

# Introduction

## ***“Dirty Gossip,” Transnational Policy Borrowing and Lending, and Education***



“Dirty gossip”? Yes, this book analyzes the complicated ways Western distortions and stereotypes about Africa shaped education policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). I use the terms “West” and “Western” deliberately in the book to represent European and American forces and entities that have engaged in all sorts of activities on the African continent. While Liveson Tatira refers to Western distortions and stereotypes about Africa as “Old World Novels,” I prefer to use the term “dirty gossip,” which the Ugandan philosopher Okot p’Bitek refers to as “the Western distortions and stereotypes about Africa” (p’Bitek 2011: 11; Tatira 2015). As a sociological construct, “dirty gossip” outlines the hegemonic processes used by the West to exclude Africans from colonial and postcolonial discourse (p’Bitek 2011: 11). The hegemonic processes expose the subtleties of race relations between Europeans and Americans (West) and Africans (and other indigenous populations), which aimed to promote white racial superiority. As a framework on race relations, “dirty gossip” reveals the complicated strategies and processes used by Europeans to misrepresent African societies to institutionalize racism, white superiority, and Western exploitation of African people and people of African descent. A major objective of Western dirty gossip was to “infantilize” Africans and position Europeans (and Western societies) in trusteeship positions to justify forced conversion and proselytization, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation, and to extract material benefit from Africa’s resources. Underneath European misrepresentations about Africa is the goal to invalidate the role played by African societies in the global geopolitical processes, development discourse, and knowledge production. Through dirty gossip, Europeans delegitimized Africa’s knowledge and epistemologies and African societies. P’Bitek notes

that two tasks confront African scholars as they try to write about the dirty gossip perpetrated by Europeans about Africans:

First, to expose and destroy all false ideas about African peoples and culture that have been perpetuated by Western scholarship. Vague terms such as Tribe, Folk, Non-literate or even innocent-looking ones such as Developing, etc. must be subjected to critical analysis and thrown out or redefined to suit African interests. Second, the African scholar must endeavor to present the institutions of African people as they really are. Western scholars had to justify the colonial system, hence the need for the myth of the “primitive.” The African scholar has nothing of the sort to justify. But he [or she] must guard against overreacting in the face of the arrogance and insults of Western scholarship. (p’Bitek 2011: 3–4)

The advice here calls for scholarship that seeks to interrogate dirty gossip about African societies to be objective in outlining issues as they are and let readers draw conclusions.

Narratives about “Africa” should move beyond the single storyline that portrays the continent as a vast savannah of predominantly wild animals that compete with humans for survival. Africa transcends the images that international nongovernmental organizations portray about the poverty-stricken, sickly, and hungry humans dying of famine and starvation. The region is more than the tales about people dying of HIV/AIDS and Ebola, and where malaria kills a third of white expatriates that go there to “help.” Not every country in the region is embroiled in “tribal” wars. Africa is not just a crisis zone of inadequate social services, economic mismanagement, corrupt politicians, and deplorable education systems. This book therefore takes a critical approach to discuss how Western distortions and stereotypes about Africa shaped Western interventions in education policy discourse in sub-Saharan Africa.

Postcolonial and globalization literature outlines how European Christians, colonizers, and imperialists dictated the direction and pace of ideological borrowing and lending (the rationing and dissemination of ideas about knowledge, cultural norms, values, traditions, skills, and attitudes) as they encountered non-Western and non-Christian societies. Globalization literature (see, for instance, the works by Kendall 2007; Quist 2003; Steiner-Khamsi and Quist 2000) outlines the ideas of transnational policy borrowing and lending, and transnational networks in sub-Saharan Africa since colonization. These works have done a great job of discussing the complexities of transnational resource flows to SSA. This book contributes to the discourse by analyzing how the “dirty gossip” of Western bards about Africa and African

