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Special issue:

Africanist Public Intellectuals, Progressive Politics, and Youth Agency in a Digital Age

NOKOKO

Institute of African Studies
Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada)
2021 (9)

Nokoko is an open-access journal promoting dialogue, discourse and debate on Pan-Africanism, Africa and Africana. *Nokoko* brings forward the foundational work of Professor Daniel Osabu-Kle and his colleagues when they started the Journal of Pan-African Wisdom in 2005. 'Nokoko' is a Ga word that means something that is new, novel, surprising and interesting. The journal offers a venue for scholarship to challenge enduring simplified views of Africa and the African diaspora, by providing other perspectives and insights that may be surprising, interesting, and refreshing.

Combining spaces for academic and community reflection, *Nokoko* creates an opportunity for discussion of research that reflects on the complicated nature of pan-African issues. It provides a forum for the publication of work from a cross disciplinary perspective that reflects scholarly endeavour, policy discussions, practitioners' reflections, and social activists' thinking concerning the continent and beyond. Hosted by the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University (in Ottawa, Canada), *Nokoko* provides a space for emerging and established scholars to publish their work on Africa and the African diaspora.

Layout by **Jillian Piper**.
Cover Photo of Professor Pius Adesanmi at an African Studies event during Black History month in February 2018 taken by **Akintunde Akinleye**.

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Introduction: Africanist Public Intellectuals, Progressive Politics and Youth Agency in a Digital Age

Nduka Otiono

The terms "intellectual" and "public intellectual" often evoke a wide array of related meanings which revolve around the idea of a person of letters who professionally or vocationally engages in the four Cs: critical thinking, critical reading, critical writing, and critical engagement. Given their prevalent use in various contexts of everyday communication, the portmanteau terms raise conceptual challenges and meaning potentialities that can be confusing and sometimes lead to their interchangeable usage—even by those devoted to the business of (public) intellection. The wide-angled lenses from which the term is viewed is connected to its chequered history and genealogy, dating back to 206 BC when the idea of the "scholar-gentlemen" sprung from appointments by *Huáng dì*, the monarch of China during the Imperial Period of Chinese history. As Charles Alexander Moore (1967) has noted, "It was good enough to be praised and imitated in 18th century Europe" (22). Other early iterations of the terms include their identification with "literati" or "*litterati*" (Latin), associated with the Carolingian Empire (800–888), and mention in The *Mahabharata*, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India regarded as "the longest poem ever written" (Lochtefeld 2002: 139). Stephan Colini (2006) further traces the "occasional usage of 'intellectuals' as a plural noun" in Europe in the late nineteenth century "to refer, usually with a figurative or ironic intent, to a collection of people who might be identified in terms of their intellectual inclinations or pretensions" (20). However, it was not until the Dreyfus Affair, a political scandal that shook the Third Republic in France between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that the idea of the "intellectual in public life" gained considerable traction with the work of the writer and journalist, Émile Zola.

The contemporary understanding of the term "public intellectual" is largely attributable to the work of two twentieth century scholars—the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas whose ground-breaking study *Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* (1963) defined the context of the social space within which the organic or progressive intellectual (to echo Anthony Gramsci) functions, and the polymathic

French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre wittily described by Benedict O'Donohoe (2011) as "a pocket-sized person with a brain the size of a planet" (2). Other scholars, leaders, and activists who have theorized the idea of the public intellectual, whether explicitly or tacitly, cover a spectrum of political positions. They include Marx, Lenin, Anthony Gramsci, W.E.B. Du Bois, and other radical black intellectuals associated with the Black Atlantic and global south traditions. Unlike fascist public intellectuals whose work are outside our view in this essay, the works of these cited great thinkers synchronize with "Sartrean notions of intellectual engagement, political commitment and revolutionary praxis to address contemporary questions," to quote O'Donohoe (2011: 2). It is in the latter sense that most of the essays collected in this special issue of *Nokoko* on public intellectuals in Africa should be understood. More so, when considered in the context of the dedication of this issue to Pius Adesanmi, our late friend, colleague, editorial board member, and Director of Carleton University's Institute of African Studies, who tragically died in the Ethiopian Airline crash on March 10, 2019 near Addis Ababa.

