

**Module: African Studies 2**

*Individual Essay Cover Sheet*

***Essay Requirements:***

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| Your essay must be submitted in electronic form via Turnitin on GCU Learn by the Friday of 26 Apr 2021, at midnight in Mauritius. Referencing should follow the Harvard style. The essay should be 1500-2000 words in length. Essays exceeding the upper or falling below the lower limits by more than 10% may be penalized.  ***Due Date: 7 Apr 2021*** |

***Essay Prompt:***

The Economist magazine branded Africa ‘the hopeless continent’ in 2000 and declared ‘Africa rising’ in 2011 – critically discuss these **contrasting portrayals of Africa** with reference to relevant literature, including both theory and evidence.

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# 1.0 Introduction

To fully understand the portrayals of Africa, there needs to be a clear understanding of imagination and how their original portrayals and perceptions originated from either their impressions, ideas or memories. Using his universal theory of moral philosophy, Hume’s describes the phenomena imagination through ideas and portrayals; this can express the role of imagination in a much broader context in our mental lives and physical interpretations. Notably, this acquisition and model of theory aimed to comprehend opinions and stories told through portrayals and perceptions that are ultimately considered either fictional or non-fictional imaginations, especially throughout media and literature. Through media, literature and other forms of evidence, it is clear that the particular imagination of either a country, place, community, or group, whether true or false, is what came before and any misinterpretation or portrayal of a particular place that was eventually spread. For example, in their 2000 Economist magazine, Africa was initially branded as “The Hopeless Continent”, However, within a little more than a decade in their later 2011 edition, the Economist referred to the continent as “Africa Rising.” Seen from the drastic shift in their portrayal of Africa, this will aim to identify the leading imaginations towards their contrasting portrayals of Africa. Using the Economist articles as literary evidence along with an additional analysis of the evidence of portrayals of Africa through media, films, or other forms of art.

# 2.0 Understanding and Defining Davide Hume’s’ Imagination

To imagine is to represent without the necessity of aiming at a particular thing; it is both present and subjective. Imagination can present different perspectives on certain things and events. Stating, “The former comprises of “sensations, passions, and emotions as they are their first impressions on the soul.” (Dorsch, 2015, 1.1.1.), through these experiences, bodily sensations, and basic feelings of desire and emotion, signifying what make the perceptions distinguishing them from impressions. While in contrast, faint images connected to the notion of judgment and memories of those experiences are what make up the impressions that help in thinking and reasoning” (Dorsch, 2015). As a result, imagination is a concept that exists in a wide range of human activities and thought.

## 2.1 Describing and Defining Hume’s General Concept and Nature of Imagination

The concept of imagination first emerged through a Scottish philosopher, David Hume, in his *Book of Philosophy and Imagination.* In this book, he wrote about the power of imagination through the contrasting ideas of the role of nature and human thought in imagination while also interlinking into contemporary events and discussions. Because imagination is everywhere, Hume argues that the nature of imagination is responsible for both features of the human mind and social reality. In his book, *Treatise of Human Nature,* Hume, throughout his text, addresses the three critical distinctions of “perceptions,” “Ideas,” and “Impressions”, which he correlates with the “thoughts” and “feelings,” which he states that eventually drive imagination. By accurately uncovering how Hume uncovers the concepts of general cognitive thoughts and faculties to explain the imaginative process. Hume recognized the cognitive faculties included—the faculty of sensation (Impressions/ perceptions), memory, and reason, —further explaining how imagination through understanding the “general” and “abstract” ideas that form and how this feeling is shared and spread throughout the modern world (Utm.edu, 2016). Hume then presents the notion that imagination is at work in all aspects of life. While Hume does not directly quote on a specific definition of imagination, on an analysis made by Wilbanks J. (1968) on *Hume’s Theory of Imagination,* they hypothesize that “imagination, in Hume’s view, is the faculty of forming, uniting and separating ideas.”

## Sensation as of a Faculty of imagination: Impressions and Perceptions in Human Thought

Addressing the first of the three foundations, “any exercise of thought, or any action, properly speaking, but a mere passive admission of the impressions through the organs of sensation” (Kind. A, 2017). he suggests that an awareness of relations between these impressions has to be involved. He was inferring to a clear and distinctive separation between a pure sensation and perception. When sensation is the power of the mind, perception is established through ideas, the added ability to stimulate and decern between abstract images and manifest thought while decerning between various impressions. In Hume’s book *A Treatise of Human Nature,* he introduces his thoughts on the nature of imagining. He states that “images and sensations are “faint” and “languid”, and cannot without difficulty preserve the mind.” (Kind. A, 2017). According to an article written about the *Importance of Imagination in Social Research*, on Hume’s analysis, he states that “imagination restricts the extent of our previous perceptions and experiences” (Concordia.ca, 2019; Kin, 2017).

## Memory as a Faculty of Imagination: Decerning Between Fact &Fiction

On his second faculty, Hume discusses the notion of memory. Hume discusses this phenomenon of imagination through the second faculty of memory. “men [people] are mightily governed by the imagination” (Utm.edu, 2016). In this quote, Hume discusses that “there are two different senses of “imagination” refer to two completely different mental faculties: a faculty for feigning or make-believe, and a faculty for apprehending real things” (Utm.edu, 2016). They are originating from memories that establish into an imagination. We first conceive our imagination before it becomes a reality before it becomes a fact.

First, he claims that “imagination and memory are alike in that they are both repetitions of impressions, reproductions of past perceptions, and experiences” (Wilbanks. J, 2012).  Second, he asserts that according to Hume, creativity and memory vary in two ways. On the one hand, memories have more force, vivacity, liveliness, and so on than imaginations (Wilbanks. J, 2012).  The imagination, on the other hand, is free to recombine original perceptions. In his book, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes, “When we remember any past event, the idea of it flows in upon the mind in a forcible manner” (Kind. A, 2017).

