(Dis) Investing Homi Bhabha’s Emancipative Discourse (from) in Post-colonial Project Management: Re-thinking the Amodernism of Imperial/African Political Economy

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from Bruno Latour’s amodernist organization theory, which illuminates the canonization of epistemological boundaries in the field of project management studies, this paper argues that Homi Bhabha’s emancipative project in postcolonial research, has failed to assert itself in this globalizing age of projectification of societies. In its historiographical context incarnated in writings by management scholars, the field of project management orientalized Africa as underdeveloped and in need of occidentalist modernization. This Latourian insight driven by the quest for the ‘purified canon’ portraying the metropole as ‘centre’ of civilization and the colonies/Africa, as the Other, was tragically misjudged by nationalist ideologues fighting for independence, post-independence leaderships in Africa, who met in the Bandung Conference, advocates of a New World Economic Order, pan-Africanists, because their interventions were grounded chiefly in hybridization. But hybdization means the demise of the amodern and since the occident will not stand by to witness this decanonization with an applause, the Third World was already ‘mal parti’ (to cite Denan) because its post-independence leadership needlessly staged the post-colonial project on the path of a hybridization logic of inevitable confrontation rather than in a light of participation and solidarity.

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Hybridization in post-colonial management studies connotes with the inevitability of ‘confrontation’ at a time when the Third World does not have the means to deal efficiently with it. Hybridization can also mean ‘participation’ and ‘solidarity’ (in the sense of understanding the Other’s viewpoint and embedding it) without radiating the perception of threat and taking no responsibility or showing any competence to deal with the consequences of that perception.

It concludes that, instead of ‘playing’ the ideological game at the level of the ‘super-structures’, more emphasis should be placed on building greater competency in the Latourian amodernism of development, entrepreneurship, etc. The Third World needs to build more projects by investing in the knowledge industry of amodernism while incorporating its cultural values. The West and the emerging world should not see this as a ‘threat’ to amodernism but as a ‘richness’; but for this to happen, they should actively invest in sustainability of this process by supporting the intelligentsia of knowledge producers and interpreters in the Third World.

Keywords: Purification; canonization; postcolonial emancipation; orientalism and hybridity; bruno Latour’s amodernism; project management knowledge economy; historiography.

1. INTRODUCTION

Homi Bhabha’s theoretical discourse owes much of its inspiration to Eurocentric political history and culture [1], philosophy, and theory notably to concepts developed by post-structuralists like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault but also to influences of critical scholars from developing societies like Edward Said, Benedict Anderson and Franz Fanon. His theoretical discourse focuses on a hypothetical space of in-betweeness, which he refers to as ‘the location of culture’ [2], the site that the colonial master used to oppress the colonized such as Africans. He also explains that, through this very interstitial space, the colonized was able to resist oppression in order to appropriate their own freedom. As a result, the hybrid space became a sign of cultural indeterminacy, it now represented the ambivalence of the colonial discourse. In this way, the theory is an attempt to simultaneously maintain a stance of rationalism while at the same time consciously seeking to deconstruct this essential marker of the theory as a ‘travelogue’, articulating new geographical and historical displacements [3]. The theory establishes a link between language and politics as a ‘narration of nationhood’ [2], in which national politics becomes simply a story told and re-told. It becomes an inspiration from the relationships between the west and Africa, primarily a ‘cultural’ affair, a question of multiculturalism [4].