In dedicating this issue to Adesanmi, we celebrate his varied academic and public intellectual disposition and practices – his multiple interests, commitments and contributions as an academic scholar, regular columnist in Nigerian (online) papers, strong mentorship activities in Africa and North America, his artistic output, an immensely busy schedule of public talks in Africa, Europe and North America, and his social media posts engaged with by tens of thousands of followers. Although not all the essays directly pay tribute to Adesanmi and his work, most of the contributors use Adesanmi's intellectual activism as a catalyst for thinking about the role of an institution builder and public intellectual and an "Africanist" scholar in the twenty-first century.

Adesanmi was extremely dexterous in his productions and interventions, using all forms of writing and speaking, and thus we welcome a range of genres of writing to explore one or more of these topics – be they academic, social activist, or artistic. Taken together, his writings as published in three volumes—*You're Not A Country, Afric*a (2011), *Naija No Dey Carry Last* (2015), and *Who Owns the Problem* (2020)—underscore the title of this Introduction in regards to the conception of the public intellectual in the context of digital democracy: "African Public Intellectuals, Progressive Politics and Youth Agency in a Digital Age." This issue pulls together essays which responded to the original call for "submissions of original manuscripts that critically reflect on what it means or what it should mean to be an 'Africanist' scholar in the twenty-first century." Taken together, the essays offer varied perspectives on the challenges of the public intellectual in Africa today. Using various lenses and case studies, they explore the African public intellectual's engagement with ideology and the politics of knowledge production and political agency. The essays address the troubling conceptual tripartite questions that various thinkers including Jean-Paul Sartre have tackled concerning the (public) intellectual: What is an intellectual? What are the functions of the intellectual? Is the writer an intellectual?

Javier Fernandez Sebastian's interesting interview with Pierre Rosanvallon, the celebrated French scholar, provides a template for engaging with the different but related approaches adopted by the contributors to this issue for dealing with these questions. Responding to a question by Sebastian (2007), Rosanvallon avers:

> For me, the role of intellectuals has always been a pivotal question, regardless of their academic functions. The academic function is producing research work. But what I call the intellectual function is the role that this research work plays in society. In France, the dominant model has been that of the individual who commits his academic legiti-

> macy or his own academic projects in the public arena in order to take a stand (714).

This "dominant model" of the intellectual has not only gained currency, but it is also coterminous with the profile of the public intellectual in other parts of the world, including Africa. Granted, as famed historian Toyin Falola notes in his contribution to this collection, "The role of a public intellectual is often a multifaceted one. The public intellectual employs informed perspectives to penetrate and reveal progressive insights into the workings of their world." The sometimes-contentious issue is the conceptualization of the intellectual as either socially conscious and politically engaged or passive and self-absorbed in their world of knowledge production. This idea is further explored in Nduka Otiono's essay in this collection from disciplinary and territorial perspectives. Nevertheless, the point can be made that all intellectuals socially engage in the public sphere to some degree, when they participate in the politics of knowledge production and professionalization.

In the contemporary African postcolonial context, the dominant theme among many intellectuals is the decolonization of knowledge. While intellectuals engaged in this ideological mission may be accorded the status of some kind of "public" intellectual, it is pertinent to contrast such acts of quiet intellection by "Africanist" scholars with the overt practical—sometimes radical—political action by the "real" public intellectuals.