# 3.0 The Contrasting Portrayals of Africa: Through the Economist Perspective

## 3.1 The Contrasting Portrayals of Africa: Presented in “The Hopeless Continent” and the “Africa Rising” Articles

“Portrayal” is defined as an act or representation of something. In May of 2000, the Economist released a cover story on their portrayals of Africa, and in their international branding of the “Hopeless Africa” detailing the harsh reality and the violent state of Africa; describing the continent being one full of the diseases, floods, poverty, famine, and unabated political crisis and turmoil. In direct contrasting response, the Economist later expressed a different portrayal in their 2011 article titled “Africa Rising”, highlighting the opportunities and economic success that the continent has established towards a possible continental and social rise.

## 3.2 Portrayals of Africa in the Economist’s “The Hopeless Continent.”

The Economist first portrayed and depicted Africa as that of a “hopeless continent” unable to achieve an experience of economic development and growth. In this special report, the magazine focused on the main question, “Does Africa have some inherent character flaw that keeps it backward and incapable of development” (The Economist, 2000). Here it interpreted Africa, portraying it as a ‘dark continent’, an uneducated and ‘primitive’ continent, and a place of socio-political instability unable to escape their current situation.

## Africa Portrayed as “The Dark Continent.”

The article’s first portrayal was that of a Dark continent. Like the pictures painted through international media, this imagination is popularized through media, and literature personified through journalists, editors, academics, and even politicians. After post-war and colonial times, anarchy, conspicuous corruption, political instability, and social turmoil were every day. At this time, individuals in Africa were often represented as culturally, technically, and politically incompetent and inferior to the rest of the world. In Charles Darwin’s work on *‘The Origins of Species through Natural Selection*, and *The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life,’* he expresses the notion that the continent is still evolving and yet to be considered a favored race in the public eye. He coined this perception as the “Dark Continent” (Chibuike Oguh, 2015; Wa’Njogu. J.K, 2009).  This specific portrayal of the African continent is delineated as “dependent,” “hopeless, “and “pitiable”, taking over more focus on the darker sides of the continent.

In Joseph Conrad’s novel, *‘The Heart of Darkness’ in 1899,* he states, “Africa has become a place of darkness...Furthermore, as I looked at the map of it in a shop window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird-a a ‘silly little bird…’ (pg. 107). He referred to the perception of the Western need to ‘save’ Africa from its barbarism (Achebe. C, 1977; Chibuike Oguh, 2015).

## Africa Portrayed as a Primitive Continent: Uneducated and Inferior

In their second portrayal of Africa, the Economist presented a skewed depiction of Africa as though it were a “basket case” compared to the rest of the world and a pestilent country in the least (The Economist, 2000).  After painting such a hopeless image of Africa, naturally, it follows that international powers seek to come out and “save” or “rescue Africa” through exploitive trade partnerships, and international foreign aid, grants, loans, humanitarian aid and “disaster-relief” organizations.

## Africa Portrayed as a Place Full of Socio-Political Instability: Through Conflicts, Violence, Civil War, and Corruption

Like most African portrayals throughout literature and media and observers in the third identified portrayal of Africa, the Economist reported on a continent riddled with conflicts and war. They presented Africa as a naturally warlike, violent, and savage-driven continent steeped through tribal disputes. This specific portrayal can be seen in a quote from *The Hopeless Continent* “as a region too riddled with problems for good governance and economic development…Most seriously, wars still rage from north to south and east to west. No one can blame Africans for the weather, but most of the continent’s shortcomings owe less to acts of God than to acts of man. These acts are not exclusively African—brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere—but African societies, for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to them” (Jacobs. S, 2021).

## 3.3 Portrayals of Africa in the Economist’s “Africa Rising.”

For centuries Africa became a place misinterpreted through misleading salacious and cynical portrayals of a hostile continent. Looking at a different perspective, in the new Economist article, Africa has been portrayed in a more optimistic light. Referring to the continent as a “rising star” soon to rule the 21st century. Noting this, according to the Economist article *Africa Rising*, “Over the past decade, six of the world’s ten fastest-growing countries were African. In eight of the past ten years, Africa has grown faster than East Asia, including Japan. Even allowing for the knock-on effect of the northern hemisphere’s slowdown, the IMF expects Africa to grow by 6% this year and nearly 6% in 2012” (The Economist, 2011). In addition, other international relations have allowed Africa to gain in technological and infrastructural improvement. The article states that Africa’s growth achievements have been due to a decent and peaceful government from their colonial shackles and near competing with western countries.

# 4.0 Conclusion

The contrasting portrayals of Africa are vital to the imagination of Africa. Not only has David Hume’s imagination lead to a between understanding of the human mind and human development, but based on the three faculties of imagination in memory, sensations through perceptions and ideas, memory and reasoning. Hume would then define imagination “as the faculty of forming, uniting and separating ideas.” Learning about this concept, the narratives presented in the Economists perspectives on Africa in their 2000 article on the “Hopeless Continent” and the later 2011 article on *Africa Rising* because “Portrayal” is defined as an act or representation of something within a decade the narrative of these articles have shown significant changes. The Economist magazine presented such portrayals of Africa in their 2000 *Hopeless Continent* article as “dependent,” or “facing huge crises”,” “facing a falling future,” “in need of help”, or even as “place of barbarism.” However, Africa’s contrasting portrayal in the *Africa Rising* Economist article as a possible rising star for economic and developmental growth.

**Word Count So Far: 1,983**

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