One of the major areas that shows the limitations of Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory is the question of elite culture and power in Africa. A critical evaluation of post-colonial situations in African social and creative ‘writings’ shows that developments in the continent were marked by movements of elitism, nationalism, new ventures of Euro-centrism justified by the reification of bourgeois lifestyles and privileges. Even Homi Bhabha’s indebtedness to post-structuralism constitutes his own way (perhaps unknowingly) of reproducing ‘neo-imperial’ modes of discursive supremacy over localizing ones in the continent. By exploiting Derridian deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis and post-modern performance, Homi Bhabha shows clearly that his theory is antagonistic to Marxist materialism, the quest for capitalism and power embodied by an entrepreneurial elite culture. By reviewing nationalism, representation and resistance in abstract terms of ambivalence, hybridity and liminality, he emphasizes articulation, imagination and construction of geographical space, cultural difference and national identity. However, Bhabha’s approach gives the ‘false’ impression that there is an existential opposition between ‘theory speak’ and ‘politics’. After all, what is in the name ‘African politics’ if not a certain ‘theory’ and what is in ‘theory’ if not ‘politics’? Even the elitism and Eurocentrism of Bhabha’s post-colonial debate is nothing but one of the possible effects of the political economy of imperialism (in Africa). In Africa, ‘theory’ is not necessarily the ‘language’ only of elites, who are socially and culturally fortunate; it is also the ‘language’ of the masses, who drive the political economy. The anti-essentialistic character of Bhabha’s theory also spells out the impossibility for it to provide any kind of substantial/concrete illumination on emancipation, and this leads to suggestions in scholarly and social circles (evidenced by the ‘bad writing’ contest, for example) that the theory is ‘clouded’ in obscure style; and this is further compounded by what was seen as the opacity of
Bhabha’s thought circulation. For example, scholars claim that his interpretation of neo/imperialism transforms this history into an unreadable discourse, couched in an unintelligible jargon embodying all the sectors of economic, political, social and cultural life.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that the cloudiness and opacity are not just about problems of intelligibility, but are more importantly signs of a bigger picture that Euro-centric institutions, principles, norms and values (the ‘first’ space) had lost their ‘transparency’ as they came into contact with the colonized geographies (the ‘second’ space) where they were introduced, imposed, enforced, misread and eventually underwent disintegration. The theory’s obsession with language verbosity is simply an instance when mis-readings become ‘bad writings’ because the Eurocentric institutions, principles, norms and values (the English Book) [5] cannot be efficiently decoded into recognizable national and indigenous experiences, even by the ruling elites of the state bureaucracies, who inherit and translate them. This ‘unreadability’ of neo/imperial scripts based on Eurocentric traditions creates a critical split between the colonizer and the colonized in this Third Space. Consequently, African sociological realities are mired in the ‘theory speak’ of Western industrial countries that Bhabha’s discourse claims to have de-centralized. The implication is that his writings show that the colonized communities find it very painful to understand the intricacies of imperial values like democracy, human rights, socialism, communism, liberalism, etc, and only Mimick models such as constitutions, imposed on them (1994b). In addition, the institutional ideas introduced and imposed in the contemporary era such as structural adjustment plans, poverty eradication papers, deregulation, free trade, etc, are as obscure as their practice.

Rethinking Bhabha’s theory via the insights of African writings and environment, shows that all is not only about the theory-speak of manicheanism, liminality or ‘doubling’ in the Lacanian sense of the terms, it is also about the drive for power through the forces of nationalism, decolonization and independence. The usage of the discourse of hybridity as a way of eliminating essentialist thoughts and practices (e.g. racism) fails to illuminate developments in the longue durée within the continent because hybridity itself is prone to the same arguments of the essentialist framework that it is trying to escape from and thus it is susceptible to (re-)definition and placement. The writings show that it is only after Africans became disillusioned about the promises of colonial rule, that is, after believing naively in the hybridity of racial relations through migration (e.g. Toundi’s escape to the town in Oyono’s Une Vie de Boy); belief in urban emancipation in. Ngongwikuo’s Taboo Love; moral corruption of the town in Beti’s Ville Cruelle; exploitation of indigenous labourers in Eba’s The Good Foot from 1884 to the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s), that they started to make recourse to nationalist struggles. The African colonized people were able to achieve decolonization and political independence not merely through hybridity but by redefining and replacing in-betweenness with new strategic and essentialistic ideologies about culture, such as Négritudism in French speaking Africa and the ‘African personality movement’ in English speaking countries. In the writings, nationalism was about the shift from liminality to a political economy based on an ‘us versus them’ paradigm. The writings of Leopold Sedar Senghor [6,7,8,9,10], Aime Cesaire [11], Birago Diop [12] and Sembene Ousmane [13], for example, were based essentially on a ‘return to the roots’ as a way of fighting colonial rule. Writers like Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (Malagasy), Tchicaya U Tam’si (Congo) and Yambo Ouologuem (Mali) constituted literary African forces that worked against European cultural imperialism and were in favour of African cultural vindication, but were also against what was unprogressive in the indigenous culture. Similarly, the Pan-African movement [14] emerged as a force to counter internationalism and globalization.

African writings shed a lot of light on the limits of Bhabha’s theory by pointing out that the concepts and values that European and US Enlightenment history brought to the continent and that Bhabha explores elaborately in his theory such as the rational self, the civilized individual, progress, law and utilitarianism, etc, are indeed alternative narratives of the European Left designed to replace Rightist, capitalist ideologies, Yet, Bhabha’s theory suggests that, in Africa, these Leftist discourses only come (as first instance) to dominate political scenarios and social life itself, thereby posing as the only imperial discourse colonizing the minds of Africans in the post-colonial era. The writings show that prior to the advent of Marxist emancipation and socialist revolutionary discourses in Africa, Africans were already exposed to capitalist institutions and late
capitalist values and cultures. For many Africans, Paris or London is ‘home’, with the myth that civilization started in these geographical centres. For example, they assimilated the values of Christianity [15, (Le pauvre Christ de Bomba; [16], The whiteman of God,)], school education, hospital medicine ([17], La plaire), democratic constitutionalism (Odinga, 1967, Not yet Uhuru) and free economic enterprise before they were compelled to turn to Leftist ideologies of liberation during the epoch of nationalism ([18], (Les soleils des independances) and the thirty or so years after political independence. The writings show further that the adoption of Leftist ideologies was not an end in itself but a means to an end, namely, political and economic emancipation. The nationalist elites succeeded marvelously well at the political level but failed tragically to isolate the continent economically from dependency as Kwanve Nkrumah [14] and Frantz Fanon acknowledged. Consequently, they were compelled to relinquish the economic sovereignty of their respective nation states to global systems of free market capitalism marked by multinational corporations, international finance, deregulation and privatization.