societies influenced external transfer and flow of educational ideas and practices to SSA in the past and their impact on contemporary education policies and practices in the region. The issue of how Western dirty gossip about Africa shaped transnational policy borrowing and lending over the past six centuries is too vast a subject to provide exhaustive analysis in these few pages. I should also point out that the materials now available are an insufficient basis for answering with confidence all the questions that have arisen. I define the construct “education” as the ideological and cultural transformation processes and the politics of human capital development for the global economic and productive processes. It is also “the transmission of broad and specific knowledge that includes but also moves beyond that imparted by national school systems” (Stromquist 2003: 176). I use human capital in this book to represent the differences in skills and knowledge that help explain why some people and groups are more economically productive in both local and global geopolitical order. While I refer to the African continent broadly, my focus is the sub-Saharan African region or African societies south of the Sahara. I use the concept “contemporary times” operationally in the book to refer to the period from the 1980s to present when transnational advocacy groups and global governing bodies systematically repositioned and inserted themselves into the social policy discourse in SSA and, in the process, introduced austere economic measures of structural adjustment programs (SAP) to address the economic challenges faced by sub-Saharan African societies.

### **Africa’s Complicated Relationship with Western Forces**

The complicated relationship between African societies and Western forces began with the arrival of the Portuguese trade adventurers to the West African coast. The Portuguese came to West Africa with the blessings of the church hierarchy—the Pope. The success of the expedition and overseas exploits had an effect on the Portuguese economy and ultimately increased the remittances to the Catholic Church through tithing payments (Newitt 1973). During their early explorations in West Africa, Antão Gonçalves is reported to have brought back to Portugal the first prisoners from the Sahara and the following year returned with slaves and a little gold dust to prove that the voyages to Africa were not a waste of money (Newitt 1973: 6). The Portuguese exploitative model set the standard for Europeans’ interaction and exploitation of indigenous societies globally. They came in the garb of

Christianity, and the Pope's Order and the Papal Bull of 1496 justified and emboldened the Portuguese to claim various regions on the African continent in the name of God, the Pope, and the King.

The year was 1471, and the Portuguese had just arrived on the shores of Edina, a small fishing village in modern-day Ghana in the West Coast of Africa, which the Portuguese would later rename El Mina because of the abundance of gold. Historian Edward Asafu-Adjaye explains in detail how these Europeans made inroads and forged trade partnerships with the Edina people using the barter system. The Portuguese merchants would leave fanciful objects on the Edina beach and retire to their boats. Interested locals would then place quantities of gold dust beside these fancy goods and retreat. The European merchants would then return and remove the gold dust if they found the amount acceptable as fair exchange for their goods. Once the merchants had left, the African traders would go back to the scene and remove the goods left in exchange for their gold (Asafu-Adjaye 1958). Reading this history, one can sense the trust that fomented and cemented the initial trading relationship between these Europeans and indigenous West Africans. However, the trust was short-lived as the Europeans came to realize over time that they could barter African humans together with the African goods for almost the same price.

The year 1482 was a watershed period for the Europeans and Africans as it marked the beginning of the great experimentation that led to imperialistic Western exploitation, enslavement, and colonization of Africans as well as racism against the indigenous population. The formal meeting between the Portuguese and the Edina locals in 1482 was different from their earlier encounters because this time the Iberian trade adventurers had come to stay to establish something far bigger and sinister than one could have imagined. Leading the Iberian traders was Don Diego de Azambuja who came with an entourage of six hundred soldiers and a hundred masons and carpenters in nine caravels and two big ships. They filled their ships with the necessary stones and other materials to construct a fortress (Asafu-Adjaye 1958). Their request was for land along the Edina coastline to build a fortress where they could consolidate their trading relationship with Africa. They convinced the local people of the potential mutual benefits from the trading relationship and the chiefs and local people of Edinaman leased to the Portuguese a strip of land where the sea forms a small inland lagoon. Captain Don Diego de Azambuja and his people started constructing the Sao Jorge de Mina in 1482 as the first trading post that Portuguese built on the Gulf of Guinea and the oldest European

building in existence south of the Sahara. The Edina people leased the land innocently to the Iberian marauders, but it was a harbinger of “the very bad and ugly” things that later unfolded in almost all African territories south of the Sahara. This trading post soon became an infamous barracoon for trading in human beings. The architectural structure of Jorge de Mina in Edina Ghana (Elmina Castle) and later castles and forts built by Europeans in Ghana, Senegal, and other coastlands of West, Central, South, and East Africa make the compelling argument that these Europeans had the motive to trade in humans from the beginning.

