was not only increasingly unnecessary but inimical to Western economic interests) that leant concrete political meaning to the philanthropic movement of the abolitionists. In short, demands that were once considered unreasonable became reasonable not because the moral and philosophical reasoning behind them had changed, but the social context had changed—in this case the mode of production. To give another example, Can one seriously produce a monocausal explanation for the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States (after all, *Brown v. Board of Education* had already been won by the NAACP lawyers by time the movement began)? Which historian, today, would deny that the successes (or failures) of large-scale social movements are always a function of the dialectical interplay between *agency* and *structure*—the latter expressed by the conjuncture of fortuitously propitious historical factors. One other point on this issue: on a different plane, the problem of multicausal versus monocausal explanations is often (though not always) an expression of the specialist versus generalist problematic explained earlier.

(10) Of what use is a book on a history of higher education? In an age of fragmented knowledge where history is just but one discipline among many how easy it is, sadly, to think that it is irrelevant to our lives (even though events that contradict this assumption are always before us).³² Still, one cannot dismiss the question. After all, this book has been written for a number of audiences, among whom are also policymakers. So how can history (or in this case a history of higher education) help them? While history has many uses, the least of them is that it has lessons to teach us (in the vein of that *mythical* saying, those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it). Human beings are incapable of learning lessons from history (otherwise we would not, for example, have wars today) for the simple reason that each so-called lesson is contingent upon the specifics of the historical circumstances in which it occurred. History can be useful in a different way, however—in a way that is analogous to the medical history that doctors require us to give them. History permits us to understand how the present came to be the way it is, and on the basis of that knowledge we may, perhaps, attempt to forge an alternative future. The present is always a product of history, but as humans we have the capacity not to be imprisoned by that history. To point to another analogy—the logic behind the appointment of *truth and reconciliation* commissions. Whatever else their limitations may be, through catharsis and forgiveness they help to write, *on the basis of history*, a new future. However, Kallaway (who explicitly deals with this question as well) suggests a possible alternative use, with which I have no disagreement: “At best historical research can reveal the complex, contradictory reality that policymakers have to somehow accommodate

and transform. A historical perspective should provide a warning to those who are inclined to resort to narrow, dictatorial strategies that emerge from 'neat, internally consistent models' by 'indicating deep-seated trajectories of change and it helps to suggest which policy frameworks have a chance of succeeding and which are completely inappropriate'" (2002: 6).

However, there is something else to which Kallaway also alludes: While it may be self-evident to historians, it is much less so to educators that the ubiquity of institutions of higher learning today must not blind us to the fact that they represent among the highest achievements of civilization. And it is precisely for that reason their history cannot be abstracted from the history of the very civilizations they are a part. To delve into the history of institutions of higher learning is to confront the story of civilization itself in all its complexity. Those of us who are privileged to be a part of them today owe it to both our students and ourselves to know something of that rich and complex history—which includes an appreciation of the blood, sweat, and tears that accompanied the sacrifices of our progenitors. From this perspective, the study of a history of higher education does not require any justification (for it is part of who we are as educators and as beneficiaries of the learning that comes out of them).

(11) At some points in this work, some readers may deem the language as too emotive for a scholarly treatise. There are occasions in history when an effort at an *aseptic* account of events does not necessarily translate into desirable critical scholarly objectivity, but on the contrary, a barely concealed subjectivity. One such occasion from recent memory are the killings in Rwanda; another are the killings in Bosnia; and another of course is the holocaust in Nazi Germany. Have we forgotten so soon the *killing fields* of Cambodia? Is an aseptic account of these *horrendous atrocities* possible without demeaning the memory of those who perished? The same applies to the colonization of the Afro-Asian and American ecumenes by Western Europe over the course of some 400 years (from around 1500 to around 1900). That the events took place a long time ago should not in any way lessen the magnitude of the revulsion that any civilized person should feel toward these events; we owe it to the millions who died over the centuries, and who, recall, had never done anything to merit the brutality that was unleashed on them, *to describe it as it really happened* (sugar coating the events with aseptic language constitutes gross injustice—it leaves one siding with the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity). Even in more recent times the killings did not end: Is it possible to describe aseptically the unleashing of poison gas on the Ethiopians by the Italians in the course of their invasion of that country in 1935? Or the experiences of blacks under apartheid in South Africa? Is it possible at all to describe aseptically the torture, murder and imprisonment of hundreds of school children (some as young as eight or nine) by the apartheid regime at its height of madness? That the loudest cries for an aseptic rendition of this history comes from the very people whose forbears were at the heart of these events should alert one to the possi-

bility that there is something more going on here: the refusal to confront the truth and thereby grapple with its moral and philosophic consequences. The usage of labels such as pacification (compare with today's favorite term of the U.S. military—whose stated policy, incidentally, is not to keep a count of the enemy dead—collateral damage) by historians does not constitute critical objectivity. On the contrary, it is not only a shorthand way of writing off human beings as mere thrash that had to be swept aside in the interest of an imperial agenda (and to add insult to injury, justified by the hypocritical ideology of the “white man's burden”—we must slaughter you in order to civilize you!), but a shameless exercise in prostituting one's intellect.³³

Jargon

While still on method, a word or two about jargon. Higher education as a term in this work refers primarily to that part of an educational system comprising universities and degree-granting colleges. However, when one goes back into history, in the absence of all other forms of higher education in a given society, higher education may also mean any postprimary level education (e.g., secondary-level education, teacher-training). Very often higher education institutions proper developed out of rudimentary lower-level institutions—as was the case historically in medieval Europe, for instance. To take another example, the once much-celebrated University of Makerere in Uganda began life as a vocational school, with a total of enrollment of fourteen day (in contrast to residential) students—all young males—in the founding year of 1922, that offered courses in just three subjects: carpentry, building arts, and mechanics.³⁴

Following upon the excellent work of Lewis and Wigen in their *Myth of Continents* (1997), an effort has been made in this work to dispense with two egregious terms: the “third world” and “developing countries.”³⁵ The normative hierarchy implicit in the term third world is simply unwarranted in this day and age. Moreover, it is an erroneous term now given the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the rapid erosion of communism in China (the so-called second world). As for developing countries it simply does not make sense today (if it ever did). New categories are needed to designate the different levels of economic development.³⁶ While any categorization will, to some degree, be arbitrary, it must do the best it can to come as close to reality as possible without, however, becoming so unwieldy that it loses its user-friendly value; but certainly any thing is probably better than the current scheme that lumps, for example, Burkina Faso and Djibouti in the same category with Brazil and India or Ireland and Hungary with Germany and United States. Toward this end, five categories appear to strike a proper balance: predeveloping (e.g., Burkina Faso, Jamaica, Zambia); quasi-developing (e.g., Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa); developing (e.g., Brazil, India, Poland, Russia, South Korea); developed (e.g., Australia, Canada, Denmark); and over-developed (e.g., Britain, Ger-

many, United States). Sometimes, where necessary, in the text these five categories will be collapsed into two primary divisions expressed as: pre/quasi/developing (PQD) countries, and over/developed (OD) countries.³⁷

From the perspective of Afro-Arab Islamic Africa specifically (and the argument applies to Ethiopia as well), given its intellectual and religious heritage (described in Chapter 1 and in Appendix I), the concept of modernity must be disentangled from the two other factors associated with this concept: secularism and Westernism. That is, one must make a distinction between *modernization* (the possession of a scientific rationality in the political/ economic/ technological domains—Hodgson's technicalism—see Appendix II), *Westernization* (signifying the influence of a Western Christian-inspired European culture: language, cuisine, clothing, holidays, entertainment, etc.); and *secularization* (the absence of an overarching religious value system). On the basis of these distinctions, to underline the foregoing, one may conjecture the following illustrative permutations: Secularization is possible without modernization or Westernization (as is evident in Turkey for example) where the key distinguishing factor is the jettisoning of Islamic religious values. Westernization may involve only the acquisition of superficial Western cultural accoutrements but not necessarily modernity (such a development is usually manifest by acquisition of Western materialist culture at the consumption-level but not the production level); and modernization does not have to involve wholesale Westernization (as has been the case in some of the Asian countries) or the abandonment of Islamic religious values.³⁸ Anyhow, the relevance of this fact stems from the observation that local elites (then, as today) in Islamic Africa failed to see this distinction in their demand for secular education for their progeny, which in reality turned out to be a quest for status that they hoped would not only be commensurate with that of the colonial elites, but would also distinguish them from the rest of the masses. Yet, even if we may concede that their motivations in this regard were not so calculating; and therefore the source lay elsewhere—namely, their belief that the relative backwardness of their countries was surely a function of religion, specifically Islam, they were even in this regard as much in grievous error as those who take a similar stance today, both in the East and in the West.³⁹ The condition of underdevelopment and all the attendant ills are surely a misfortune of not simply Afro-Arab Islamic Africa, but non-Islamic Africa too. In fact, one may broaden this observation to a global-level and point out that both Islamic countries and Christian countries—for example, those in Latin America and the Caribbean—and even Buddhist countries are plagued by this misfortune; the fundamental source of which will be explored in Appendix II.