The survival of indigenous republicanism and class issues is a critical point one may consider as a social context from which to examine the humanitarian philosophy of Homi Bhabha. The post-colonial African world was not merely a nihilistic order, that is, a collection of narratives of nation leading to a political void. There were also powerful ‘voices’ that emerged to challenge dominant neo/imperial hegemonies. For example, the writings show that anti-secularist and anti-nation state movements were active in Africa. Whether in Cyprian Ekwensi’s Burning grass where Fulani nomads continue to organize their own mode of production based on cattle-rearing in the margins of the modernizing Nigerian nation or in T.M. Aluko’s A state of our own or Elechi Amadi’s Sunset in Biafra, which depict the current tendency in many African nation states of ethnic and regional groups of people to agitate for their own national and protected space, the effect is same. These ‘voices’ included the elite intelligentsia class. For example, Somalia’s leading novelist, Farah Nuruddin, wrote a trilogy of novels against military tyranny in his home country [19,20]. Bhabha’s liminality of culture implies that class issues had become questions of the past that were already treated and dispensed with during the colonial or pre-colonial era and were no longer existent or applicable. However, African writings show that ‘class’ issues did not diminish after the decolonization struggles; on the contrary, they only took on new and more complex forms. The problem of class stratification in African societies is chronicled by the writings in terms of the impotence of the silent masses who were in the majority and the overwhelming power and conspicuous presence of the rich bourgeois elites living side by side. For example, in Mwangi’s (1973) Kill me quick, the protagonist ‘...scrutinized the ragged beggars who floated ghostly past him as closely as [he] watched the smart pot-bellied executives wrinkling their noses at the foul stench of backyards. And between these two types of beings, [he] made comparison (Kill me quick, 1).

The writers show Africa as a contrast of classes of people: contrast between the wealthy urban and poor rural settings ([21], No way to die), the patriarchal male and submissive female gender ([22], Nervous conditions, [23], Born before her time), the old and younger generations in politics (Asonwugwes’s Born to rule) and the ethnic group in power versus the ethnic groups outside the institutions of power (TM Aluko’s A state of our own).

New pan-African and localizing ideologies constitute emerging contexts that challenge discursivity or must be treated in parallel with postcolonial humanism. Although the ‘post-colonial’ is used as a belligerent term to fight domination, it is also used to condense complication, to even out real life conditions thereby reducing them to merely a binary structure of oppositions (Neil, 2004: 4). But over and beyond hybridity, multiculturalism and ambivalence, are ‘recipes’ of the Third World capitalist ‘intelligentsia’, as Anthony Appiah and Arif Dirlik would put it, which are new forms of political philosophy and nationalism based on ideological questions such as pan-Africanism, United States of Africa project, and regional strategies of economic integration like the African Union, ECOWAS, UDEAC, etc. For the past fifty years, African societies organized themselves to deal with neo-imperialism through new political struggles. Africa also became an intellectual site of nationalist insurgencies such as the Biafran civil war [24] and revolutionary anti-capitalisms ([25], How Europe Underdeveloped Africa).

Rethinking Homi Bhabha’s theory opens up our vision beyond psychism, cultural dichotomies and the agency of resistance to colonial subjugation, into the legacies of the precolonial and colonial, that is, the realm of political history.
of imperialism in Africa, the practices of the colonial master that abused African indigenous cultural systems. The ‘beyond’ of Bhabha’s ‘third space’ reveals successive epochs of republican ideology and political and cultural systems. This conflict is reflected at social and individual levels and subverts the discursive foundations and its historical agency.