Written texts alone about the slave trade do not provide the full picture of the inhumane treatment endured by African slaves at the hands of European slave traders and the American slave masters. The slave traders employed “divide and conquer” strategies and incentivized the African captors, which motivated many of the coastal traders to work alongside the Europeans and other Africans in the interior to capture innocent Africans and drag them thousands of miles and for weeks to slave markets. At these slave markets, the African captives were auctioned for their final transfer to the European castles along the coast where they awaited shipment to the Americas. This past year (2019) marks four hundred years since the first African slave stepped onto the shores of the Americas. Tracing the slaves’ steps on the journey of no return at Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana and the Goree Island off the coast of Dakar Senegal and other places provides a glimpse of the brutality and barbarity of the European Transatlantic slavery in the name of wealth. Once the captured African slaves arrived at the castles, their European captors tortured over two hundred slaves at a time and confined them to crammed underground dungeons where they awaited shipment like cargo. The waiting period for shipment was also traumatizing as their European captors and traders objectified them and subjected them to inhuman treatment. The slaves lived, ate, and slept in their filth and excreta in the dungeons. Some of the European slave traders raped and sexually abused the captured women at will. They threw those women who refused to be used as sex objects into to a small cell for a period of confinement to teach them a lesson about who was in control. In his documentary *The Bible and the Gun*, Basil Davidson explains that slaves were locked in “infamous barracoons where, well-guarded by their captors, they had lingered for weeks, even months, anchored for just long enough to buy them from their captors.” Once they were aboard the ship bound for the Americas, their misery became worse.

## European Distortions to Justify Colonialism and Imperialism

Europeans employed symbolic violence to construct the African “other” as less of a human to justify the institution of slavery. They also used distortions to label African societies to justify their subsequent colonization, imperialism, and exploitation of Africans in the global geopolitical processes. In many novels, the representation of Africa and African cultures invoked the clichés of the “Dark Continent,” the site of dangerous disorder and savage violence, and the emblematic “Garden of Eden” under threat set to be saved by the “white man.” Europeans portrayed Africans as “black devils” and “noble savages” (Götttsche 2013). Europeans (later followed by Americans) stripped away Africa’s human and natural resources. They also stripped away Africa’s dignity and caricatured Africa’s image to dislocate the identities of Africans in the global community. European explorers, wanting to gain “knowledge” about the “Dark Continent” and its mysteries, tore the continent inside out and upside down as they explored Africa’s geographical landscapes. Explorers used imaginative geographies to present Africa south of the Sahara as an object of “circus and spectacle” that merited decoding its enigmatic elements and geographical mysteries. Similarly, European scholars and researchers turned Africa into a laboratory where they pursued anthropological, sociological, psychological, and scientific research to present Africa as a mysterious concept and space.

### The “Lazy Africans” in White European Imaginations

Europeans viewed it as their right to serve as trustees of African societies. This trusteeship ideology led to Europe partitioning and eventually colonizing African societies. The trusteeship roles also meant the Europeans had the right to exploit African labor. African resistance to such exploitation sometimes resulted in harsh punishments in some colonial territories. In spite of the harsh punishments meted out to Africans, some refused to work for the Europeans cheaply. In many of the cases, African antipathy to laboring for Europeans was a form of resistance to white European male exploitation of Africans. However, the Europeans explained such resistance in stereotypical terms. The European colonists created a narrative that portrayed black Africans as “lazy, docile, childlike, . . . irresponsible,” and exhibited docile attitudes toward work and labor (Degler 1976; Shadle 2012; Whitehead 1999). European settlers and farmers who most needed African labor