Of the many concepts used in this work, there is one that is of such importance that it deserves special mention at this early point: the concept of *dialectic*. It is a concept that is not uncommon in philosophy, but it is not that philosophical meaning of the word that is of direct relevance here. Rather, its use

in this book is more generic in the sense that it denotes the process where two seemingly unrelated factors impinge on one another *cyclically* such as to permanently render the fate of each, to be in the hands of the other. For example: factor A impinges on factor B such as to change factor B and thereby enable B to impinge on factor A, which in turn is altered, enhancing its capacity to continue impinging on factor B. Now, B is further altered, enhancing its capacity to continue impinging on factor A—and so the cycle continues. Still on jargon: for specialized terms appearing in the section dealing with higher education in Afro-Arab Islamic Africa, a glossary has been provided at the back.

STRUCTURE AND SUMMARY

Now, having laid out the broad parameters of historiographical intent and method, there remain two other matters to attend to: an outline of the structure of the book and a succinct summary of this work (if such a thing is possible considering the vast terrain that the book has been required to cover by the subject matter). The structure of this work is governed by both geographic and thematic perspectives. The geographic focus is to be found in chapters 3 through 6 in consonance with the division of the continent, for purposes of this work, into three broad regions: Afro-Arab Islamic Africa (Chapter 3), anglophone Africa (Chapter 4), and europhone Africa (Chapter 6). Anglophone Africa has merited an extra chapter because of the special historical circumstances of Ethiopia, Liberia, Namibia and South Africa (Chapter 5).

The thematic dimension of the work is handled by Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 8—in addition to Appendix 1 and 2 (already discussed in the preface). In Chapter 1, substantive comments on the central historiographical and methodological parameters of this work are indicated, while Chapter 2 explores the development of African higher education beginning in antiquity and extending into the premodern period. Chapter 7 addresses the matter of the history of foreign aid in the development of African universities over the past half a century or so, that is, in the postindependence era. Of special interest in that chapter is the now generally accepted view among scholars with more than a tangential interest in African higher education that the dominant role played by that multilateral financial institution, the World Bank, in the formation and implementation of higher education policy in Africa has been, historically, far from benign.⁴⁰ The conclusion (Chapter 8) has been assigned the task of taking stock of the legacy of European colonialism in Africa from the perspective of higher education, as well as briefly indicating what possible future may be in store for the generic public African university at a time when the relentless push toward commodification of all knowledge by the bean counters (aided and abetted by their allies, the pseudointellectual representatives of the ignorantsia), at the behest of the omnipresent globalized capital, is threatening the very concept of a

university (as traditionally understood as a hallowed institution of higher learning with a lineage that goes back centuries *engaged in the public good*).

Turning now to summation: The history of the development of African higher education cannot be separated from, on one hand, at the generic level, its provenance as among the embodiments of a civilization's pinnacle of achievements in which its evolution has truly been a function of global civilizational influences, and on the other, at the specific (African) level, the given configuration of the historical matrix of political, economic, and social factors in which such an institution is perforce embedded. Consequently, it is an institution that has been burdened, under the aegis of various political imperatives, by a variety of roles that go beyond the educational; and the successes and failures in meeting these roles have rested on a *dialectic* between the course of its development and the configuration of the given historical matrix in a specific instance. In sum, civilizations shape institutions of higher learning in as much as institutions of higher learning shape civilizations; the inability to comprehend this truism may be considered as among the root causes of the current awful predicament of most African universities across the length and breadth of the continent.⁴¹

NOTES

1. The lay person, understandably, is often confused by the term historiography; it has two meanings: one denotes the study of the writing of history (that is, as a sociology of knowledge enterprise) and the other is the explanation of history by means of theoretical analysis. In this sense, then, juxtaposing historiography against history, the latter simply denotes a description of historical events (akin to news stories); in other words, it is the datum of historiography.

2. Or consider this: in his recent published introductory text on African civilizations, Ehret (2002) is constrained to make this observation:

Africa lies at the heart of human history. It is the continent from which the distant ancestors of every one of us, no matter who we are today, originally came. Its peoples participated integrally in the great transformations of world history, from the first rise of agricultural ways of life to the various inventions of metalworking to the growth and spread of global networks of commerce....Yet traditional history books, ironically, have long treated Africa as if it were the exemplar of isolation and difference—all because of a few very recent centuries marked by the terrible events of the slave trade....That sad heritage continues to shape the envisioning of Africa today, not just in the West, but all across the non-African world and sometimes in Africa as well... Even historians themselves, involved these days in crafting courses and writing books on world history, find it profoundly difficult to integrate Africa into their global story (pp. 3–4).

There is another related matter that ought to be raised here; it concerns a form of intellectual arrogance that underlies the assumption that a single book, and one of modest length at that, can do justice to the history of higher education of an entire continent as huge and complex as Africa. Clearly, this is an arrogance that flows from the marginal-

ity of Africa in Western historical scholarship. Consider these facts: if one were to fit the landmass of Europe (excluding the former Soviet Union) and China altogether into Africa, there would be space left over for the whole of United States (excluding Alaska) and still enough to accommodate the whole of India! The small amount of space remaining would hold Argentina and New Zealand. Therefore, Africa, it bears repeating, is a huge continent (approximately 11,700,000 square miles, or 30,303,000 square kilometers)! However, the continent is not simply geographically enormous, but it also has a huge diversity of races, ethnicities and cultures. Through the complex historical processes of climatically influenced evolution, breeding, and immigration, Africa today has races, languages, and religions representative of almost the entire planet. Hence blacks, whites, browns and yellows are all represented in Africa. Moreover, no other continent has as many countries within it as does Africa—over fifty (comprising a quarter of the entire U.N. membership). Yet, this is not all; as just noted above, African history—recorded African history for that matter—spans millennia (rendering the celebration of the year 2000 a few years ago as nothing more than merely a celebration of the Eurocentric imprint on world calendars.) Consequently, the assumption that a single book can meaningfully accomplish a survey of the entire history of the development of higher education throughout the continent, from antiquity to the present—something that would be best entrusted to a multivolume work—is, to put it mildly, not only foolhardy, but smacks of, to repeat, arrogance! More importantly, it calls into question the usefulness of such an exercise. Given the exigencies of the scholarly publishing business, however, one is left with little choice other than the consolation that one has to begin the struggle somewhere. This book, therefore, dear reader, constitutes no more than the broadest of sketches of the development of higher education in Africa.

3. In fact, one can go so far as to say that all formal education in all societies at all times is also a political enterprise, intimately tied up with the extant power relations, regardless of from what perspective one views these relations: class, gender, race, and so on. Education is never neutral, however much one may wish it otherwise (see Carnoy 1974).

4. See Ballantyne (2002) for examples of other cultural artifacts in the service of the imperial project.

5. This is a problem that, on a much smaller scale of course, is not unlike one experienced by African American mayors of U.S. cities. After a long struggle for civil rights, African Americans managed to record significant successes among which their election to mayoral positions of large cities has been emblematic. Yet, no sooner had they taken hold of the reigns of political power they discovered that the resources that they needed to manage and develop their cities were not there because the gravity of economic power (always in the hands of Euro-Americans) had shifted from the cities to the Euro-American dominated suburbs and beyond. The outcome has been predictable: decaying inner cities with all their attendant ills—from homelessness to rampant crime to dysfunctional educational systems (see, for example, Massey and Denton 1993).

6. Yes, of course, it is true that not all colonial projects begin with economic objectives in the forefront—it is quite possible that initially other considerations may be paramount (security issues, rivalry with other powers, internal politics, etc.)—but at the end of the day, a colony must help pay its way (so to speak) in some manner. One is often stunned by the necessity to point out to Westerners (especially Eurocentrists), even

in this day and age, that Western colonialism at heart was always a project about exploitation at the economic-level and oppression at the political level; it was most certainly not a philanthropic project, nor was it about democracy and human rights. In fact, about the latter: it will do well to forcefully remind Westerners that colonialism was just as much a totalitarian political system as the other more well-known ones that would later emerge out of the ideological crucibles of fascism (Nazi Germany and Italy) and Leninist-Stalinism (China and the former Soviet Union).

