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Introduction[1]

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Abstract

This introductory article explains the origins of this special issue initiative in the work of a select number of African graduate students in the US. It locates the different articles included in the volume in the general framework of debates about the imbalances in knowledge production on Africa between the global North and South. It highlights the issue of the role which the fourth generation of African scholars is to play in these politics. It concludes by summarising the contributions to this topic of the various articles included in this special issue.

Résumé

Cet article introductif explique les origines de l'initiative de ce numéro spécial dans le travail d'un certain nombre d'étudiants africains de cycles supérieurs étudiant aux États-Unis. Il situe les différents articles inclus dans le volume dans le cadre général des débats sur les déséquilibres dans la production de connaissances sur l'Afrique entre le Nord et le Sud. Il souligne la question de savoir quel rôle est dévolu à la quatrième génération de chercheurs africains dans ces politiques, et conclut en résumant les contributions à ce sujet de divers articles inclus dans ce numéro spécial.

The idea of this special issue on 'The Politics of Knowledge Production in Africa: Nurturing the Fourth Generation' began through an informal group constituted by a number of African graduate students then based at Northwestern University, Evanston, USA. The idea culminated in the establishment of an African Authors Study Group (AASG) that met regularly with the aim of identifying and discussing papers and books written by African

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scholars. When a call for papers for the CODESRIA 30th Anniversary celebration came to our attention, the group submitted a panel proposal on this very theme of nurturing the fourth generation. Out of the initial ideas that came up for the panel, five papers were selected for presentation in Dakar in December 2003. Four of these papers are included in this volume. They include papers authored by Mshai Mwangola, Nana Akua Anyidoho, Godwin R. Murunga and Ato Kwamena Onoma. While in Dakar, the initial team of five panelists enlisted other contributions that make up this volume. Ernest-Marie Mbonda's paper had separately been selected for the anniversary celebration and the organisers decided to include it in our panel. We were glad to have Mbonda on the panel and his paper was easily co-opted into this issue. The other two papers by Babacar Ndiaye and Ramatoulaye Diagne were solicited for inclusion.

The African Authors Study Group grew out of a frustration with the teaching of Africa in many universities abroad, especially in the US. It stemmed from the frustrating reality that universities and research institutions abroad constitute the favoured sites for training in African studies, yet these institutions pay only lip-service to taking seriously the scholarship from the continent. These universities and institutions make their claim on Africa only because of the global power relations that provide them with a better research environment and resources to produce knowledge on Africa. Matters are not helped by the increasing crisis situation engulfing many African universities and research institutions. It is now acknowledged that African scholars have to struggle against a myriad challenges, both economic and political, to produce knowledge about their own societies. These challenges have limited the priority that African universities accord to training future generations of African scholars. Given that some of the best scholars of Africa are pursuing their work in North America and Europe, it does not sound utterly misplaced for African students to undertake their doctoral studies outside the continent. But the effect on those travelling abroad has left a sense of disappointment because of the faddish and afropessimist inclination of knowledge production in the global North.

What was particularly alarming for us in the US was that Africa was taught through the eyes and perceptions of the Other. This may appear a trivial issue to many senior African scholars who have extensive working experience both at home and abroad. But in the eyes of young students in the social sciences whose undergraduate training is in Africa but who eventually gain admission to Northern universities, the surprise and sense of alienation at the *Africa* taught in Northern universities can be very disorienting. By the eyes and perceptions of the Other, we mean that African Studies especially

in the US has developed an immense capacity to ignore the existence of African (including black) epistemic communities that are actively engaged in producing knowledge about Africa. Instead, Africanists prefer an Africa refracted through the lens of western categories and theories – most of which bear little or no relevance at all to situations obtaining on the continent. This situation was very clear to those of us whose articles are included in this volume, because we studied courses in African history, politics, and the question of development, without ever using studies authored by Africans. Yet many of these studies are ground-breaking in more than one way.

The only contact we had with African authors was in courses domiciled into area studies programs like the Program of African Studies. This in itself is an interesting comment on the much talked about successful integration of Africa into the disciplines (Bates et al., 1993). This experience was a reminder that the channels through which knowledge is authorised in the US still retain a resilient aversion to knowledge produced by 'natives'. Consequently, this neglect of knowledge produced by 'natives' (except when they appear as data collectors) has left a false impression among migrating African and also many American students that Africa has no community of scholars worth the name or, if they have, their work is not worth reading. If for no other reason, the AASG was meant to ignite and constantly prick our consciousness about the various anomalies in the organisation of African studies abroad and to regularly remind ourselves of the vibrancy of the African scholarly community on the continent that continues to achieve even in difficult times.

The spirit of the AASG takes on another task which is embodied in this special issue. That is the task of championing the contribution of a newer generation of African scholars to scholarship. It is no secret that senior scholars in Africa continue to voice their disappointment with the younger generation of African scholars and their scholarship. The overlay of disappointment has tended to mask the contributions, even if minor, of the younger generation and the difficulties this generation experienced during the crisis years in African higher education. Many senior scholars still hark back to the good old days when Marxism was vibrant and when ideological debates defined the prestige of centres of learning like Dar es Salaam. But our task is to invite African scholars to make a better future out of a glorious past, rather than destroying every potential by wishing the recovery of a past that is already gone and ignoring or underrating the work being done today.