Ali Mazrui grapples with these issues of "the homogenization of the intellectual culture of the world" as he addresses the question: "What makes a great Africanist? He or she needs a commitment to Africa, a capacity to interpret it, and a spirit of congeniality towards fellow Africans" (Adem 2010: 199). These look like simple dicta. But in real life these categories appear more easily identified than exemplified or justified by such "great Africanists." Mamdani (2016) seems to problematize the core challenge through the additional insight he offers into our understanding of the profile of the African public intellectual and scholar. This is evident in the dichotomy highlighted in the title of his essay that focuses on the politics of decolonization of knowledge in African universities, "Between the public intellectual and the scholar: decolonization and some post-independence initiatives in African higher education." The keywords here are "the public intellectual" and "the scholar." In everyday speech, individuals tend to confuse the terms in their association of the word "scholar" with "intellectual." Sometimes when they use the term "public intellectual," they may in reality mean a "scholar" or simply an "intellectual." Mamdani's article indeed further "explores the role and tension between the public intellectual and the scholar from the perspective of decolonization" (68). It is, therefore, worth noting that even the term "intellectual" comes with its own baggage of confusion that can lead to further to confusion. Thus, we find the clarification by Ahmed Mohiddin (2010) very germane to the discourse:

> It is important here to make a distinction between intellectual and intellectualism. The former might be defined either as a person who has been exposed for any length of time to a formal intellectual training of some sort and not necessarily Western; or a person who has the capacity for abstract thinking and is demonstrably able to articulate his views vocally or by writing. An intellectual need not therefore necessarily be the 'Degree Holder'. Intellectualism is simply an activity necessarily associated with the role of the intellectual (226-227).

This special issue not only recognizes the complex nature of the topic, but the seven essays and two reviews of Adesanmi's posthumous collection of keynote

addresses (*Who Owns the Problem?* 2020)[1] boldly underscore the nuanced differences between the "scholar," the "intellectual," and the "public intellectual." The dedication of most of the essays to the work of Pius Adesanmi is the organizing rubric. This allows for sustained discussion of the subject matter around a single African public intellectual who straddles the African diaspora and the homeland. However, it must be quickly pointed out that two of the essays in this collection, Adeolu Oluwasey Oyekan's and Otiono's, offer broader views of the topic. A third essay, by Toyin Falola, spotlights a different kind of African public intellectual as a case study.

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The territorial location of the Africanist scholar in the homeland and in the Diaspora—as exemplified by Adesanmi's life and work—calls attention to a recurrent trope in discourses of the profile of African intellectuals working in the Western academy, which is one of crisis of identity and ideology.[2] This profile is defined by the challenges of living in the Diaspora and committing to social activism in the homeland. So vital is this trope that some African scholars (Irele 1991; Njubi 2002; Irobi 2008) have devoted much time to examining how African intellectuals living abroad negotiate the "double consciousness" that virtually holds them hostage. Njubi expresses this idea with remarkable clarity in his declaration that for Black African intellectual migrants in the West, "the resolution of this identity crisis is a political act which produces three 'types' of migrant intellectuals: the comprador intelligentsia,[3] the postcolonial critic and the progressive exile" (69). While this special issue makes no pretence to *comprehensively*[4] examining the politics of location, identity, and knowledge production in relation to the work of the Africanist

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1 The book reviews are by Eyitayo Aloh and Emma Bider, respectively titled "Listening to African Voices: Adesanmi's Love letter From the Grave" and "The Privilege of Editing #WhoOwnsTheProblem: Remembering Pius Adesanmi."

2 F. Njubi Nesbitt (2002) provides more context for apprehending the point being made here, which we would like to quote at some length: "To complicate matters further, the migrants must also endure alienation from their countries of origin. Academic exiles are likely to be victims of government repression even before leaving their home countries. Many are pushed out of their countries after political disturbances at university campuses. Others are exiled because their political perspectives do not correspond with the dominant ideological dispensation of the time. Yet, these same forces that kept them from achieving their full potential at home demonize them for leaving instead of contributing to national development. These tensions between intellectuals and politicians have boiled over frequently in the postcolonial world… [as]… in a shouting match between Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings and eminent Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui during a conference in Davos, Switzerland in June 1999 (Mwagiru, 1999). The Ghanaian president was extremely upset because medical doctors trained in Ghana at great expense were leaving for the West as soon as they completed their studies. He argued that it was not enough for the professionals to repay their student loans because it took at least 7 years to train another doctor, leaving thousands of patients without medical care" (69).