7. Witness the U.S.-led democracy projects in Iraq and Afghanistan—formerly havens of oriental despots. Perhaps the most boldly articulated embodiment of the “*white man’s burden*” was the mission civilisatrice of the French, which one French colonial governor, Raphael Sallers, described it thusly as late as 1944, at the Brazzaville Conference:

Evidently, the purpose of our civilization is to bring civilization to others. So we civilize, that is to say, we are not content to provide merely a surplus of material wellbeing, but we also impose moral rules and intellectual development. And by what methods and according to whose example should we do this, if not by our own methods and according to the example of our own civilization, in the name of which alone we may speak? For what authority would we have to speak in the name of the civilization whose people we are trying to improve? (from Shipway 1999: 142).

Note: The phrase “white man’s burden” comes from an 1899 poem of the same title by Rudyard Kipling, which was the notion that Europeans had a divinely mandated duty to free Africans (and other colonial peoples) from the prison of heathen darkness and savagery by bringing them into the light of Christian civilization and modernity. (In the U.S. context, this “responsibility” with respect to Africa, from the perspective of African Americans, took the form of the project for “African redemption.”)

8. Compare with the subsequent arguments made by the United States and the British to justify their invasion of Iraq in 2003 once it became clear that the Iraqis did not possess weapons of mass destruction after all (the original justification for the invasion).

9. As Cherif (1989: 448, 476), for instance, observes: “it would be futile to look for the causes of the problems of nineteenth-century North Africa in purely local circumstances and to attribute these difficulties, as has been done in the past, to one-sided considerations such as the archaic nature of society, secular backwardness and the defects peculiar to the civilizations of North Africa—and not to those of Europe—in general.” In other words, Cherif argues further: “Sooner or later, and with varying degrees of violence, each of the countries of the Maghreb was subjected to the same process, one which led from autonomy to dependence. It is therefore useless to seek the reason for this collapse at the local level in the errors committed by a particular ruler or in the unscrupulous behavior of a particular European agent. A single external factor, namely the expansion of Western capitalism, sealed the fate of the Maghreb, just as it sealed the fate of the rest of the non-European world.”

10. In the end, as it turned out, their fears were not entirely unjustified. For, although the decolonization literature usually provides centrality to the role of the comprador elite (the nationalists) in anticolonialist struggles, if we take the example of Afro-Arab Islamic Africa, we notice that sections of the traditional Islamic elite (the ulama) played a role in this struggle too (just as sections of it, like the nationalists, played an

opposite role—cooperating with the colonialists). Take the instance of Algeria, the French attempt to completely emasculate Algeria culturally (and of course even spatially) ran into the wall of Islam. A religion that had such a pervasive role in the lives of their societies, and given the backdrop of the Crusades in their collective memory, could not be simply dismissed out of hand by a relatively brief interregnum the colonial period constituted. In other words, among the traditional institutions, the madrasah system—the haunt of the ulama—also played a role in fomenting anticolonial sentiments and inspiration.

11. Racism dictated the presence of the qualifier “almost.”

12. It ought to be noted here that in ascribing motivations to the colonial project (what ever forms it took: outright colonization, imposition of protectorates, declarations of spheres of influence, etc.) what is most important at the time decisions were made was perceptions more than actual facts on the ground. That is to say that even if later it was proven that the colonial project in respect of a specific acquisition turned out to be economically unsound (in terms of hard numbers: the value of surplus extraction minus the cost of acquiring and maintaining the colony averaged annually over the life of the colony) that fact was irrelevant in terms of the original decision; belonging as it is in the category of hindsight. To be sure, economics alone, at first glance, was not the only motivator in the case of specific acquisitions; however, in the final analysis it was (even if it turned on simply strategic interests, like protecting an economically important route to some other part of the world).

13. What is also being suggested here, at the methodological level, is that the study of colonialism can elicit the most fruitful insights when it is approached by a tripartite comparative method: temporal (e.g., pre and postindustrial capitalism); competing models (e.g., settler colonialism versus trusteeship colonialism); and contrasting national styles (e.g., French versus English, or *indirect rule* versus direct rule).

14. The absorption was only in a hierarchic sense—the colonies, even in the postindependence period when nominal political control by the metropole had been terminated, would always remain the metropole’s hinterland.

15. Who can doubt, for example, that the jingoistic rise of French nationalism within Europe (shaped to some extent by the traumatic psychological fallout emanating from such misadventures as the Franco-Prussian War (July 19, 1870–May 10, 1871) and the subsequent loss of Alsace-Lorraine—not to mention the earlier Napoleonic debacles at the Battles of Trafalgar (October 21, 1805) and Waterloo (June 18, 1815)—had a major ideological impact on the political calculus of the architects of the French colonial project as visions of a grand French empire continued to dance in their heads (even if this time it meant going outside Europe altogether). In fact, Lucas (1964: 26), among others, is explicit on this: “In 1875, French pride was still deeply wounded by the loss of Alsace-Lorraine [it was regained permanently only after World War II] in the Franco-Prussian War.... Then a group of politicians led by Jules Ferry saw a way to divert French attention from Alsace-Lorraine, and at the same time to demonstrate French vitality to the world: France would regain prestige and grandeur by conquering a new colonial empire. Discreetly encouraged by Bismarck, France set out to acquire her largest empire in history: Indo-China, North, West and Equatorial Africa.”

16. Take the example of British colonial Africa, the educational policy—which was forged, as Reilly (1995) has shown, in the colonial education laboratories, of Ireland,

Jamaica, the southern U.S. and British colonial India—that would be pursued in that part of Africa was a dual pronged policy where on one hand education would be aimed at increasing the productive capacity of the servile masses without encouraging among them notions of upward mobility, and on the other a small cadre of Fanonian compradorial elite would be nurtured to assist with maintaining the colonial order (but in the case of neither group would education be permitted to encourage demands for freedom). The task regarding the latter was best described by Thomas Macaulay of colonial India's Supreme Council and head of the Committee of Public Instruction in 1835: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 1935 [1835]: 349). Yet there was a contradiction in such a policy that did not entirely escape the colonialists themselves; as one of them would astutely observe: "If well directed, the progress of education would undoubtedly increase our moral hold over India, but, by leading the Natives to a consciousness of their own strength, it will as surely weaken our physical means of keeping them in subjection" (from Carnoy 1974: 92). One may also note here parenthetically that even after independence had been achieved, the essential principle underlying the original colonial education policy—increasing the exploitive value of labor without encouraging revolt—would never be completely abandoned and in fact remains the unarticulated part of the mission of African higher education to this day (this time at the behest of globalization, which, in truth, is nothing more than a pseudonym for old-fashioned postindependence Western imperialism).

17. See Ruedy's discussion of these strategies in relation to the Algerian experience for example to see how these strategies were implemented (Ruedy 1992). Note: A glossary of key Islamic terms has been provided at the back of the book.

18. Examples of this phenomenon are legion even in noncolonial contexts: Communist China, the Communist Eastern Europe, Occupied Palestine, apartheid South Africa, and so on. Take China, for instance, in the context of its highly regimented education system, it would appear that on the face of it Tiananmen should have been an impossibility.

19. Colonialism was rarely a peaceful affair. While it is impossible to know precisely how many throughout the Afro-Eurasian and American ecumene were murdered in the course of implementing the Western colonial project, in the nineteenth-century alone, a combined figure of a half a million per year average would not be far fetched (see Ahmed 1992).

20. The functions of racism were complex; on one hand, it was used directly to justify colonialism (the colonized were an inferior peoples—their inferiority was attested to by their cultural and physiognomic difference as well as their failure to resist their colonial subjugation in the first place—hence not only they did not deserve the natural resources they possessed, but they were destined to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for Europeans), and on the other, it was used to underwrite policies (e.g., in the area of education) that were instrumental in justifying and maintaining colonialism ("white man's burden"). Generally speaking, the former function held sway where permanent colonial settlement was the desired end, while the latter was relevant to those situations (such as in the case of protectorates) where permanent settlement was not an immediate objective.