berated natives as idle and lazy when those Africans demonstrated an unwillingness to work on settler farms and preferred instead to work on their own farms in less alienated forms of labor. The Europeans expressed negative stereotypes about the African's antipathy and limited capacity for work and labor. The European colonialists' value judgment about work also made European settlers in some African countries infantilize their African workers and gave them lashes (Shadle 2012). Such views and value judgment about the black African's attitude to work and labor became part of colonial narratives of white European colonialists. This narrative ignores white European males' exploitation of black Africans through forced labor in colonial encounters.

### **Education and Development of the African "Other"**

The European Christian missionary project in Africa was part of the Christian religious ideology to take the gospel to the "uttermost part of the earth." European Christian missionaries justified their benign and forced proselytizing and conversion missions as coming from a higher authority—God and His word. Okot p'Bitek (2011) points out that new spiritual forces drove the Western man toward a new destiny. The Christian faith provided that spiritual force, which saw humanity as born under a curse, enslaved by the dark powers of cosmic evil, and sinking even deeper under the burden of its own guilt. While such scriptural verses of the Bible provided the basis for the European Christians to take the gospel commission to the heathen lands, Acts 1:8 and 13:47 provided the impetus to justify their divine right to carry the gospel to the "heathens." Acts 13:47 in particular states that "For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, 'I have set you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" The European Christian missionaries saw conversion, cultural imposition, civilization, development, and transformation of the "heathen" African societies as all encompassing. Their divine right to seek converts among the heathen became a watershed moment that shaped the destiny of all non-Western societies. The strategy of white European Christians was to use all tools possible to convert the heathen Africans. This is not a surprise because after the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christians forcibly spread the gospel, punishing "heretics" with torture and death, and using religion to accumulate vast amounts of power and wealth.

When the European Christians realized that the gospel message alone could not provide total transformation, they embarked on an

even more ideological strategy—implementation of Western forms of education to strategically reconfigure African societies' social and cultural arrangements. Trapped in their aggressive ambitions to transform non-Christian lands and societies into Christian societies, European Christian institutions portrayed African practices as primitive and their religions as paganistic and barbaric. They presented Western forms of education as the only way to develop and transform Africans and wean African societies of paganism. In order for Africans to embrace Christianity, Europe “must drain African religions of their powers” (Davidson 1984). The European Christians initially saw proselytization through schools as an effective way to break the new (progressive generation of Africans) from the old (backward and primitive generation). European Christian denominations and institutions scouted African societies, established mission schools, and used mission education to enforce European Christian religion on African societies as part of their “divine” project. During formal colonization, colonial administrators also saw the potential of Western education to transform the “lazy” African and develop the human capital needed to shore up the colonial productive process. The European colonizers used colonial schools to further distort Africa's narratives to young generations of Africans to a position of identity flux where they dislocated their identities and embraced European cultural values and social arrangements as the epitome of progress.

### **Philanthropic Foundations and the Contours of Education in Africa**

Philanthropic initiative has been a formidable strategy used by Western societies to shape the educational discourse in SSA. Philanthropy is a symbiotic process that draws its roots in religion, humanism, and enlightenment (Cunningham 2016; Phillips and Jung 2016; Union Bank of Switzerland 2014). In the early twentieth century, calls were made to use philanthropy to complement governments' efforts to promote social services including education and human capital development to strengthen the roles citizens should play in a liberal democracy (Salamon 1992: 10; Barman 2017; Borgmann 2004; Cunningham 2016; Kunzman 2012). The civic sensibilities of philanthropy took on a new form in the United States during the early days of the US industrial revolution as civic-minded individuals employed charitable initiatives to promote mass education in a context of burgeoning social transformation. Philanthropy became a way to transform society itself, since