In Bhabha’s in-between space, the colonial ‘subject’ is neither the colonized nor the colonizer; he/she is in a liminal position, which negates the colonizer and the colonized status simultaneously. By prioritizing only the subjectivity of the interstitial space, Bhabha suggests that Africa had defeated colonial rule or was never colonized. But after gaining independence in the 1960s, for example, most African countries had to immediately face the forces of internationalism and eventually the proponents of globalization, which operated in the same ways as hegemonical establishments of colonial rule. Internationalism and globalization were still exploiting the capitalist economy, the modern technology and the old orientalist discourses of race, ideology and religion. After having conquered the world economically, technologically and ideologically, the forces of internationalism and globalization reinforced the capitalist mode of production with its own set of sensitivities, values, attitudes, behaviours and institutions.. From this light, Bhabha’s post-colonial project appears to be impotent and reductionist in its ability to address the dynamism of these forces through its own counter-hegemonic discourses. Bhabha’s project appears to ignore or avoid the power of contemporary forces of globalization [36,37]. Consequently, it seeks ‘refuge’ in the apolitical realm of hybridity and in-betweenness as a way of operating in the margins of international power relations and struggles. His project can even be seen then as representing an implicit complicity with Leftist hegemonical struggles.

The ‘post’ (post-colonial) in the hybridity project is not evidenced in Tah Asongwed:s work [38] Born to rule which demonstrates that the imperial powers of the west continue to impose political leverage through US (Tubab’s) foreign policy and economic control through international institutions such as the World Bank, the WTO and the IMF. The west exerted cultural influence through the mass media (parabolic antennas, internet, facebook, twitter, films, etc). Bhabha’s project is oblivious of the fact that Africans, for example, in the post-independence era were still living in very difficult economic, political and social circumstances that were in many ways similar to those of colonial rule. For example, African societies were still ideologically-divided communities according to ethnicity, class, gender, racialist, generational and sexuality
factors. As Immanuel Wallerstein [39,40,41] points out in his world systems analysis, there is still a strong imperial presence that manifests itself in the form of a ‘Core-(Semi-Periphery)-Periphery’ world structure that is a repeat of the hierarchical order during the colonial epoch. In this ‘Core-Periphery’ order, economic power and cultural influence replaces the rule of the bureaucracy and the law. The colonial systems that were employed and then abandoned, such as the administration, law, education, urbanization, hospital medicine, sanitary conditions, religion, language, etc, were maintained rather than replaced by the emerging nation state regimes of black elites. Consequently, the power systems of colonial Africa were simply transposed into the post-independence settings.

The relationships between the west and the postcolonial situation in Africa are not primarily about the ‘discourse of language’ or ‘cultural identity’, but are about global policies of military armaments, raw material commodities for the free market, exploitation of the continent’s natural resources as in Diescho’s [42] Born of the sun, the politics of migrant labour and remittances as in Peter Abrahams’[43] Mine boy and in films like ‘Come Back, Africa’ (1959), ‘Jemima and Johnny’ (1966) and ‘A World Apart’ (1988). They are also about new issues of border controls and new questions of national debt, drugs and terrorism. The ‘beyond’ of the post-colonial discourse addresses itself to these political and economic realities, which Bhabha’s perspective of postcolonial theory commits only to the alienating ‘third space’ of cultural discourse. In fact, Bhabha’s theory effects the dissolution of Third World issues and questions of colonial domination by re-constituting them under the signifiers of post-colonialism. Whether in the writings of Robert Young [45] or of Arif Dirlik, there is a recognition that postcolonial discourse, that made its entry only recently into the academic realm, had its provenance in the terrains of ‘third world’ and ‘colonial’ questions of political economy. Bhabha’s theory is actually an attempt to get rid of all distinctions between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’, to eliminate all ‘binarisms’ that are clearly a legacy of imperialism and colonial ways of thought. It is an attempt to expose societies in the third world as engaging with the global order through processes of complexification, heterogeneity and contingency.

Bhabha’s perspective of the post-colonial ignores the importance of history as directive to political economy; it ‘evaporates’ all forms of ‘historicisation’, cultural singularity, political imperialism and ideological hegemonies so that in his interstitial space they merely become metaphors, generalizations, manicheanisms, repetitions and signifying abstractions free of concrete factors like ethnicity, class, gender, time, and geography. This abstraction of universalities and play of identities show that Bhabha’s project is indifferent to matters of factuality and historicity; it sees history as a rationalist invention of linear time and construes the colonial encounter as a discursive idea that is psychic in character. Understandably, his hybridity, whether of a political, cultural or philosophical nature, is a critique of all forms of essentialism, it is intended to claim that cultures are in a state of permanent flux and that there is nothing like a discrete national culture that cannot be vulnerable to the discursive ‘traffic’, the migrancy of cultures, considered to be superior. Homi Bhabha’s discursive writing assumes that he had access to privileged insights about the flux and that he stand from an advantageous position. But this position is that of an essentialist male, elitist, bourgeois onlooker, surveying the imperial universe and ‘illuminating’ it in order to tell the Truth from his own perspective of a ‘double vision’.