3 While we do not provide a more detailed discussion of these categories here, it is important to note the association between the "comprador intelligentsia" and those intellectuals who serve the hegemonic ruling class in contradistinction from the progressive public intellectuals who oppose and have a vision of a more democratic, just world. Indeed, as Derek Boothman (2008) rightly points out, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony "rests, as he himself states, on a fundamental text of Marx's, the 1859 preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, which he translated in a part of Notebook 7 set aside for such work" (201).

4 It is impractical to cover every salient dimension of this vast and complex subject matter. For example, we have not paid attention to the distinction between the 'Africanist' intellectual and the Africana intellectual—Nduka Otiono offers some insight into this area in his essay in this volume. Suffice it therefore to note that while the 'Africanist' intellectual focuses on Africa, the latter are African and diaspora intellectuals that write not just about Africa but also about its Diasporas and of much else: see for example, Lewis Gordon (2008).

scholar in the twenty-first century, some of the essays use Adesanmi's work to subvert the recurrent trope of the Diaspora African intellectual as embodying identity and ideological crises referred to above. The essays also highlight what Thandabantu Nhlapo aptly describes as "the rise of new kinds of trans-national imagined communities (e.g. Facebook) which are no longer beholden to the boundaries and binaries characteristic of the ethos of autonomy and sovereignty fostered by the nation-state" (2012, ix). Adesanmi fully understood the significance of digital humanities to Africa and for Africa's growing youth population and was adept at deploying social media as a public intellectual. Recognizing that much of the theorizing and discourses on Africa constituted what Harry Garuba qualifies as "a narrative teleology constructed from elsewhere" (2012, 44), Adesanmi committed to bridging the territorial gap between the Diaspora and the continent as Samuel Oloruntoba clearly describes in his essay in this special issue.

Like some of his contemporaries working in the Western academy, Adesanmi operated from outside the continent; but unlike many, he dug his roots deeply in the continent and used social media to reach beyond geographic boundaries. In so doing, he sought to address the notion that "[t]he scholarly study of Africa in institutions of higher learning within the domain of area studies is often knowledge constructed from a distance about an area of the world by 'experts,' from outside of the area in question" (Garuba, 44). He did not have to construct knowledge of the continent from outside; he promoted a model of the new African public intellectual's complicated relationship with the continent which required some kind of presence-absence status. As Otiono writes in his essay in this journal, Adesanmi represents a younger generation of African public intellectuals whose outstanding work "marks a shift from the traditional public sphere of intellectual discourses to hybrid formations that include digital or social media activism involving youthful 'netizens,' to use one of Adesanmi's favorite expressions." Crucial to the work of the Africanist public intellectual in our time, therefore, is the recognition that progressive politics and youth agency can be allies in Africa's quest for development in the Digital Age. Falola (2020) further highlights this point is his Preface to Adesanmi's *Who Owns the Problem*. According to Falola, "[i]n this book, Pius unequivocally demonstrates the need for African agency in order to transform the continent. He enjoins Africans to be the agents that will identify, define, and narrate African problems and also report the continent's progress . . . To lift Africa up from its subaltern state, Pius exhorts the people of Africa to be pivotal agents" (x).

Being "pivotal agents" requires bridging the gap between gown and town, finding in Adesanmi's words, "a meeting point between theoretical abstraction and empirical constrictions" (2020 xxiv). It also requires recognizing Africa's embrace of the new modernity which allows the palm wine tapper to deploy a Blackberry cellphone atop the palm tree to communicate with his clients waiting for fresh palm wine as Adesanmi writes in an essay with the thrilling title, "Face Me I Book You: Writing Africa's Agency in the Age of the Netizen" (2020: 127-136). It is no surprise then that Adesanmi's engagements as a public intellectual in both physical and virtual public spheres soon earned him, in his own words, the status of "a social media celebrity, followed on Facebook and Twitter by thousands across Nigeria and the rest of Africa" (2020: xxiv). He further explains the importance of the digital public sphere to the work of the new Africanist scholar and public intellectual:

> In a little over a decade, my Facebook wall came to acquire the reputation of a public seminar room, attracting hundreds of African doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career faculty based in the continent, Europe, and North America. I was also writing prodigiously for that audience. Social media celebrity increased the pace of my public lectures in Nigeria, necessitating another mode of writing for a third category of audience (2020: xxiv).