longstanding sustaining philanthropic initiative was seen as an investment in human capital. As businesses boomed, the wealthy saw the need to use their wealth to support social services (Hall 1994). With time, philanthropy took on a new meaning as capitalist control of those who needed it and a way to promote capitalist ideologies. Philanthropic entities used market mechanisms to analyze and guide their decisions of giving, even if the giving was for a common good. They assessed the rate of return on investment, enforced competition, and used the framework of close supervision and standardized output as indicators of success (Edwards 2015). Sometimes the philanthropic organization's goal is to perpetuate an entrenched system and keep practices in place. Their support for specific social programs are based on their own agenda, which force them to play contradictory roles of advocacy and civic engagement in a context where they sometimes also push or promote the dominant ideologies that advocate some political agenda and power asymmetry in the society. Edward Berman points out that "the decisions to initiate work in specific geo-political regions, to consider funding various categories of activities, and to fund or reject specific requests are made based on some criteria, some of which are public, some of which perform, remain unknown" (Berman 1978: 72).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, US foundations saw their philanthropic initiative as an effective strategy to insert the United States into global political, economic, and sociocultural discourse. Motivated by the political, economic, and social currents of the times, US philanthropic foundations became convinced that they should play important roles to shape the political, economic, and social reforms in colonial territories in sub-Saharan Africa. These philanthropic foundations became involved in colonial African education for three reasons: to limit the activities of African-American Christian missionaries in Africa; to deter communist tendencies in African societies; and to ensure the United States' presence in Africa to promote their own vision of investment in human capital and ensure the survival of business enterprise. US philanthropic entities worked with colonial governments to shape the educational discourse in SSA and determine the kind of education to provide to black Africans to keep them in subordinated positions (similar to the plight of blacks in the Southern United States). The educational initiatives of these non-state actors from the 1920s into the 1970s and beyond connected education and the US foreign policy agenda in complicated ways. The US philanthropic entities became convinced that they could use education to connect Africans on both sides of the Atlantic to place them in sub-

ordinated positions in the global knowledge, cultural, economic, and political processes (Berman 1978; Yamada 2008).

The idea of improving human capital became a major Western policy and economic agenda item for African societies from the 1960s into the last decade of the twentieth century. In the 1990s, global governing bodies including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and a host of development entities pushed for aggressive development of human capital in Africa through policies of “Education for All” (EFA), which promoted educational access, quality, gender parity in education, and many other initiatives. Arguably, the distortions about Africa influenced the educational initiatives of these global development entities. How do contemporary development entities (and Africans) conceptualize the capabilities and agency of African societies and provide them the needed support and space for Africans to chart their own path in the development of human capital? This is an issue that African policy makers, African scholars, and the global development entities may need to critically interrogate in the twenty-first century.

## **Organization of the Book**

This book employs “symbolic violence” and “postcolonial theory” to examine how European distortions about African societies influenced education discourse in SSA from the early decades of the twentieth century within the contexts of proselytizing, cultural transformation, and development of human capital for the colonial and global productive and economic processes. The book makes several arguments. First, the European and US bards’ distortions and stereotypes about sub-Saharan Africa created an education policymaking relationship that positioned Africans in subordinated status in the global geopolitical order. Second, the distortions and stereotypes served as the framework, lens, and basis for US philanthropies to push “adapted education” on Africans and use education to promote race relations that placed African societies in a subordinated position in a white racial supremacy. Third, the European portrayal of African “backwardness” influenced European colonial administration and US philanthropists to employ education as a tool to stratify colonial territories in Africa where Europeans were at the top, other intermediary groups were at the middle, and Africans were at the bottom of the knowledge and social hierarchy. The Europeans and global forces’ use of education to reconfigure African societies along the lines of European hierar-

chical order had lasting implications, creating social, political, and economic marginalization of many groups in African societies. It also necessitated that independent African governments implement affirmative action initiatives to address inequities and inequalities created through the education systems. Finally, the “dirty gossip” about Africa has occasioned the contemporary global partners’ paternalistic attitudes toward Africans regarding conversations on transnational policy borrowing and lending and education policy initiatives. International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs), Western education policy experts, and researchers see Africa’s development and progress as “backward” and below expectation. They use research to highlight a “crisis” in education to perpetuate the distortions about African societies and assume trusteeship of education policymaking and practice in sub-Saharan Africa.