In addition, this position is a weakness of the postcolonial project because Bhabha argues from an ideologically loaded location, a location of shifting margins, cultural displacements, spaces of ‘translation’, etc, which dispenses with any sense of concrete authenticity based on the Master/Slave dichotomy, and on opposition. Bhabha’s theory is a sign that history is happening, but it negates history as an ‘organic’ entity. This elaboration of hybridity, through displacement and contingent forms of politics, is accomplished with the help of writers such as Ranajit Guha and Veena Das in ‘Subaltern as perspective’, for example, Veena Das [46] request that a historiographical approach to the subaltern should be adopted to displace social and rational action. The emphasis here is on discourse, that is, on affection, iteration, contestation and camouflage. Here, agency antagonizes with history, ‘a priori’ knowledge becomes just a form, and history is sui generis rather than an ‘essentialism’. There is no prior, nor a structure, only contingency. In this light, Bhabha’s fundamental idea is that human behaviour should be elucidated in non-rationalist terms. However, Bhabha’s theory projected this way, cannot explain the very bases of political
action. It cannot explain, for example, the existence of organised communities of exploited ethnicities fighting for their own rights against an upper ethnic class [47]. In this case, the underdog community members communicate between themselves in ways that may be described as ‘rational’ and take actions that are ‘rational’ (to use Habermas’ terms). The decisions that the Accra market women take to stage a protest march to the parliament to articulate their grievances about their unhealthy working conditions maintained by a patriarchal system, are constituted not in a flux nor in a displacement but in a given historical location of post-independence Nkrumah’s Ghana (Bebey, The Ashanti doll). The history of imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and independence as enunciated in African works of art such as Chinua Achebe’s Things fall apart, Arrow of god, and Buchi Emecheta’s The joys of motherhood [48], Azanwi Nchami’s Footprints of destiny [27], Ahmadou Kourouma’s Les soleils des independences [18], Achebe’s A man of the people [49] and Anthills of the savannah [50], was not constituted from Bhabha’s universal human condition based on continuous ‘migration’ and ‘displacement’, but was motivated from concrete conditions of international political economy such as mercantilism, the quest for an inter-continental commerce, the civilizing mission and decolonization revolution. In these historical contexts, Africans were not really able to exercise their freedoms by themselves, nor did indigenous communities emerge out of and fade into the ‘thin air’ of the infinitely contingent. Among Bhabha’s African ‘migrants’, there are the privileged, who exploit wealth and the underprivileged, who are poor and experience ‘displacement’ not as an end in itself to be celebrated culturally but as material conditions of agony. Consequently, what the underprivileged seek is not ‘displacement’ but a new ‘placement’, that is, a lieu from where they can start off with their life anew, with the hope that they would see a better future.

2. METHODS OF STUDY

This paper exploits insights from the amodernist theory of Bruno Latour. Latour [51-59], wrote a number of books associated with social constructionism. He renounced the subjective/objective division and developed the actor–network theory, a constructionist approach that was determined by ethnmethodology and the generative semiotics ofAlgirdas Julius Greimas, and Gabriel Tarde’s sociology.

In his Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: Essais d’anthropologie symétrique (We Have Never Been Modern), Latour re-thinks and re-assesses mankind’s mental landscape. He evaluated the contributions of the scientific method to knowledge and the workplace and came to the conclusion that society was never really modern. He promoted the concept of non-modernism (or amodernism) as opposed to postmodernism, modernism, and anti-modernism. His position was that mankind has never really been modern and only insignificant divisions separate Westerners from non-Westerners. Latour viewed modernism as an epoch which believed it had annulled the entire past in its wake. He represented the anti-modern response as defending such ideas as spirit, rationality, liberty, society, God, or even the past. Postmodernism, from the Latourian light, also accepted the modernistic abstractions as though they were real. In contrast, the amodernist idea restored a symmetry between science and technology (nature) on the one hand and society on the other hand. Latour also referred to the impossibility of returning to pre-modernism because it precluded the large scale experimentation which benefited modernism.