Beyond the content of the socially conscious discourses of Africanist public intellectuals, therefore, context matters a lot. Therefore, Adesanmi emphasizes the importance of social media as a site for his work, for reaching a diverse audience that comprises everyday people, professional colleagues, and the bureaucratic and political elite who are often the driving forces

behind the impoverishment of the continent.

The new Africanist scholars and public intellectuals, like their predecessors who deployed their intellectual resources to wage war against colonialism and neo-colonialism, must recognize the limitations of postcolonial politics of knowledge, especially given that many of them live in the Diaspora. It is pertinent to identify, as part of the advocacy for decolonizing knowledge, that "the knowledge economy is probably the most sanitised phrase that describes a knowledge capitalism which has made crude market-driven models and ideas such as value added, continual innovation, new technologies, consumers and clients all pervasive in the thinking (and speech) of university administrators" (Garuba 2012: 49). However, such broad-brushed critique of the "knowledge economy" might underestimate the politics of the corporatization of the Western and African academy, and in fact, tends to downplay the challenges of the African intellectual in the Western academy. Quite tellingly, in response to the question, "What exactly does it mean to be an 'African' in Europe or America?" which Njubi (2002) poses, he adds that "One quickly learns that the answer is not pretty" (72). He further explains that "[t]his predicament tears at the migrant's identity. It creates a duality that is the root of the existential crisis faced by the migrant African scholar," and concludes that "[i]ronically, the postcolonial flight from the African continent reinforces the worst stereotypes of Africanity" (Ibid.). Sadly, this point conduces to what Garuba identifies as "perhaps the ultimate postcolonial paradox in knowledge production: that the new producers coming on the stage sought the prestige of disciplinary validation and authority while the nature of their research and writing was undermining this authority and destabilising its foundations" (Garuba 2012: 47).

The first essay by Adeolu Oluwasey Oyekan, "The Contemporary Africanist Philosopher and the Need for Indigenous Modern Knowledge," further contextualizes the foregoing discourse by examining "what it means to be an Africanist scholar within the discipline of philosophy in the 21st century." While acknowledging that "an Africanist philosopher among other things inherits the necessary burden of decolonization on account of Africa's history and present experience," he argues that this responsibility of the Africanist philosopher "transcends the decolonization of foreign categories of ideas and the repudiation of moribund traditions in the search for eclectic concepts with utility value." Oyekan deconstructs Kwasi Wiredu's important project of conceptual decolonization which he sees as "making African philosophers simply those who unearth and transmit past knowledge rather than creators of new knowledge." He challenges the usefulness of such an exercise, suggesting that even if one can recuperate some authentic precolonial form of thought from within a particular African group, doing so likely does not assist in grappling with the range of social, environmental, ethical, and political issues facing the continent. Instead, Oyekan champions what he calls "indigenous modern knowledge systems" (IMK), or an "African body of knowledge developed by African scholars, philosophers especially, to address and anticipate present and possible challenges militating against the development of African societies morally, materially and intellectually." Oyekan concludes that "precolonial indigenous knowledge systems (PIKS) serve as a foundation, not the edifice itself, upon which Africanist philosophers ought to build." This analytical pathbreaking toward building African agency to address the range of problems resonates so closely with Pius Adesanmi's own life mission as articulated in his posthumous publication, *Who Owns the Problem?* (2020).

The need to look beyond Western paradigms and for Africans to seize their own agency which Adesanmi canvasses in his works is reinforced by Oyèrónké

Oyewùmí in her strident insistence that:

> the foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination. . . Sometimes scholars seem to forget that intellectual tools are supposed to frame research and thinking. As long as the "ancestor worship" of academic practice is not questioned, scholars in African Studies are bound to produce scholarship that does not focus primarily on Africa—for those "ancestors" not only were non-Africans but were hostile to African interests. The foundational questions of research in many disciplines are generated in the West (23–24).