21. Two basic approaches by Western anthropologists had proven particularly fruitful on this matter: the study of the behavior of the oppressed (but, tellingly, minus its structural determinants); and the biological determinist-driven study of physiognomy. Taking Britain as an example, they studied the urban poor (who were classified a separate race by the upper classes), and the Irish (arguably the first colonial subjects of the British) and concluded that the ills that plagued them (including poverty, unemployment and homelessness) was attributable to their racial inferiority! On the basis of their spurious findings they emerged with their racial hierarchies where the wealthy Anglo-Saxon male was placed at the pinnacle, and subject peoples in the colonies in North America, and later elsewhere, at the very bottom (and their own poor, the Irish, Jews and other Europeans, in between). A similar line of thinking also developed in France, well described by Cohen (1980). By the middle of the nineteenth-century, to turn to the second approach, they came up with the “science” of *phrenology* and *craniometry* (also well described by Cohen). Specifically, they argued that the supposed lack of cultural, economic and political achievements among blacks when contrasted with that of the Europeans spoke to their status as inferior beings—which was proven by the fact that they differed physically from whites in their skin color, facial and skeletal structure, and above all the size of their crania. The last was considered particularly important because it was suggested, falsely, that cranium size determined brain size (and hence intellect) and a comparative study of the crania of blacks and whites, they again falsely argued, showed that the latter’s was bigger than the former’s. Not surprisingly, the collection and measurement of skulls became an important activity of European anthropologists, with the European skull serving as the benchmark for the norm. Statistical measurement of skulls as a way of indicating everything from a propensity for crime to class origins to gender roles and above all racial hierarchy soon gave rise to the fields of craniometry and phrenology. European physical anthropologists came to believe that through such measurements they could scientifically prove the existence of a racial hierarchy among humans. In an age when scientism was all the rage who could fail to accept these scientific findings. With the coincidence of this age with the age of Western imperialism (scientism was in fact nurtured by this imperialism), it is little wonder that racism among European intellectuals (let alone the European masses) became firmly entrenched (and continues to this day, in various guises, to shape their thinking on almost all matters of relevance to peoples outside Western Europe—vide Eurocentrism, see Appendix II). As for relevant names, those familiar with the literature on the subject will recognize the following as among the many *dramatis personae* of social Darwinism and racist anthropology: Louis Agassiz, Charles Davenport, William Edwards, Franz Joseph Gall, Francis Galton, Comte de Joseph-Arthur Gobineau, Samuel Morton, Herbert Spencer, and William Graham Sumner. Considering that the issue of race often tends to be neglected in discussions of the ideological provenance of colonial thinking and policy by Western historians in general (by both, those on the left and the right), especially when writing about colonial education, the reader may wish to pursue the subject further by consulting the following sources: Asad (1991); Cohen (1980); Curtis (1968); Himmelfarb (1983); Lorimer (1978); Mangan (1993); Pieterse (1992); Reilly (1995); Said (1993); Smedley (1993); Shipman (1994); Stocking (1982 1988). (See also the discussion of the Hamitic theory in Chapter 2.)

22. There is a profoundly sad irony in the origins of this model; as will be evident in

a moment, an African American came to play a pivotal role in its genesis, a man by the name of Booker T. Washington. The Tuskegee Institute (to be also called Tuskegee College, and today continues on as Tuskegee University) began its life as a teacher training college in a place from which it took its name; it was established in 1881 by the state of Alabama. The Euro-American trustees of the college appointed Booker T. Washington to head the new institution upon advice from his mentor Samuel Chapman Armstrong—the Euro-American brigadier general who had been in charge of African American troops during the U.S. Civil War and who, with philanthropic help, had founded in 1868 Tuskegee's precursor, Hampton Institute, to train recently emancipated African Americans in the industrial arts. Taking Armstrong's educational philosophy (known as the Hampton idea) of combining training in practical vocational skills with Christian morality, a strong work ethic, and a deep sense of gratitude toward and humility before one's (white) benefactors, Washington developed it further almost to the level of a religion. Faced with the reality of an unrelenting, brutal and ever-spiraling terrorism unleashed on African Americans by Euro-Americans under the aegis of the protofascist Jim Crow laws that came to govern the South in the postreconstruction era—among the hallmarks of which was the routine gruesome murders (lynching) every year of innocent African Americans by the score all over the South, as well as anyone else who dared to oppose these laws, by Euro-American mobs dressed in their Sunday best (so as to obliterate the recently won civil and human rights of African Americans in the service, at the core, of that age-old problem of Southern agrocapiatists, access to a plentiful supply of cheap labor)—Washington took to heart the Hampton idea and publicized it with even greater fervor by politicizing it. Note: for a visual history and the historical significance of lynching see Allen, Als, Lewis, and Litwack (2000); Apel (2004); Dray (2002); Tolnay and Beck (1995); and Wells-Barnett (1997). Arguing that the road to the recapture of civil rights by African Americans did not lie in political agitation, but exemplary hard work and Christian morality, Washington would immortalize himself by that oft quoted line in a speech he delivered on the occasion of the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895 (to which he had been invited to speak by its Euro-American organizers), that came to be known as the Atlanta Compromise:

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down among the 8,000,000 Negroes whose habits you know.... [For]...you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen....In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one has the hand in all things essential in mutual progress. (Washington 1985 [1895]: 151–52)

Earlier in the same speech Washington had told his mainly Euro-American audience that because of ignorance and inexperience, African Americans had been in error, following emancipation, in pursuing the very top instead of beginning at the bottom: "that a seat in Congress or the State Legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden" (p. 150). It is not clear whether Washington sincerely believed in what he preached as he went around the country; or, like a politician, he was

merely grandstanding and telling his (usually Euro-American audience) what they wanted to hear (surely, a man as astute as Washington must have known that the economic salvation of African Americans he was championing was dialectically intertwined with their political salvation; that is, in the contradictory world of a capitalist racist democracy, one was not possible without the other). What is clear, however, is that against the backdrop of Jim Crow, the Euro-American establishment heard what they wanted to hear; they would reward him accordingly through gifts to "his" Institute—as well as personally to himself (materially and otherwise). To put the matter differently: his—perhaps understandable—pragmatic response to Jim Crow terror was fortified by the dialectic between the growth of Tuskegee, together with his personal stature, and his advocacy of uncle tommyery. In other words, then, until the civil rights movement came into being in the late 1950s, Tuskegee became the educational beacon of the hat in hand, "yes Masah!" uncle tom strategy of grappling with the always potentially volatile black/white race-relations in the United States, and in colonial Africa. Little wonder then, that patronizing white liberals like Thomas Jesse Jones and Charles T. Loram (who mistook their racism, like so many white liberals of today, for wholesome liberalism—recall that neither had ever publicly championed opposition to Jim Crow or apartheid), together with those blacks like James E. Kwegyir Aggrey who aspired to fill Washington's (uncle tom) shoes, became fervent advocates of the Hampton/Tuskegee model and philosophy. Yes, of course, there was a touch of hypocrisy in all this; for none of the fervent advocates of industrial education would have risen to the commanding heights of the world of black education (which had given them the opportunity to prescribe industrial education for others) on a diet of that same education; on the contrary, they had received (and/or self-taught) the same liberal classical education that they did not wish others to have!

It goes without saying that even in its day, the Hampton/Tuskegee model was not received with equanimity by everyone; it drew considerable criticism from some sections of the black community on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, men such as W.E.B. DuBois saw the model for what it was—an attempt to create an obedient conservative black underclass unwilling to challenge the Jim Crow status quo. Writing some decades after the founding of Tuskegee, he would comment:

The system of learning which bases itself upon the actual condition of certain classes and groups of human beings is tempted to suppress a minor premise of fatal menace. It proposes that the knowledge given and the methods pursued in such institutions of learning shall be for the definite object of perpetuating present conditions or of leaving their amelioration in the hands of and at the initiative of other forces and other folk. This was the great criticism that those of us who fought for higher education of Negroes thirty years ago brought against the industrial school (DuBois 1996: 417).

In Africa, harsh criticism by some was also reserved for people like Aggrey. For example, when the Phelps-Stokes Education Commission visited South Africa, James S. Thaele, a leading pro-Garvey African National Congress official in Cape Town, who himself had studied in the United States, described Aggrey as "that theologian whom, in the American terminology, we simply dismiss as 'a me-too-boss-hat-in-hand nigger'." Many black South Africans were especially incensed at statements such as the following

by Aggrey: "In this year of 1921, the spirit of the union, of British justice, is in this land; it is being felt now as never before because of the War and because of the restlessness. What we need is some great messiah of the Anglo-Saxon race to rise up and give fair play and reciprocity. I have dedicated my life to see that we work for cooperation. I pray that before long South Africa will be the best place on earth for white and black; so that Great Britain may lead the whole world; that the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and a little child may lead them" (Hill and Pirio 1987: 229). Reilly (1995) has suggested that Aggrey's role in British colonial Africa was the same as that of Booker T. Washington's in the U.S. South—as an antidote to black nationalism. (For a biography of Aggrey, who would later become the principal of Achimota College, which was commissioned by the Phelps-Stokes Fund, see Smith 1971 [1929].) At the end of the day, as King (1971: 258) points out, the very notion that "the Negro could by education be immunized against politics," was foolhardy indeed. It did not work in the United States and neither did it work in Africa; for education by its very nature is always subversive.