It is this younger generation that Mwangola's article addresses and speaks for. Mwangola acknowledges Mkandawire's (1995) pioneering work on three generations of African scholars but proceeds to lay out a mission for the

fourth generation. Noting that this generation has not yet been thought into existence, she defines it by default arguing that it is constituted by all those who self-identify with it. Mwangola does not draw clear boundaries to separate the different generations. She refuses to adopt the divisive politics of positioning this fourth generation against the preceding three generation identified by Mkandawire. She emphasises what each generation can learn through inter-generational dialogue. Mwangola identifies two main challenges the fourth generation must deal with. The first is to bring about the recognition of Africans as the premier producers and consumers of knowledge on and emanating from Africa; the second involves the rediscovery, development, recognition and validation of African epistemologies in the creation and transmission of knowledge. In addressing the problem of mentoring so evident in Africa, Mwangola suggests that the preceding generations can nurture the fourth generation by passing on to them the intellectual heritage they hold in trust from the generations of African intellectuals who have preceded them, that they need to demonstrate their own commitment to the work of their peers in their own research and teaching and, finally, that they can nurture by deliberately facilitating the creation and maintenance of an enabling environment for alternative pedagogical strategies. These are practical issues that set the stage and form the basis for all the contributions in this issue. They are issues whose relevance should not be minimised, since, as we have suggested above, they are relevant to the generation that is the subject of this issue.

Perhaps as a response and elaboration on Mwangola's insistence on centring Africa and African scholarship, the three papers in section II zero in on some specifics. Nana Akua Anyidoho examines the linked themes of identity and knowledge production embedded within the concept of insider scholarship. She addresses the definitional challenges that the concept of insider scholarship poses, and interrogates what impact one's position within a group or a culture has on the knowledge produced. This is in effect a study of representation and identity. As she puts it, earlier generations of African scholars, in an effort to reclaim representations of Africa and Africans, might sometimes have based scholarly legitimacy on idealisations of race, culture and territory. From that historical point, we appear to be in a moment when notions of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'universalism' make nonsense of any attempt to ground scholarship in complex and shifting identities. As the fourth generation of scholars comes into its own, Nana Akua Anyidoho argues, one of its defining tasks will be to negotiate a contested terrain. Her paper represents such an attempt to negotiate this terrain.

The article on 'African Intellectuals, patriotism and Pan-Africanism: on brain-drain', is devoted to a crucial topic, as Africa is and will be for a while a continent of intellectual emigration. This phenomenon has been recently amplified as African universities face a profound crisis. The article questions the moralising position often adopted to talk about those who have 'fled'. Beyond such a sterile approach, the article calls our attention to another form of exile which the situation of intellectuals physically living on the continent but who are totally disconnected from the issues relevant to the African situation exemplifies. This situation is contrasted with that of an intellectual Diaspora, ancient and new, active in pan-African networks dealing with the African questions, issues and challenges. The article invites us to consider this fact of an active African intellectual Diaspora in relation to the affirmation of an African presence in the world of knowledge.

The paper on African and Black Studies in the US brings into the picture the interacting experiences of mainstream Africanist, diasporic black and African epistemic communities in the study of Africa. Often, African scholars on the continent do not pay sufficient attention to the contributions of the African diaspora in the study of Africa. The idea in Murunga's article is to discuss the intellectual and institutional distance between African and Black Studies in the US to illustrate how racial politics within the US are reflected in and influence the conduct of African Studies. At issue is really the place of Pan-Africanism and how our understanding of this experience is limited when an institutional distance exists between Black Studies conducted largely by Africans in the Diaspora and African Studies conducted mainly by white scholars in the US. The article then talks about growing ignorance of African realities among African-Americans. It partly attributes this to the rise and dominance of Africanist Africa, its disengagement from Black Studies, and the marginalisation of African-American and African scholarship (conducted by black scholars) in Africanist scholarship. In particular, it is concerned with the de-emphasis of radical and Black intellectual traditions in the mainstream study of Africans. Murunga proposes the enhancement of direct horizontal dialogue between African and African-Americans as a good way of redefining the intellectual representation of Africa's achievements and failures, gains and losses.

Section III of this issue opens with Ato Kwamena Onoma's paper on the language question. The paper argues that the continued use of English, French and Portuguese in state and academic activities has minimised the empowering effects of recent transitions to democracy. The use of such languages contributes critically to limiting the ability of many Africans lacking fluency in these languages to participate in two important moments that define the

possibilities and limits of democratic decision-making. The paper argues that generations of African scholars have collaborated in this process of disempowerment by refusing to take a concerted and determined stance against the dominant role of the former colonial languages on the continent. Because of this role, Ato Kwamena Onoma provocatively concludes that we should regard African scholarship as a force seeking to create a space for itself within a closed discursive and practical space rather than a radical force seeking to eliminate closure of these spaces generally.

The article on 'The World's disorder' is authored by Babacar Ndiaye, an officer in the Senegalese army, who uses his experience as a peace-keeper in different areas and on different missions with multinational UN forces to reflect on the new world (dis)order which characterises our post-Cold War situation. This reflection of a scholar trained as a philosopher explores the situation of a world of uncertainty, in a 'permanent state of surprise' and also the paths towards an international order whose foundation cannot be but multilateral and a leadership not based on hegemony.

Finally, the article by Ramatoulaye Diagne revisits Senghor's notion of the Civilisation of the Universal which he borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin. At a time of globalisation it is important to re-read what Senghor had to say about universality and pluralism, or about the dialogue of cultures vs. the 'clash of civilisations'. Ramatoulaye Diagne demonstrates in this article how Senghor's thought could be understood in connection with the philosophy of G. W. Leibniz, and particularly with his notion of a world constituted by individual monads, each of them being a particular reflection of the whole and all of them forming together a 'monadology', or harmonious totality.

Note

1. The discussions that led to this special issue began while most of the contributos were still at Northwestern University, USA. We were joined in the discussion by Ramatoulaye Diagne and Babacar Ndiaye, who unfortunately passed away in the bombing of the UN office in Algiers, in December 2007.

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