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The Scholarly Journal in the Production and Dissemination of Knowledge on Africa: Exploring Some Issues for the Future

Introduction

The discourse in the social sciences and humanities in Africa has been rooted in the question of Africa; that is, the condition and relevance of its peoples *vis-á-vis* themselves and the world. There is no denying that this discourse has evolved with transformations in the conditions of its subject over the years. Neither would prizes be awarded for noting that the catalysts to such transformations have been internal and external, local and global, and familiar and foreign.

Expectedly, the thrusts of this discourse were and are still being anchored in those pivotal periods and pointers in the continent's history. Particularly in the twentieth century, we can cite colonialism, profound insertion in, and usurpation by, global capital, the independence struggles, the post-independence state and its crises, cold war politics, military dictatorship, democratisation processes, structural adjustment and neo-liberal economic policies, the emerging civil society, human rights and gender studies.

Equally expected, the development of academic publishing in Africa has been inextricably linked to the varied and complex thrusts of African scholarly enquiry. Academic publishing has gathered, sieved and engraved the work of researchers, disseminating their products to the corners of the globe, and thus assuring them a place in knowledge production in a more accentuated information-driven world. From the CNN advert screaming 'you are what you know', to gigantic mergers of companies trying desperately to control all sectors of the media: publishing, television, cinema, radio and Internet – anything with text or images, harnessing the power of information and knowledge in a globalised world has never been so crucial. 'Globalisation itself is arming people with the information they need to give consent and, in some cases, the means to refuse to it', observed Smith and Naim (2000: 15-16).

In the last three decades, questions of choice and relevance – of what to study, and by and for whom and how – have become more strident in the research and publishing of African social sciences and humanities. These questions have divided the discourse into blocs: structuralist, developmentalist, modernist, political economy versus poststructuralist, postmodernist, post-Fordist. This exploration, however, is not to vindicate or reiterate the ridiculousness of their constantly shifting and complex labels. Rather, the

paper seeks to analyse the patterns in scholarly enquiry in the last two decades by assessing the focus of four multidisciplinary scholarly journals from 1980 to1999. What does this pattern portend for African scholarly publishing in the next millennium? In a context where the production and distribution of knowledge is even more skewed than the distribution of wealth among nations (Arunachalam 1999; Cetto 1999), we cannot afford to gloss over any factor that may undermine or promote African scholarship. Smith and Naim (2000) points out that 'OECD[1] countries, with 19 percent of the world's population, account for 71 percent of world trade, 58 percent of foreign direct investment' (p. 8-9). Shocking, but hardly surprising. What is incredibly sad is the fact that OECD countries control 91 percent of all Internet users (Ibid.). Knowing the weight Internet carries today and is estimated to possess tomorrow, one has a right to be scared for the developing world.

The paper will argue that it is rather too restrictive to conclude that the growth of scholarly journal production in Africa in the twenty-first century will be assured only by exterminating incompetent editors and production staff, or by modernising obsolete and inadequate infrastructure. Have African scholars in their contributions being restricted to generally accepted themes or theoretical constructs? Have they moved out of the accepted boundaries to posit new theoretical approaches? To what extent have they focussed their work on the key questions shaping Africa today? These questions have a role to play in the marketability of African researchers and themselves. They have an influence of the development of the scholarly publishing on the continent and on African published material as a whole. And much more, they have an effect on the legitimisation of African research and scholarship (Altbach 1998; Mkandawire 1999; Zeleza 1998).

The paper has been divided into four major parts: 1) a brief description of the development and role of the scholarly journal; 2) an analysis of the medium in Africa today; 3) a description of methodology and the tools for gathering data for the study; and 4) an examination of the findings in relation to issues and trends in contemporary publishing.

In the beginning, there was academia...