23. The Phelps-Stokes Fund was founded in 1911 through the generosity of the granddaughter of Daniel Lindley (a U.S. missionary who had worked in South Africa), Caroline Phelps-Stokes, following her death two years earlier. The Phelps family, as the name suggests, was closely linked to the transnational corporation, Phelps-Dodge Corporation. In her will, she had specified that the income from the endowment that was the fund was to be expended for a number of social welfare purposes as well as "for the education of Negroes, both in Africa and the United States....through industrial schools" (from United States 1916 [vol. 1]: xi). See King (1971) for more on the education-related work of the Fund in the United States and in Africa.

24. Jim Crow refers to the racial segregation that had existed *de facto* in the United States prior to the Civil War (primarily brought about as a result of the massive immigration of the European working class and peasantry to the United States in the early 1800s) that became *de jure* following the abolition of slavery with the return of the former confederate governments to power in the post-Reconstruction era (effected through the use of terror—see Nieman 1991) in spite of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. constitution that had firmly established the civil and human rights of African Americans. The power of an alliance of white agrarian and urban capitalist classes in the U.S. South bent on restoring as many features of the old slave order as possible, operating through such terrorist groups as the Ku Klux Klan, was such that not only did they systematically and brutally disenfranchise African Americans (and other blacks), but managed to create a political and legal environment in which the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the legislative intent of the amendments—by means of a ruling in an infamous case called *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) that came up with the bogus concept of separate but equal. (The concept would not be overturned until its ruling in another case, *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954]). However, like its counterpart, apartheid (in South Africa), Jim Crow evolved to be more than simply racial segregation; it was a neofascist political order, a protototalitarian system in which the civil and human rights of those whites who opposed racial segregation (albeit a tiny minority) were also wiped out. The term Jim Crow itself is said to originate from a song sung by an enslaved African American owned by a Mr. Crow and overheard and later popularized (beginning in 1828 in Louisville) by Daddy Rice (Thomas Dartmouth Rice) through the medium of

black minstrel shows—comedic song and dance routines performed by whites in black-face based on highly demeaning negative stereotypes of African Americans. The song's refrain went:

Wheel about and turn about
And do jis so,
Ebry time I wheel about
I jump Jim Crow

For more on Jim Crow the following sources considered together should suffice: Allen (1994), Nieman (1991), Patterson (2001), Pfeifer (2004), Watkins (1994). (See also the resources at the website www.jimcrowhistory.org.)

25. The Atlantic Charter was a press release issued on August 14, 1941 (following a secret meeting on a ship off the coast of New Foundland between U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill), had made reference in Article III to the right of all peoples to self-determination of government, and freedom. Even though the charter was formulated with the European peoples in mind, elites in the colonies, in bouts of grandiose optimism, looked upon the document as the death knell for imperialism everywhere. The United States was perceived by many Asian and African leaders as the harbinger of their freedom. This was an illusion; for, as Noer (1985: 17) has correctly observed, the United States did not really include the European colonies in its rhetoric on self-determination, freedom, and human-rights. (Of course, in a very different sense, both Britain and the United States were indirectly responsible for the present freedom of these former European colonies. One only has to surmise with horror what their fate would have been had the Germans and their fascist ally, Italy, won the Second World War.)

26. Those that were specific to a region (as in the case of say Afro-Arab Islamic Africa) are covered in the appropriate chapters below.

27. To highlight the biases that plague Western history, consider Glubb's comment on Islam (which in the pages that follow will consume some of our attention):

I have referred on several past occasions to the extraordinarily narrow prejudices which, for many centuries, have governed the teaching of history in the West. One of the deepest of these prejudices has been the omission of the history of the Muslim nations from the syllabuses of schools and universities. This omission was doubtless based on the hatreds bred in the long wars between the Muslims and the Christian West, from the rise of Islam in the seventh-century to the dominance of Europe in the seventeenth—a 1,000 years of struggle for power. Today, perhaps, some people are ready to admit that true history is the history of the human race and that the great Muslim nations of the past contributed generously to the culture of the West today. But prejudices imbibed for so many centuries die hard. Historical works on Greece, Rome and Europe continue to increase on our bookshelves, but works on the past history of the Muslim nations are few and far between (Glubb 1973: 7).

28. In fact, the difficulties that plague the historian's craft are highlighted by considering a problem that is rarely addressed by historians, if ever: that life is full of most amazing coincidences. Consequently, what a historian may ascribe to a set of events as a product of deliberative human agency may simply have been an outcome of a coinci-

dence and no more!

29. For accessible summaries of these and other approaches to historiography see Berger, Feldner, and Passmore (2003); Cohen and Roth (1995); Green and Troup (1999); and Stuchtey and Fuchs (2003).

30. The forcefulness of this point is brought up every time I ask my students the question: Why is it that it was Africans (and not some other people) who were enslaved in the Americas? The usual answer I get is because they were black. Of course, this problem is part of a wider one: the continuing marginality (with a few exceptions) of Africa in Western-authored world histories (see the summative discussion, for instance, by Eckert 2003.)

31. See Miers 1975 for a fascinating account of the conference, its antecedents and the consequences of the Brussels Act (General Act for the Repression of African Slave Trade)—signed on July 2, 1890. (The text of the Act is reproduced in Miers as Appendix 1, pp. 346–63.) In addition to the sources mentioned, see also Carrington (1988); Solow and Engerman (1987); and Solow (1991) for more on the debate concerning the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade.

32. Compare the ongoing spirited effort to rewrite the history of a U.S. presidency (Reagan) even before its principal architect's dead body has turned cold. In fact, just the other day, a student exasperatedly blurted out, "you can't change history, so why do we have to learn it?" A birthday marks a historical event. Why do you celebrate your birthday? (Gifts... Ahhh gifts).

33. How powerfully enduring the ideology of the "*white man's burden*" is can be assessed by even a cursory examination of the rhetoric in the West (especially in the United States) surrounding the recent U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in which countless thousands of innocent civilians, many of them children, have perished.

34. It is from such inauspicious beginnings that the university would eventually emerge. For more on the institution see Chapter 4.

35. They, of course, systematically expose the ridiculousness and the inherent political nature (Eurocentric) of other terms as well, such as the Middle East. Consider, Morocco lies west of England; How then can Morocco be viewed as part of the so-called Middle East? In any case, Where does the East begin and the Middle East end, or where does the West end and the Middle East begin—especially on a spherical planet? The term Middle East, it may be noted, arose to solve two ideological problems facing Latin Europe: how to marginalize, on one hand, Communist Europe (considered part of the East), and on the other, Islamic Mediterranean/ Red Sea region (also considered part of the East). "The most popular solution has been," they state, "to designate a new entity, the Middle East, and to give it quasi-continental status as an interstitial area linking Europe, Asia and Africa" (p. 63). However, to take on all of the current meta-geographic misuse in this work would place undue burdens on the reader. One has to leave part of the struggle, then, for another time.

36. Leys (1971: 32), writing more than three decades ago pointed out the problem: "The very expression developing countries has come to sound embarrassing precisely because it so obviously rests on the linear conception [of development] and sometimes refers to countries which are in fact stagnating or even regressing." (For more on the concept of linearity, exemplified by the Rostowian take-off trajectory, see Chapter 7.)

37. Of course, no one ever dares to admit, be it academics or politicians, the inher-

ent dissemblance that undergirds such terminology—that in order for all to achieve the much sought after status of developed we would need the resources of three or more planet earths combined since the present status of the over developed is being maintained on the basis of their consumption of more than two-thirds of the world's resources (even though they constitute a mere one third of the world's population).

38. The phenomenon of the resurgence of the so-called Islamism today in most of Afro-Arab Islamic Africa (and elsewhere) is but a symptom of this definitional difference which the West has missed in its myopic analysis of the situation, positing it as a phenomenon of incomprehensible religion-inspired “civilizational luddism” that harks back to a medieval era.

39. However, the temptation to pursue such an erroneous line of thinking is so strong that it continues to be publicly articulated. Witness the remarks of the former head of the Anglican church in England, Lord Carey, at a talk in Rome on March 25th, 2004, in which he linked Islam with inherent backwardness. (News story available at www.bbc.com.)

40. Those who choose to read only Chapter 7 but not the rest of the work, and even then only cursorily, may come away somewhat confused. See endnote 110 in Chapter 3, as to why.

41. One other matter, which appropriately belongs to notes: This work is replete with numerous and sometimes lengthy explanatory notes. The point of raising this readily observable fact? As an expression of the anti-intellectual and anti-scholarly tradition that runs through the entire 350-year history of our plebian dominated intellectual culture in this country (itself an expression of the station in life that most of our immigrant forebears sprang from) we often have an exasperated impatience with notes. But if the text of (especially) a work of history can be likened to a tree, then the notes are the leaves without which the text is reduced to a limp, simplistic and less than vibrant rendition of the subject matter. For, the nuances of the complexity of a subject such as history (especially one with a topic that attempts to cover, at a considerable risk of pretentiousness, an entire continent, and not only that, but with a timeline that ranges from antiquity to the present!) simply cannot be captured entirely in the text without seriously damaging its organizational coherence. With this justification, then, dear reader, you are urged to read the notes too.