Comfort Olajumoke Verissimo extends the conversation around the role of "Africanist" scholars and public intellectuals in the twenty-first century on the one hand, and on the other, the choice of medium or platform for their work. Verissimo focuses on Adesanmi's choice of the tabloid platform as a columnist, an idea that Toyin Falola further explores in relation to another Nigerian intellectual, Olu Obafemi. In her paper, intriguingly titled "'Stomach Infrastructure': Survival, Trauma, and the Slippery Relations of Nation-Building in Nigeria," Verissimo uses the work of Adesanmi and Abimbola Adunni Adelakun, a female academic and newspaper columnist, to demonstrate how the print and online columns of both writers have become vital spaces for engagement with questions of governance and socio-economic injustices. In looking at Adesanmi's work through a narrative lens, Verissimo's contribution echoes aspects of Ogunbayo's study in this issue. While the latter's essay brings Adesanmi's brand of satire to light through his 2011 work *You're Not a Country, Africa!*, Verissimo concentrates on the collection of Adesanmi's previously published online and print columns compiled under the title *Naija no Dey Carry Last!* from 2015. While Adesanmi and Adelakun use narrative in different ways (Adesanmi through satire, Adelakun through analogy), their objective is the same: to give voice to the lived realities of most Nigerians and to help their countrymen understand and interpret the ills that plague Nigerian society. The work of public intellectuals like Adesanmi and Adelakun, who "narrat[e] the oppression of the people into their columns" is vital to understanding the everyday economic activities of Nigerians. For Verissimo, the narrative of informal labour is an existential one: failures of leadership and lack of economic security have created a traumatized population that has to operate outside of the formal economy in order to survive. The systemic gaps in infrastructure are filled periodically by politicians who partake in the longstanding practice of "stomach infrastructure", that is the practice of wooing voters with bare necessities such as food and clothing. Where there is no social infrastructure, "stomach infrastructure" reigns. Adesanmi and Adelakun, each in their own way, pointedly show through their columns that when the population is always in survival mode, the work of nation-building is perpetually deferred.

Jane Kerubo builds on such a portrait of Adesanmi by looking at the role he played in leading and supporting work among African diasporas. In her article "Diaspora Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges for African Countries," she situates Adesanmi as an exemplary "diaspora diplomat" whose work in Ottawa (and elsewhere) focused on advancing the diverse interests of Africa. Drawing on her experience working as the Deputy High Commissioner for the Kenyan High Commission to Canada in Ottawa and her work with Adesanmi on various initiatives as well as a careful analysis of the varied policy frameworks supporting diaspora diplomacy for Africa, she examines how Adesanmi diligently and creatively worked to foster what she calls "brain gain, brain bank and brain circulation." She traces

his work at Carleton University's Institute of African Studies to extend its links to Africa, helping to forge partnerships with African institutions that are more equal than the typical North-South arrangements. She also examines how Adesanmi worked closely with the Group of African Heads of Mission in Canada, the African diplomatic community in Ottawa. Following her analysis of Adesanmi's impressive activities she suggests pathways for both African diplomats and African diaspora scholars to play greater roles in fostering diaspora diplomacy and infrastructural development to better support such initiatives.