I organize the book around two parts and ten chapters. Part I encompasses the first three chapters and discusses the ways Europeans employed distortions and stereotypes to construct the ordering of Africa and symbolically violate Africa’s identities to help marginalize and position people of African descent in subordinated status in the global order. Chapter 1 discusses the theoretical frameworks of symbolic violence and postcolonial theory as inquiry approaches for understanding how colonialism and imperialism as political and economic processes determined the human capital development of colonial subalterns. The chapter delineates how symbolic violence as an inquiry approach helps analyze the various ways and the tools used by European and US colonial and imperial forces to relegate African societies to subordinated status to dominate and colonize, and provide education that relegated African people and people of African descent to subordinated statuses in global cultural, economic, and political order. The chapter also explains how a postcolonial framework helps de-center colonial and imperial discourses, which distort and misrepresent the crucial role played by African societies in global development narratives. Chapter 2 traces the root of Western distortions about Africa from Africa’s initial encounters with Europeans in the fifteenth century. The chapter analyzes the dimensions of European-American strategy to stratify African societies in the global economic and political discourse and portray Africa in a dependent position in the global discourse with the goal of justifying colonialism, imperialism, and the subordinated treatment of black Africans and people of African descent in the global governance processes. Chapter 3 highlights how the activities of the early European traders, nineteenth-century explorers, Christian missionaries, colonial officers, European scholars, geographers and scien-

tists and US philanthropies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries misrepresented African societies.

Part II encompasses chapters 4 through 9 and discusses the effects of those narratives, distortions, misrepresentations, and stereotypes on education policy discourse including education policymaking and education research in SSA. Chapter 4 delineates the systematic ways European powers utilized Western education to stratify sub-Saharan African societies and define the opportunity structures and access to the colonial labor and productive processes. The chapter argues that underneath this stratification was the ideology of distortion and misrepresentation that viewed Africans as backward, primitive, unintelligent, and culturally inferior.

The intricate role played by US philanthropic entities and the British government to transplant the US industrial education model in sub-Saharan Africa is the focus of the fifth chapter. The chapter outlines the objective behind the adapted education policy as development of human capital of blacks in Africa and its grand scheme of education transplanting to subordinate black Africans in colonial territories in Africa. Chapter 6 outlines the paradox of US philanthropic entities' work to use education policy and practice that drew from deficit ideologies to promote race relations. The chapter outlines how deficit ideologies of European and US forces provided a justification for their use of agricultural and industrial education to ratify black Africans' inferior position in colonial society. Chapter 7 highlights the paradox of "Education for All" by outlining the higher levels of educational enrollment rates and the growing unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa. It discusses how the global campaigns to promote the development of human capital since the 1960s hinged on the rationale to promote national economic development, and how over the years the increases in educational access have not translated into increases in employment rates in sub-Saharan Africa. It outlines how education policies and practices have historically led to some groups' participation in the economic and productive processes creating opportunities for their social mobility while marginalizing other groups.

In Chapter 8, I outline the evolution of affirmative action strategies in SSA from the 1960s and the rationale for affirmative action strategies used by sub-Saharan African governments to offset the cumulative effects of inequalities created during colonization, and the potential challenges faced by governments implementing affirmative action initiatives. The ninth chapter delineates the role of contemporary Western education scholars in formulating education policies. The chapter delineates how education research and reports highlighting the crisis

of education in SSA feed into the existing colonial “dirty gossip” to justify the direction of transnational borrowing and lending of ideas and knowledge from the West to SSA, project Western development entities as the “saviors” of African education crisis, while using education research to perpetuate the exploitation of African societies. The conclusion ties the themes together and provides reflections for African policy makers, education scholars, and development entities with the objective to forge new partnerships of hope that promote empowered engagement of all partners in the development processes.