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2

Premodern Africa

History without historiography is meaningless. This chapter, therefore, has two objectives: one is to establish the precolonial historical record; the other is to confront the more contentious task of examining the larger theoretical implications of this record. Ultimately any historical record is of value only to the extent that it is the subject of a historiographical exegesis. (Upon further reflection, it appears that the historical record is equally contentious, as will be evident shortly.) First, however, a necessary point of prolegomena: The conventional dichotomous periodization by historians of African history into, principally, the precolonial and colonial periods may give pause to those seeking an anti-Eurocentric perspective on African history (see Appendix II). The matter raises not only the issue of a foreign (in this case European) temporal standard as a marker of African historical chronology (How often does one come across, for example, a periodization of European history labeled “Europe during the pre-imperialist period” or “Europe during the imperialist period?”), but as if that is not enough, there is the underlying implication of not only a general failure among historians to provide an equitable historical treatment of both sides of the dichotomous divide—hence suggestive of the relative unimportance of a strictly African history versus the hybridized Euro-African history, especially when viewed against the unequal weights of time involved (temporally, the colonial period is merely an infinitesimal blip when compared to the precolonial period, which stretches back in time to the very birth of humankind several million years ago)—but also a dyadic evaluational dimension to the dichotomy, usually manifest at the subterranean level of “ideology”: savagery versus civi-

lization, darkness versus light, evil versus good, stasis versus progress, primitive versus modern, and so on.

Now, if one is cognizant of this problem as pervading much of African history, why then repeat this convention in this work? What is more, as if to add insult to injury, only one chapter is devoted to the precolonial era, while the rest of the book, in essence, covers the colonial period on, up to the present. There are three principal reasons that may be adduced in defense, but strictly from the perspective of this particular work. It is a matter of incontrovertible historical fact that there were simply far fewer institutions of higher education during the precolonial period than during the colonial period; in terms of human history (not prehistory), the precolonial period was never simply a purely African period, any more than say a European historical period was purely European, or an Asian historical period was purely Asian. The colonial period, whether one likes it or not, marked a permanent rupture from all that had gone on before of such level and magnitude as to force on any historian of Africa the perspective of a dichotomous periodization—though not necessarily with the ideological baggage it has come to acquire (see Appendix II).

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

In consideration of the enormous weight given in history books to that period of African history that commences with the arrival of Europeans in Africa under the aegis of the European voyages of “exploitation” and later, imperialism (see Appendix II), it is necessary to begin with the following question: Did higher education exist in precolonial Africa at all? If there is one person who can be credited with producing one of the earliest works on the history of higher education in Africa, then it is Eric Ashby. His response to this question is, therefore, of interest. His answer is, yes, higher education “is not new to the continent of Africa, but the modern universities in Africa,” he continues, “*owe nothing to this ancient tradition of scholarship*” (emphasis added). He states further, “[t]he modern universities of Africa have their roots not in any indigenous system of education, but in a system brought from the West” (1966: 147). In other words, according to Ashby, the existence of premodern higher education is of no relevance to considerations of modern higher education in Africa today. Why? Because there is no continuity between precolonial higher education and modern African higher education, which he asserts is an entirely Western invention.

Of course, Ashby neglects to explain why there is no continuity: the deflection of the African historical trajectory by the intrusion of European imperialism. Be that as it may, Ashby is, by and large correct about the matter of continuity, but he is absolutely mistaken about the second assertion (see Appendix I). In any case, whether or not precolonial higher education institutions in Africa have any relevance to the development of modern higher education in Af-

rica today, it is still necessary to consider them, if for no other reason than to firmly register the point, that African history does not begin only with the arrival of European colonialism. In other words, for the sake of historical accuracy, any survey of the historical development of higher education in Africa must consider its entire history. Yet, there is more to this matter than just the issue of historical accuracy, as will be indicated in the conclusion to this chapter.

In the effort to identify the existence of precolonial higher education institutions in Africa, it would help by first noting that higher education cannot exist in any society without the presence of books, which in turn requires the availability of the written word. Historically, the origins of writing and books have generally been associated with the emergence of an organized state and/or organized religion (usually the two have gone hand in hand in a theocratic alliance). In other words, writing and books emerged as a response to the bureaucratic needs of the state and/or the requirements of religious practice and education. (This certainly was the case in that most ancient of known civilizations, the Sumerian; see Kramer 1981.) In time, once the written language was invented, it also became available for scholarly pursuits of a more secular nature to eventually effect the displacement of the oral tradition by the written one. In other words, writing marginalized the bard and the orator and the writer and the scholar took their place. "Civilization has few miracles," as Parsons (1952: 106) sagely observes, "to compare with the transmission of ancient learning on frail papyrus or tougher parchment." Not surprisingly, then, in the case of precolonial Africa all instances of higher education that are known of so far are associated with religions and their religious books—which, needless to say, presuppose the existence of written languages; there are principally three: that of the ancient Egyptians, that of the Ethiopian Christians, and that of the Muslims. Therefore, the account that follows structurally corresponds to the geographic domains of these three.¹ Also note that in the absence of a separate secular educational system, as was the case with most premodern societies with rare exception, religious higher education institutions did double duty: they provided training for both religious and secular (state) purposes.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Pharaonic Egypt's Per-ankh

The transition of human societies from rudimentary forms of social existence, rooted in a hunting-and-gathering mode of production, to more complex forms marked by such features as settled agriculture, urbanization, literacy, social differentiation, a redistributive economy, state formation with well-defined political structures (that is, all those features that speak to only one fundamental factor: the existence of surplus)—and that may legitimately be termed as civilization in its nonjudgmental sense—does not appear to have a definitive

causal factor, other than the presence of one critical variable: agriculturally easy access to a constant and plentiful food supply. This itself, it must be stressed, is an arbitrary function of climate and geography. (The succinctly summarized comparative study by Bard and Fattovich (2001) of early state formation in the Egypt and Ethiopia of antiquity, with their vastly differing climatic and geographic environments, is highly illustrative.)

It is not surprising then that the chance discovery by the Neolithic peoples of Northeast Africa of the existence of rich alluvial soils in the Nile valley in Egypt amidst an ocean of slowly but relentlessly desiccating Sahara, would unknowingly propel them toward the creation of one of Africa's and the world's early great civilizations: the Egyptian civilization. Along the way, in this cultural journey, they were probably assisted by their geographic proximity to other peoples—especially those of the Near East (Mesopotamia, for example), from whom they would receive via direct and indirect economic interactions periodic infusions of critical genetic and cultural material (in the form of immigrants, foods, agricultural practices, artistic and architectural traditions, etc.) that would become the basis for some of their own innovations to give rise to an African civilization that was unique to itself—the key word here is unique. The chronological zone of transition within which this process occurred was probably around 5000 to around 3000 B.C.E., by which time the known dynastic period of Egyptian history would commence and the capstone in the march toward civilization, the invention of writing (in this case the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing), would be firmly in place. Defensively insulated by the Sahara, the Africans of Egypt would have the luxury, for almost 2,000 years, to devote most of their energy toward unprecedented cultural, artistic, and architectural achievements.²

It follows, then, that the quest for the first instance of higher education institutions in Africa must perforce begin in ancient Egypt. Logic would suggest that any civilization that was as accomplished and sophisticated as the Egyptian civilization, and that was of such considerable longevity, must have had some type of formal educational system to impart the high arts, religious education, medical education, and so on, to the younger generation. In other words, individualized (usually familial-based) apprenticeship alone may not have been a sufficient vehicle for this purpose. After all, it is now well-known that from around c. 3000 B.C.E. there existed, as Bernal (2001) points out, specialized professions (e.g., astronomy, medicine, magic, scribal arts). To be sure, the Egyptians may not have had exact replicas of the modern university or college, but it is certainly true that they did possess an institution that, from their perspective, fulfilled some of the roles of a higher education institution. One such institution dating from around c. 2000 B.C.E. was the *per-ankh* (or the House of Life). It was located within the Egyptian temples, which usually took the form of huge campuses, with many buildings, and thousands of employees.³

Now, some have referred to the *per-ankh* as a library or a “scriptorium,” where scribes wrote and kept their papyri. This indeed it was, but it should be emphasized that the *per-ankh* was no ordinary library. The *per-ankh* was in essence an institution of multiple roles. Yes, it was a repository for the sacred texts, but it also housed the administrative records of the kingdom, as well as the temple itself. Yet, it appears that it did more than that: it was also the place where texts on all the various branches of Egyptian religious, philosophical, medical, and scientific knowledge were produced and stored. However, it has been suggested that there also existed separate institutions that served as libraries in the usual sense (see Clagett 1989). Ghalioungui (1973: 30) reminds us that even as early as the sixth dynasty (2345 B.C.E.) there is reference to a high civil servant as the Governor of the House of Books, pointing to the presence of important collections of papyri. (Later, perhaps, it may be conjectured, these Houses of Books would become part of the *per-ankhs*.)