Latour tried to prove through case studies that there is a fallacy in the compartmentalization of object/subject and nature/society dichotomies of modernity, traceable to Plato. He rejected the notion of "out there" versus "in here" and rendered the object/subject distinction as simply unusable thereby charting a new approach to knowledge, work, and circulation reference. He considered amodernists as playing on a field, different from that of post-moderns. He referred to this amodernist field, which is broader but much less polemical - a creation of an unknown territory - as the Middle Kingdom.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section of the paper, I attempt to explain why I think insights about Homi Bhabha’s hybridity theory are inaccurate ontologically and epistemologically in the present age of globalization. Project management and organization are essentially an epistemological canon of the projectification of human societies, which has conquered the history (e.g. slave trade, colonial rule, internationalism, globalization), culture and geographies of the universe. Although post-colonial theorists [60,2] have attempted to deconstruct this canon in scholarship, they have failed. Even though
project management and organization studies have appropriated insights from the postcolonial corpus (Prasad and Prasad 2003), these insights have not replaced organizational processes like planning, execution, control, human resources, accounting, quality, costing, schedule, participation portfolios and so forth. Despite the popularity of hybridity studies, as an incarnation of the effect of the colonial encounter on management ([61], Prasad and Prasad 2003), the boundaries of canonization continued to reinforce themselves. Latour [62] explained this phenomenon by alluding to processes of hybridization and purification. When the coloniser encountered the colonized, processes and practices of textual translation took place. But, at the same time, mechanisms of purification embodied, for example, in bodies of knowledge (PMBOK, PRINCE2, AGILE, etc) constructed the colonized as ontologically different and in need of technology and development. The metropolitan bodies of knowledge (PMBOK is now in its fifth, 2013 edition) masked their own recourse to hybridity discourse in history by rejecting synthesis, denying mutuality, and historiography, and prioritizing canonization, objectivity, linearity, surrogation, rationality, perpetuation, self-identification, disguise, omissions/exclusions [63], occidentalisation, resistance and purification. The Other (African, primitive, Islamic, tropical), was portrayed as inferior, exotic, and degenerative in dire need of modernization. What powered this Orientalism process was the canonization of project management’s historiography, whose basis is American and European. The metropolis was the observer, and projectification was presented as an essentially western ontology which had to be purified from Other discourses through strategies of compartmentalization (the West and the non-West).

In terms of methods employed, project management knowledge systems approached the Other through exclusionary/inclusionary processes of asymmetry. The fact that the early projects managed were large-scale military and civilian works of what was seen as an amodernist (‘universalist’) civilization across different geographical regions (the Egyptian pyramid, the Hangzhou Dam in China, the Coliseum in Rome, the Boulder Dam, the slave trade, sugar plantations, Cold War missiles, NASA, the light bulb [64] before the creation of joint stock companies like the East India company, joint ventures, large corporations [65,66] gave project management a colonial edge, unprecedented in human history. Consequently, slave trade and colonial management was programmed to promote political and economic goals of a universal ‘civilization’ narrated in African writings as the civilizing mission (Olaudah Equiano, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Joseph Ngongwikuo, Kenjo Jumban, Timothy Aluko, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono). These writings show in rich detail how early management practices (through the white District officer, D.O., governor, chefs de canton) of administrations over raw materials like coffee, cocoa, bananas, etc, signified a qualitative shift in the techniques of management. For example, colonial operations were coordinated; skills and job descriptions were specified (T.M. Aluko’s Kinsman and foreman), human resources were classified in such a way as to promote division of labour, and respect for age, gender and time scheduling (e.g. punctuality, discipline master, etc). The principles of scientific management as propounded by Samuel Taylor, for example, were applied in the German colony in Peter Nsanda’s The good foot where one finds the rudiments of division of labour, control through chiefs, recruited labour, time management, and coordination between components [67,68,69]. Where in the PMBOK Guide, for example, are these bureaucrative practices used in the colonies acknowledged. Lord Lugard’s model, which was consistent with the British philosophy of indirect rule and differed with Weberian idealist models of bureaucracy or the French continental model of centralized bureaucracy, facilitated colonial expansion by basing its premises on a discrete decision-making process, designed to realize the civilizing mission, which was seen as the white man’s burden [70]. Biological traits of the African were also used to justify him as lazy, childish, etc and fit only for menial jobs.

In the 1940s and 1950s, colonial project management took new forms like participatory management, informal groups, sensitivity training and democratic management [71]. Studies were conducted to explain the relevance of ‘output norms’ and informal group structures in Zululand. [72]. Yet, these findings were expunged from the managerial discourse [73]. Change management, action research, group dynamics, and participatory management were excluded from the canonized management texts as a purification strategy to keep project management ‘distinctly Western’ [74]. While others (Henry Fayol) speak of westernization as a ‘universalism’, the post-independence epoch legitimized a new kind of control of MNCs over
Africa’s natural resources by drawing insights from culture [75], promoting values such as obedience, loyalty, devotion, harmony, and identifying the good of the nation with the good of the individual.

In the next section of this paper, I propose to examine the project management context in which Homi Bhabha’s emancipation discourse was theorized in Africa. This will enable us to understand why the optimism of Homi Bhabha’s theory have translated into new orientalist and subalternist narrations still subjugated to metanarratives of western management practices than to localizing protocols. When the indigenous and colonial management Knowledge systems in Africa comprised of management technologies, organizational structures, and traditional education underwent profound changes, came into contact with the cutting edge protocols and procedures embedded in western guides of project management knowledge bodies, they could not resist subjugation if we take the example of pastoralists, for example, we see clearly how different forces of change challenged the viability of indigenous management systems and either destroyed the systems in some parts of Africa or modified, and caused them to adapt in others. One cannot easily pinpoint precisely the times of change, given that indigenous modes of management underwent a gradual process of transformation caused by different factors exerting pressure on the practices at the same time.