Journals have been instrumental in the development of academic publishing in Africa. The establishment and proliferation of universities and higher institutions in Africa from the latter half of the twentieth century influenced the development of scholarly journals on the continent. Today, there are 593 institutions of higher learning in 46 countries in Africa (AAU 1999). The need to communicate the knowledge consumed and produced raised the question of a dissemination channel. In African scholarship, the chosen medium has been the journal. Why the journal? Can it be related to the essence and role of the medium?

As Christopher Tomlins (1998: 2), notes using the American Historical Society as an example, scholarly journals initially 'were created as mecha-

nisms crucial to defining professional identity and to communicating the distinctive practices that would constitute it and thereby bring discipline, as it were, to scholarly... disorder'. But the scholarly journal, he argues further, should not be limited to maintaining professionalisation and codes of ethics. In addition to being disseminators of authoritative scholarship, the scholarly journal 'exists to promote original scholarship, to accommodate scholarship in its variety, but also to influence its general direction and shape, to certify it as worthy of note and trust to whatever audience is reached, and to preserve it' (Tomlins 1998:3).

In African scholarship, with its umbilical attachment to western scholarship, journals were ascribed the task of doing all this and much more. In the words of Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'journals were founded – mostly in literature, history, political science, and development economics – to trace the teleological march of the once reviled "native" subjects to respected national citizens and their societies from underdevelopment to development' (1998:14). This added responsibility was crucial in not just the development of the academic publishing enterprise in Africa as a whole but also, as we shall touch on later, in the modalities and modes of operation of academic publishing, in this case journals.

The next question that we may ponder on is why the journal dominates, particularly in the arts and humanities, over other media? In the West, the demands of the natural sciences for speedy exchange of the most up-to-date information and data, which has been compounded by the enormous stress on who found what first, have made journals the most preferred choice of researchers in these fields. In the arts and humanities however the book is the superior choice because it can be leveraged in the promotion and tenure process (Hunter 1998) and because empirical knowledge does not have such an acute short life span of relevance (Tomlins 1998)[2].

In Africa, however, several historical factors have shaped the acceptance of journals differently. Given, as Zeleza rightly pointed out, '...the establishment of scholarly journals is largely a post independence phenomenon, spawned and sustained by the expanding possibilities of university education, itself tethered to the dreams of nationalism and developmentalism' (1998: 14), the journal would become the preferred medium because publishing – particularly books and in the case of some parts of Africa, newspapers – in the early post independence era, was dominated by multinationals whose interests were far from concretising the dreams of nationalism and developmentalism of the newly independent states (Chakava 1989 and 1992; Bgoya 1996a). The truly indigenous publishing sector was stifled by multinationals for close to two decades of postcolonial Africa (Bgoya 1996b).

To African scholars from the burgeoning and growing institutions of higher learning, the journal was central to giving them a voice and an opportunity to realise their dreams, dreams that may be similar to those of their compatriots.

The first set of scholarly journals in Africa were established and controlled during this period in the universities. And this remained very much so until the late 1970s and 1980s when the symbiotic collaborative relationship between academics and the state, which controlled and funded the universities, turned awry (Zeleza 1997; Morna 1991; Ake 1993). This rift came into fore as the realities of nation building proved far more daunting than initially expected. Academics, social scientists in particular, began to question state research agenda and excesses of corruption, tribalism, and incompetence among members of the ruling elite (Zeleza 1997).

The ensuing repression and starvation of the academic community, with most of Africa strangled under military or one-party authoritarianism, led to the near disintegration of the educational system, igniting a panoply of problems from brain drain to empty lecture halls and libraries to loss of interest and time to pursuing qualitative research (Mamdani and Diouf 1994). However, the rift, accentuated by the economic crises of the late seventies and eighties, redrew the contours of academic publishing, in particular journal publishing in Africa. State disinvestment from education (higher education with the connivance of Bretton woods institution, see Zeleza 1997) meant other actors other than universities had to surface as the producers and disseminators of research on Africa. The vacuum was filled by the proliferating non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society actors.