Moreover, it should be pointed out here that the term scribe describes someone who was more than just simply a manuscript-copying clerk; rather, the scribe was a learned person who combined within him (evidence so far suggests that they were all males) the “training of a calligrapher, a philosopher, a scholar, and a scientist” (Ghalioungui 1973: 28; see also Clagett 1989).⁴ Consider, for instance, how the scribe who was nominated by the priests to accompany the pharaoh Psammetik II on his journey to Syria was addressed in explaining his nomination: “None other than you in this town can leave for Syria; look, you are a Scribe of the House of Life, there is nothing on which you would be questioned to which you would not find an answer” (from Ghalioungui, 1973: 66). From this perspective, then, the *per-ankh* was also a research institute of a kind where new knowledge was brought forth out of the old. In fact, it is thought that even Greek physicians visited the *per-ankh* at Memphis to study the medical texts housed there (Wilkinson 2000: 74). Ghalioungui (1973: 63–64) goes a step further on this point: he discusses the very high probability that such Greek luminaries as Plato, no less, made scholarly visits to ancient Egypt. He, interestingly, points out that from at least the Eighteenth Dynasty there were Greek interpreters present at the royal palace.

At the same time, the *per-ankh* was also a higher educational institution of sorts that like other higher educational institutions that were to emerge in other parts of the world thousands of years on, combined religious education with secular education. For the Egyptians, as would be the case for many other peoples in millennia to come, knowledge did not neatly divide into the religious and the secular; to them each flowed seamlessly into the other—as is so clearly indicated in that masterly synthesis of evidence from a host of papyri (Edwin Smith, Chester Beatty, Carlsberg, Kahoun, Ramesseum, Leyden, London, Berlin, etc.), and a variety of archeological sources, that Paul Ghalioungui’s riveting study of medical science in ancient Egypt, *The House of Life, Per-ankh: Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (1973), represents. Therefore,

those destined for the professions (scribes, doctors, lawyers, architects, astronomers, etc.) received their education alongside those who were to join the priesthood in the *per-ankh*. In this regard, compare with the early medieval European and Islamic universities. Clearly, as Wilkinson (2000: 74) observes, the genealogical roots of the very concept of a university as it was to be developed hundreds of years later by the Islamic and Christian societies—as, in its most elemental sense, a gathering of religious and secular scholars for the purpose of research and study—can be traced to the *per-ankh*.⁵ Moreover, the *per-ankh* was not only restricted to the teaching of theoretical knowledge, it was also a place for the teaching of the practical arts such as sculpture and other crafts. It is also thought that the pharaohs themselves sometimes studied in these institutions; this certainly appears to have been the case with Ramses IV, a literary person of considerable knowledge (Ghalioungui 1973: 67).

The eventual demise of the Egyptian civilization also, of course, spelled the demise of the *per-ankh*. To account for the end of this uniquely African civilization is a task that lies well outside the subject matter of this book. Ergo, it will suffice to simply note that the civilization began its downward spiral starting roughly with the Twenty-Third Dynasty in 1070 B.C.E. as a result of a combination of factors, such as internal corruption, imperialistic ambitions, foreign invasions, and so on, so that by the time Alexander the Conqueror arrived in Egypt some 700 years later, in 332 B.C.E., the civilization of ancient Egypt was well into its twilight (see Mysliwiec 2000 for a fascinating account of this late period of ancient Egyptian history).

Now, interestingly, the next instance of higher education in ancient Africa that is known of, so far, is still to be found in ancient Egypt, but it emerges during the period of the Ptolemaic dynasty in the form of the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* complex. Before proceeding further, however, two additional points need to be made: (1) Had the *per-ankhs* of ancient Egypt undertaken systematic credentialing of bodies of students—there is, however, no evidence yet unearthed that points to this—then their designation as universities in the true sense of the word would not be farfetched. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress this point: as Ghalioungui (1973) and Canfora (1990), for example, observe, the Alexandrina complex was heir to the legacy of the *per-ankh* as a religio-secular institution that gathered together in a single place of study concentrations of the most outstanding scholars and masters of the day, from near and far. In other words, the modern university, college, research institute, think-tank, research library, and so on of today, has a lineage that spans millennia and can be traced back to the Alexandrina complex and thence to ancient Egypt's *per-ankh*.

(2) There emerges from the foregoing an important matter that cannot be sidestepped. It can be articulated thusly: Having established the existence of a prototype version of higher education institutions in ancient Egypt, which of course constitutes one of the major institutional expressions of a vibrant intellectual life of any society in any time period, it invariably raises the further

question of whether ancient Egyptian knowledge and learning had any significance for other contemporaneous—at the very minimum—societies outside Africa. Greece, perhaps? Now, what appears to be an innocent and ordinary scholarly question has in recent years acquired an unseemly, racially inspired, ideological baggage as expressed by the intense and vitriolic disagreements between *Eurocentrists* such as Mary Lefkowitz and *Afrocentrists* such as Maulana Karenga and Molefe Asante over the broader question of the significance of the Egyptian (read: black) civilization vis-à-vis the genesis of the Western (read: white) civilization. The former say that Western civilization owes nothing of determinative substance to Africa (ancient Egyptian or otherwise), while the latter say they owe a lot and in fact they “stole” most of their ideas from ancient Egyptians.⁶

Then there is Martin Bernal, of the *Black Athena* fame; he too may be categorized here as an Afrocentrist of a sort (however, given the moderation in his claims and a more convincing attempt at marshalling evidence in support of his positions, perhaps a better label for him would be neo-Afrocentrist.⁷ Anyhow, he has almost single-handedly resurrected—based on a remarkable and Herculean scholarship—a more moderate Afrocentric point of view (relative to that of the Afrocentrists proper), which he describes as the “Ancient model” (in contrast to the prevalent “Aryan model” that places the origins of the Greek civilization entirely within Europe—and northern for that matter), that if we accept that Western civilization has its roots in ancient Greece, then ancient Greece had some of its roots in, primarily, Phoenicia and ancient Egypt through the process of colonization by the latter of the former. One would be seriously remiss not to quickly mention in the same breath that many critics (not all by any means Eurocentrists—see the excellent overview and synthesis by Howe 1998 and Berlinerblau 1999; plus van Binsbergen 1997 and Wigen and Lewis 1997 are also of relevance here) have pointed out what appear to be significant flaws in his work so far. Leaving aside the fact that it is highly unlikely that any scholarship undertaken on as grand a scale as Bernal’s *Black Athena* project can be entirely flawless, the truth probably lies somewhere in between the Ancient and Aryan models—as it so often does in disagreements of this type where incontrovertible evidence is not always available and whatever evidence is accessible is subject to conflicting, but legitimate interpretations.⁸

Hellenistic Egypt’s Bibliotheca Alexandrina

If our knowledge of higher education in the Egyptian civilization remains woefully sketchy, then one is on a slightly more surer ground as one turns to another important instance of higher education in African antiquity: the museum/ library complex at Alexandria (the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex), which has once again risen like the legendary phoenix from the ashes, more than 1,000 years following its destruction.⁹ The Alexandrian museum/library

complex was established in that period of the Egyptian civilization known as the Hellenic period that would be ushered in by the arrival in Egypt, in December 332 B.C.E., of that infamous and ruthless Macedonian, Alexander the Conqueror (often referred to in history books as Alexander the Great), whose imperialistic ambitions would spawn an empire stretching from Macedonia to as far as India. Although the slaughter of the defeated was one of the hallmarks of many of his military expeditions, the Egyptians were spared this fate because they saw him not as an invader, but as a liberator. The warm welcome by the Egyptian populace accorded to Alexander enabled him to easily obtain the peaceful (and wise) surrender of the Persian satrap Mazaces. He thereby conquered Egypt without doing battle, while at the same time liberating the Egyptians from the much-disliked Persians who had become the rulers of Egypt from 664 B.C.E. under the Achaemenid dynasty.

Enticed by the hospitable geography of the ancient Mediterranean village seaport of Rakotis (established around 1500 B.C.E.) located on the western edge of the Nile River delta between the sea and the fresh water Lake of Mareotis, Alexander commanded it to be the site of his new Egyptian capital and a naval base for his fleet. As was his practice, in his typical ego flattering flourish, he named the capital after himself. It is with this beginning that the Greco-Egyptian city of Alexandria would become, in time, one of the world's greatest cities of antiquity and a major center of scientific and philosophical research. The task of placing the new capital on to this illustrious path, however, fell to his viceroys: first, Cleomenes, and later, after Alexander's death on June 13, 323 B.C.E. in Babylon, Ptolemy I Soter.