Although indigenous practices of pastoral management were already undergoing change before 1884/1895 caused by droughts, sedentarization, inter-tribal conflicts, etc, it was chiefly during the colonial era that policies like taxation and pacification, began to impact seriously on traditional pastoral systems of livestock breeding. The British Administration in Nigeria created settled Wodaabe Fulani villages, entrusted with an Ardo, or traditional chief in each village and charged with collection of taxes. The policies of veterinary care, emancipation of slaves, increased livestock statistics, reinforced high consumption of water resources in water points and promoted overgrazing. With quarantine policies, aimed at restricting disease spread, high concentrations of livestock caused an imbalance between livestock and availability of pastures. The incentive policies of sedentarization caused the chiefs to vie for the greatest number of Fulani transhumants by constructing villages in the best grazing lands, thereby inducing excessive grazing, straining water resources, inviting the settlement of farmers, and reducing rangelands. The policy of veterinary control against diseases, as narrated in Kenjo Jumbam’s The whiteman of cattle initiated in the 1920s, and supported with funds and human resources and the emancipation of slaves, among Twareg and Fulani indigenes in West Africa, northern and southern Sudan in 1947 increased livestock. In the Kenya of 1906, the British administration imposed quarantines, and suppressed the economic capabilities of Maasai herders who were not allowed to sell livestock nor breed Merino sheep, in order to keep prices high for European livestock and protect economic competitiveness of European ranches. But with the colonial policy of pacification, which consisted in intervening to stop raids and wars between pastoral communities, and suppressing the Bornu Empire as well as farmers in the highlands, in Nigeria, and allowing Wodaabe Fulanis to freely use pastures, the effect was facilitation of mobility and liberation of unutilized pastures [76].

Other policies like crop cultivation, intensively managed ranches, destruction of traditional norms, practices and habits, which weakened the entire cultural framework produced imbalances between livestock and pastures with the best lands expropriated by European colonials while pastoral or hunter-gatherer groups were allotted arid and infertile “tribal reserves”. Tax policy and nationalization of land (e.g. the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of Nigeria in 1916) made all lands public and under control of the Governor requiring herders to stay in a place throughout a season, thereby abandoning their traditional range management techniques, and with annulling of the tenure system, the traditional social control over rangelands was dismantled (cf. Cyprain Ekwensi’s The burning grass).

In colonial administrations in French West Africa, farmers rather than pastoralists benefitted from laws passed on crop expansion where the Kafue Flats in Southern Zambia were reserved for European ranches. Insufficient land compelled Tonga native herders to overstock and use land intensively while in 1914 in Northern Nigeria, best grazing lands of the Wodaabe were seized [76] and best quality rangeland was expropriated from the Maasa with other measures such as the “Swynnerton Plan” in Kenya, validating forceful destocking, land reclamation and commercialization. Through the tax policy, the colonial administration in Nigeria exploited the
Wodaabe. These management policies unleashed a process which caused traditional land tenure style of pastoralists to lose its authority. In Kenya, Maasai culture was dismantled and these policies were continued by post-independence administrations.

During the post-colonial era, from the 1950s, the processes of change that had been initiated by the colonial administrations, namely, increasing livestock, sedentarization, decreasing rangelands, urban influence, veterinary services decreasing traditional social control over rangelands, increasing central administrative authority, underdevelopment of water resources increasing revenue distribution gap among pastoralists, provision of supplemental feed, etc, continued but with factors like droughts and disease epidemics, environmental impact of these policies resulting in declines over livestock numbers while putting strains on resource capacity. The living standards of people declined as in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Northern Tanzania [77]. Thus, these policies contributed to breakdown of traditional grazing controls and tenure arrangements as in Twareg territory in Niger between 1961 and 1969 (FAO 1972), in the Ferlo region of Northern Senegal, the Kalahari among the Kgalagari (hunter-gatherer/pastoralists) in central Somalia, and among the Nuba in Sudan displaced from the Jebel al-Awliya dam, and relocated around state created boreholes.

Urban influence, such as modern education, wage labour (in cities, mines and agro-industries), the political powers of the central governments have resulted in a decrease in manpower available on the range, and a change in management strategies, increasing commercialization, gradual widening of market linkages, land nationalization, privatization, establishment of regional authority and “local governments”, and decimation of entire tribes, which have contributed to decrease traditional social control over resource management, the abrogation of tribal territorial rights, socio-political fragmentation and a breakdown in traditional control of natural resources. The decision-making process was transferred from local communities to national and local governments, against the Kikuyu in Kenya, the grazing reserves of Northern Nigeria, the Sakuye of Northern Kenya, the Dinka in Sudan, and the Berbers in Morocco, who became victims of Somali separatists considering them as pro-government, while the Kenyan army suspected them of helping the Somali. Among Fulanis in Northern Cameroon, as a household becomes richer, its younger generation moves into urban areas, necessitating hiring of non-Fulani herders (Frantz 1981); consequently, the poor household is left with less labour and is forced to forego traditional resource management techniques. Among the Maasai, capitalism displaced their egalitarian outlook, and in central Somalia, cooperative ranches privately enclosed pastureland but these enclosures provoked fence burning and retaliation.