The Pan African vision promoted by Kerubo informs Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba's contribution, "Pius Adesanmi: A Paradigm Shift in Pan African Humanity."[5] Hence, Oloruntoba proffers a rich analysis of some of Pius Adesanmi's important work in supporting and building up scholarly analyses and programs in Africa through the lens of Pan African Humanity, an embodied worldview in which Africans distinguish themselves from others, despite the centuries of degradation and exploitation the continent has faced since the start of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Through briefly tracing some of the learning experiences that generated this perspective for Adesanmi from the cultural dynamics of his informal education in Nigeria to the formal schooling he had in Nigeria and in the global North, Oloruntoba carefully lays out numerous initiatives taken to promote and facilitate the appreciation and cultivation of Pan African Humanity among Africans on the continent and among African diasporas. Through such a biographical lens, Adesanmi's impressive pedagogical, scholarly, and policy contributions to enhancing African self-understandings and research capabilities through unceasing forms of mentorship and collaborative work take on a new light. Oloruntoba provides incisive glimpses into Adesanmi's generative roles in initiatives such as the Pan African Doctoral Academy at the University of Ghana, the Abiola Irele Seminar in Theory and Criticism at Kwara State University, The African Doctoral Lounge on Facebook, and many other bridge-building and capacity-building activities in higher education in Africa and beyond, which substantiate the larger argument about the immense work this Nigerian Canadian scholar had carried out and the tremendous loss so many felt at his untimely passing. As Olurontoba points out, Adesanmi brought both a reverence for specific African, if not Yoruba perspectives, at the same time emphasizing the importance of university education, aiming to ensure that the latter build on the former while also addressing current concerns and challenges on the continent.

Olusola Ogunbayo's article, "Menippean Satire in Postcolonial African Literature: A Reading of Pius Adesanmi's *You're Not a Country, Africa* (2011), analyzes Adesanmi use of Menippean satire "to show the contradictions that inhere in the African continent." Describing "Menippean satiric method" as entailing "the interrogation of mental attitudes, the querying of inhumane orthodoxy as well as the re-negotiation of philosophical standpoints of persons, institutions and nations," Ogunbayo associates its "innuendoes and moral inclinations of some Nigerian folktales" with Adesanmi's "imaginative dexterity in attacking ineptitude" and "the recklessness in Africa and to promote rectitude."

The advocacy for good governance and integrity in the polity remains a denominator in the activist-scholar's work. This is the cardinal objective that drives

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5 Oloruntoba's title and insights here remind one of Ali Mazrui's article (2005), "Pan - Africanism and the intellectuals: Rise, decline and revival" in which, to appropriate Assié-Lumumba & Lumumba-Kasongo's (2010) apt summary, Mazrui "argues that as the origins of modern black intellectual traditions and those of Pan - Africanism are intertwined, African 'intellectuals and educated minds' have the capacity 'to conceive and construct an alternative social paradigm" (203).

the work of another public intellectual profiled by Toyin Falola in his article, "The Academic as a Public Intellectual: Olu Obafemi's Ideas and Ideals." Noting that "[t]he role of a public intellectual is often a multifaceted one," Falola argues that "The public intellectual employs informed perspectives to penetrate and reveal progressive insights into the workings of their world," and uses Olu Obafemi, a Nigerian academic, foremost literary critic, human rights activist, creative writer, and newspaper columnist, to demonstrate how the public intellectual's work "significantly impacts his immediate society."

Like Adesanmi, Obafemi's oeuvre covers creative writing, newspaper columns, interviews, and public speeches. Falola's essay "focuses on the ideas and ideals of Obafemi as a committed public intellectual using, for illustration, a series of interviews, his media works, his speeches, and personal notes." The author uses "the lens of critical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and cultural pluralism" to explore Obafemi's successful deployment of his "intellectual gifts to promote the cause of ordinary citizens by critiquing the ills of society."

In his contribution "The Struggle, Their Lives: African Public Intellectuals and the Crisis of Representation," Nduka Otiono explores the controversial role of intellectuals in society and the academy. He aligns with Mamdani's (2016) emplacement of the discourse within the debate around disciplinarity" (68), professionalization, labour and corporatization of universities. But Otiono goes beyond that by offering a comparative analysis of the differences between certain public intellectuals in the West and in Africa, calling attention to the dangers of universalizing the discourses on the subject matter. He identifies the "sore subtopics" which "call for further inquiry," and which he frames around three fundamental questions that the essay seeks to answer by "investigating how issues of specificity and context disturb the logics of a universalizing discourse on the role of public intellectuals." Otiono uses as case studies, two outstanding Nigerian "public intellectuals whose activism demonstrate the precarious nature of the African public intellectual's work which inspired the great Nelson Mandela to issue his popular declaration of June 26, 1961 – "The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days" – and which inspired the title of this essay." As Otiono demonstrates, the two public intellectuals he assesses—Ken Saro-Wiwa and Wole Soyinka—are not only celebrated creative writers but public intellectuals par excellence whose activism have earned them beatification as a special breed of activist-intellectuals.