The Alexandrian empire did not survive the death of its creator, having been held together by the dint of his personality. The wealthiest and most prestigious province in the empire that was Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy I Soter who, in time, would proclaim himself the new Egyptian king, thereby launching a new dynasty. That the Egyptians accepted the new rulers was a testimony to the diplomatic and political acumen of the Ptolemys, as well as their respect for the culture of pharaonic Egypt. For instance, they generously dispensed patronage to the Egyptian nobility, they established a new religion that brought together Greek and Egyptian beliefs through the worship of the sun god Serapis (a reinvented Egyptian god of the underworld from Memphis); they restored some of the Egyptian temples that the Persians had destroyed; and so on.

Now, just before his death in 283 B.C.E., it is said, Ptolemy I Soter, who was also a man of letters, ordered the construction of a museum/library complex near the royal palace in the Greek section of the city known as the *Brucheion*. In this effort, it is thought, he was implementing an idea that was not originally his; for it had been the wish of Alexander to have a library built in the new city that would bear his name. It was to be dedicated to the worship of the Muses—a group of sister goddesses in the Greco-Roman religion who each were patrons of different artistic and intellectual endeavors. Ptolemy I So-

ter did not live long enough to see the entire project completed; it was left to his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, to see it through. The complex was both a religious and a secular institution and as such it would enjoy patronage throughout the reign of the Ptolemies, including the appointment for life of full time, salaried staff headed by a librarian who also served as royal tutor to the king. The religious component of the complex, the place of worship of the Muses (the *mouseion*), was headed by the priest of the Muses. (It may be noted here that the modern term museum has its etymological origins in that Greek word *mouseion*.)

The complex comprised living quarters for the community of poets, philosophers and scholars that ran it, lecture rooms, a botanical garden, a zoological park, astronomical observatory, and the great library. In time, the complex would become a truly great monument to human knowledge and learning, built to gather together—either through purchase, systematic copying, or even forcible acquisition—every available work known to the librarians. The library's collection even included what was then and even today the priceless works of Aristotle; though how the library came to acquire these works remains a mystery to this day (see Tanner 2000 for one conjectural thesis). The zeal of the librarians in acquiring works is attested to by the naming of sections of the library's holdings as ship libraries because they were constituted from works confiscated from passing ships by customs officials. The supposed practice was that all books aboard a ship were copied and then returned to their owners, while the copies (catalogued as "from the ships") became part of the ship libraries. However, one may legitimately surmise, as MacLeod (2000a: 5) does, that many a traveler left Alexandria without their originals (or perhaps even without any copies at all). At one point, the library is thought to have amassed over a half a million works on rolls of papyri in an age when, it must be remembered, there was no paper and no printing press. Clearly, in terms of its acquisitions policy, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex was a multicultural institution that, over time (it would be in operation for almost 600 years), would attempt to bring together in one place the contributions of the Asian, Egyptian, Hellenic, Judaic, Mesopotamian, and Roman worlds.

The fact that the person entrusted by Ptolemy I Soter with the establishment of the complex was the Athenian Demetrius Phalereus speaks volumes for what the complex became. Why? Because Demetrius, who besides being a Greek orator, statesman, and philosopher, was also an ex-pupil of Plato's famous ex-pupil, none other than Aristotle himself. One can, therefore, confidently assume that from the very beginning the complex, in terms of its mission (and possibly its physical design) bore the hallmarks of Aristotle's Lyceum, an academy that he founded for the purposes of scholarly endeavors in a variety of scientific and philosophical fields of inquiry.

The ultimate practical objective of the Ptolemys, it would appear, was twofold: the complex would serve as a symbol of prestige that spoke for the cul-

tured or civilized status of their dynasty, and it would be a vehicle for cultural and intellectual domination of other cultures through appropriation of all written knowledge where ever and when ever it was available. This was not an unusual practice as MacLeod (2000a) reminds us. Empire builders of antiquity had long grasped the importance of acquiring and translating works from other cultures as a means of gaining valuable insights into intellectual and other accomplishments of these cultures that could facilitate their domination. (Note that the present-day practice of national libraries in metropolitan countries, such the Library of Congress, systematically acquiring foreign produced materials, one may legitimately argue, is a continuation of this tradition. See also Casson 2001 for an excellent account of other libraries in the ancient world.)

The true significance of the complex, however, was not that it was simply a unique repository of knowledge for the time period, but like the proverbial moths being drawn to a candlelight, it attracted scholars from near and far. For, unlike today, libraries of the past were also important seats of learning where the librarians themselves too were, one and at the same time, scholars in residence. Hence, over time, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina became the source of prodigious and remarkable intellectual scholarship which, many centuries later, through the agency of the Muslims, would help to ignite the European Renaissance.¹⁰

Until new evidence comes to light, it is safe to say that the library complex was not a university in the modern sense in that it probably did not undertake *systematic teaching* and *credentialing* of bodies of students, even though research, teaching, and learning took place there. However, this much is certain: on its own terms, it did clearly function as a university and an international research institute, and a very important one at that. This is further underlined by the fact that dinners and symposia featuring philosophical, scientific, and literary disputations were regularly sponsored by the complex (often present among the invited guests were the Ptolemys themselves). Moreover, its staff were called upon, from time to time, to offer lessons to members of the royal family.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was undoubtedly an institution of higher education, in fact one can go so far as to say that it was among the world's earliest known prototype universities.¹¹ At the same time, the library's presence, it is especially worth noting, helped to sustain a thriving publishing industry, thereby assisting in the dissemination of the knowledge that the library acquired, and produced, to all the four corners of the ancient world. From this perspective, the library was also indirectly responsible for helping to permanently preserve works that would have been lost forever when it underwent periodic and later final destruction. About this last point, the demise of the museum/ library complex was a cataclysmic scholarly disaster of massive proportions, the consequences of which can hardly be even imagined.

The Destruction of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

So, exactly how then did this magnificent institution of higher learning eventually meet its end? The short answer is that no one really knows with absolute certainty because of a couple of problems: the lack of information regarding the exact layout of the complex internally, as well as externally with respect to the palace, and the fact that the complex included a smaller daughter library (created around 235 B.C.E. by Ptolemy III in the Serapeum [Temple of Sarapis]) and warehouses where acquisitions were initially stored while they were awaiting cataloguing. This yields four major architectural units that could have fallen victim to destruction by fire at different times or at one and the same time: the museum, the main library, the daughter library, and the warehouses—thereby generating much confusion as to when the complex was destroyed and by whom among the following four main probable culprits: the Roman general Julius Caesar in 48/47 B.C.E. who set off an accidental fire provoked by a civil war among the last of the Ptolemaic dynasty (between Cleopatra VII and her brother Ptolemy XIII) in which Caesar had become embroiled; the Roman emperor Aurelian in 272 C.E., who in the course of putting down a rebellion razed most of the Brucheon to the ground; the virulently anti-pagan Christian patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, who in 391 C.E. ordered the destruction of all pagan temples in Alexandria; and Amr ibn al-'As, the leader of the conquering Muslims, who supposedly burned the library upon the orders of the Caliph Omar ibn Khattab in 642 C.E.

What is the stand on this matter of the various authorities on whose work this part of the chapter is primarily based? Casson (2001) and Barnes (2000) side with Edward Gibbon (1910 [originally written 1776–88]) and Alfred J. Butler (1998 [1902]), who both conclude that by the time the Muslim Army arrived in Egypt under the command of Amr ibn al-'As, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina complex had long passed into memory (El-Abbadi 1992 and Canfora 1989 are also of the same opinion); therefore, the Muslims could not have destroyed the complex—a viewpoint that, however, is not favored by Parsons (1952) and Zeydan (1952), for example, who insist that the Muslims were definitely the culprits. The preponderance of evidence—albeit much of it circumstantial—is in favor of Gibbon's and Butler's position. Both Gibbon (1962 [1910]: 345–47), and Butler (1998 [1902]: 401–26)—who interestingly labels the complex as a university in its own right and who feels compelled to deny that he is simply defending the Muslims in this matter, rather he only wants “to establish the truth”—draw attention to a number of disquieting facts; such as: the story that the Muslims burned the library makes its appearance for the first time more than five centuries after the event is supposed to have taken place!; the story is fraught with “absurdities” (e.g., the books being used to heat 4,000 bath houses over a period of six months, instead of being burned in a large bonfire on the spot; in the seventh-century most of the books in Egypt were made of vellum—not papyri—which does not burn as fuel, etc.); the principal