All of these factors degraded local institutions and management of natural resources with traditional systems gradually being disrupted. As the younger generation move to urban areas or as they are educated in formal schools, the introduction of imported cement, rice, modern medicines, and zinc roofing, has reduced the need for natural resources and traditional measurement systems such as timing and weighting which were also replaced with modern ones like watches, weighing scales. However, not all is lost. Many pastoral groups still retain and use some of their traditional knowledge systems, such as rituals, traditional medicinal plants, knowledge of the value of trees, range reseeding, etc, and traditional houses are being increasingly constructed out of bricks and cement. Livestock management (herding, watering, etc.) is labour intensive, the availability of labour at the household level in part defines the viability of traditional grazing controls and techniques. Wherever labour is available, the indigenous system thrives, if not, then people find shortcuts which often result in a breakdown or modification of the system. Labour availability on the range has generally decreased due to children being sent to formal schools, and young men leaving for salaried wages or other occupations. Fewer members of the younger generation are willing to remain as pastoralists.

Traditional deferment of pastures to allow for regeneration of the range was either shortened or entirely dropped, traditional migration routes were altered, traditional transhumance to wet season areas and to stay all year in the dry season area was abandoned, range areas reduced with imposition of nation state laws. The traditional strategy of occupying new areas when old ones were no longer sufficient, was no longer feasible; similarly, the agro-pastoral strategy of moving a settlement to an entirely new area after a few decades, to find fresh resources and allow the old area to rest, which helped to maintain the
ecological balance in the long term, was no longer a viable strategy. Traditional deferment systems like seasonal transhumance in the Algerian Steppe, the Rufaa’ al-Hoi of Eastern Sudan, the Rendille and Gabra of Northern Kenya, the Dinka of Kongor become scarcer, and the main criterion for selecting herding units is no longer kinship but pasture condition and productivity. The local socio-political hierarchy of chiefs and council of elders has for the most part lost much of its power and been partially replaced by an administration appointed by the central state system. Thus, it no longer has the power to enforce the traditional grazing controls and resource use regulations. Communal meetings, used in the past to discuss and devise rules, are still being regularly convened but cooperation among herding units has declined, and tribal codes and rules governing transhumance movements are gradually being abandoned.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial project serves to establish a globalised hermeneutical authority of the post-modern over the economic, political and cultural environments of Africa. The popularity of the theory in the United States, Europe, Australia, Africa and elsewhere evidences this fact. It is, an attempt to create an intellectual space beyond imperial modes of thinking; yet, this attempt is limited by being susceptible to indeterminacy, and to the restrictions of political ambiguity. It is a way of radicalizing politics without promoting anti-capitalism; a Leftist way of constructing a ‘post-political’ universe. There is a need for post-colonial theory to evolve its own political agenda and engage with the denied subjectivity of Africans [78]. Bhabha’s project is ambivalent in its political orientation, and avoids any militant commitments. But Bhabha’s project as enunciated in The Location of culture, for example, can and should still re-engage with new spaces of re-inscription and negotiation, in order to expand the liberatory boundaries of intervention. These boundaries would have to incorporate the political economy of pre-capitalist, capitalist, entrepreneurial and neo/modernist hegemonical systems in Africa based on the embedded economy, patrimonialism and communitarianism. Homi Bhabha’s liminality is a template from which to review the question of social justice in post-colonial Africa, questions relating to poverty, the environment, corruption, exploitation, etc. But it also enables us to see that beyond the academics of interstitionality, multiculturalism and hybridity, there are more critical and historical questions of the roles of neo/colonialism, the capitalist countries of the west, the world system of ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ [79], the oil cartels, the I/NGOs, transnational corporations, modernity, Eurocentricity, rationality and imperialism in the oppression, subjugation and subsequently the under-development of Africa.

END NOTES

[1] I am using Professor Homi Bhabha’s theory in this paper as a useful departure point from which to stimulate discussion on and re-analyze the strategies of emancipative management in Africa. My target is not to demolish his theory but to engage it with a project management ontology and epistemology. As far as the African context of management methodology is concerned, Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory, in particular, and post-colonial theory, in general, needs to go beyond just ‘textuality’ and engage seriously with the management of very dynamic historical, political, international, and cultural projects and geographical, environmental and ecological realities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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