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Together, these essays offer rigorous and insightful understandings of the profile of the Africanist scholar and public intellectual against the backdrop of progressive politics and youth agency in the digital age. Although, this special issue is dedicated to Pius Adesanmi, the essays in the issue extend to older generation Africanist public intellectuals. Among the latter are the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, writer and environmental rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the playwright and newspaper columnist Olu Obafemi. The period covered stretches from the late twentieth century to the first quarter of the twenty-first century; the figures represent three generations of Nigerian public intellectuals: roughly, pre-Independence, post-Independence, and millennial. Rather coincidentally, the four public intellectuals—Adesanmi, Saro-Wiwa, Soyinka and Obafemi— belong to the literati, have been academics, and have had strong connections to the popular press. Their shared professional inclination and interest therefore reinforces the popular association of writers with social consciousness and public intellectual activism as symbolized by Emile Zola and Jean Paul-Sartre highlighted at the

beginning of this essay.[6]

The focus on Adesanmi in this issue enables contributors to underscore what Oloruntoba aptly sees as "[t]he paradigm shift that Adesanmi represented in Pan African Humanity" which is "informed by his life-long commitment to work for the restoration of the above qualities through the development of a new cadre of African intellectuals who take pride in their own humanity, are socially and politically conscious, committed to excellence in both professional and public spaces with enough concern for building a better African society." Emerging from this description and the essays as a whole is the often glossed over spectrum for calibrating the level or degree of social engagement of public intellectuals. For while some public intellectuals are committed to the struggle for a better society through their "intellectualism"—in the sense delineated earlier—others extend their theorizing to praxis by intervening in the political process, as exemplified by Soyinka and Saro-Wiwa. However, the ironic reality about the work of public intellectuals in the digital age is that society has evolved and today, to borrow the illuminating words of Pierre Rosanvallon (2007),

> the public space is very open, the public space is plural . . . And as far as fame is concerned, the type of renown exemplified by all of these intellectuals of the past, like Sartre, Camus, or before that, Voltaire, has largely disappeared—just look at today's media scene. Effective media images these days are those of great sportsmen, film actors, and artists of all sorts. The media capital of an intellectual is now far weaker. The role of the intellectual, however, can be plotted out by his work itself. Not that his work should be marked by a political bias—absolutely not—but rather because his work has and ought to have the function of rendering contemporary society's difficulties more intelligible (713).

Based on this understanding, therefore, Rosanvallon defines "the intellectual as someone who first and foremost possesses tools of comprehension, tools which may also become instruments of action" (Ibid.) This definition of the intellectual, and by extension the public intellectual, is perhaps the most measured characterization of the public intellectual—whether in Africa or elsewhere. . It accommodates the various shades of public intellectual including the ones examined as case studies in this special issue. Beyond the shades or variants of Africanist public intellectuals, what unites them is what Kenneth Harrow (2020) identifies as "the quest for an African agency" (xix). And what drives them is their social vision and commitment towards the decolonization of knowledge and the rise of the continent from the stranglehold of neocolonial forces and postcolonial rapacious political leadership.

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6 The emphasis on the literary profile of these public intellectuals is not intended to exclude or downplay the non-literary types. Indeed, besides the social impact of the work of the philosopher Kwasi Wiredu as discussed in this special issue, scholars such as Seifudein Adem (2010) have argued for the disciplinary stake of political scientist as public intellectuals in Africa—with Claude Ake (especially in his ground-breaking Social Science as Imperialism) and Ali Mazrui as paragons. Adem forcefully notes that: "a political scientist combines the personal experience of political consciousness, the general ethos of scholarship, and the specialized skills of interpreting political phenomena." He further observes that "Political consciousness is sensitivity to issues of public concern and to the policy implications of private interests. The ethos of scholarship is rooted in adherence to the rules of evidence, documentation, and logic" (1).

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