Much as we can debate on the purpose and agenda of the involvement of NGOs in research in Africa, we should also note that some of these NGOs employed African academics, now retrenched or impoverished as 'consultants' or as members; or were founded by African academics themselves. Hence, it was inevitable that from the late seventies scholarly publishing in Africa would be dominated by NGO research institutions. Today some of the outstanding academic journals on the continent were either established or are being supported through the efforts of regional and continental institutions. Among these include the *African Journal of Political Science* [Association of African Political Science (AAPS)], *Africa Development, African Sociological Review, Afrika Zamani, and CODESRIA Bulletin* [Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)], and the *Southern African Political Economy Monthly* [Southern African Political Economy Series Trust (SAPES)].

Challenges of Scholarly Journal Publishing in Africa

Jaygbay (1998) noted that there are over 400 scholarly journals published in 48 countries in Africa. Out of this number, he estimated based on a 1996 survey, that nearly 200 of this figure cover the social sciences and humanities. Given the realities of scholarly journal production in Africa today, the number of active and regular (the differences in adjectives do matter) journals may be lower now. The African Periodicals Exhibit (APEX) catalogue for 1997 lists

135 titles from 22 African countries. APEX is part of the African Journal Support and Distribution Centre (AJSDC) managed by the African Academy of Sciences. The Apex 1999 catalogue lists 70 titles from 16 African countries – a sizeable drop. The sector shrinks the more. Given the modalities of APEX[3], figures released in the catalogue can be said to be a relatively accurate figure of active and regular journals on the continent today.

The 'volume one, number one' syndrome besets journal publishing in Africa. Why this is so has been documented in volumes and argued in countless forums – Zeleza (1997), (1998), Akin Aina (1994), Zell (1998), Jaygbay (1997), Altbach and Teferra (1998) just to cite a few. They identified a set of specific challenges facing journal publishers and publishing as follows: a weak institutional base, financial difficulties, the level of editorial (in)competence, the quality of submissions from authors, and the development of marketing and distribution channels. In addition, they have also gone further by contextualizing these challenges faced by scholarly journals on the continent in the socio-economic dynamics of publishing in Africa today. Makotsi (1999) in an in-depth study on barriers to intra-African book trade in educational material in Southern Africa that covered twelve countries acknowledges that certain obstacles are no more there. For instance, foreign exchange restriction is becoming less problematic and regional economic integration seems more promising. However, she argues further, other factors like cumbersome export procedures, a weak reading culture and poverty and literacy levels are still too daunting, and new worries brought about by globalisation demand more challenging ways of combating them.

It is interesting that, given the state of African publishing, in particular scholarly publishing, knowledge of the problem, at least among publishers and scholars, is far from being a problem. This awareness has fuelled a much-needed passionate commitment to striving towards the growth of the industry. African publishers have weathered the storm in genuinely innovative ways to publish. They have ganged up with co-publishers, partners and organisation with common goals, within Africa and outside, to find ways of surmounting the problems and promote the sector. There have been successes. Some good quality award-winning books are being turned out, some are selling the world over etc. Yet, despite benefiting from initiatives like other sectors of publishing, journal publishing is yet to shake off its volume one, number one label.

The specificity of scholarly journal publishing comes down to more than the intense demands for timeliness in production against a background of a weak technological infrastructure base, which is more acute in publishing than in other sectors. The North-South dichotomy in publishing is wide. It is a branch of publishing that is extremely dependent on its content, in astonishingly expansive ways. What is the content saying, written by whom and for whom, quoted whom and by whom etc? It is not surprising that the beauty, quality or

effectiveness of this content shapes the processes and procedures of scholarly journal production the world over. Among these include peer review, editorial boards or some would say watchdogs, academic institutional anchors etc. Much more than content determines the success of the journal. High quality manuscripts if published get cited more often, so the journal attracts more high quality manuscripts, gets cited in major indexing and citation database, which would also attract more manuscripts... What is surprising is that this core factor is not given much more prominence in discussions regarding the level of development of scholarly journal publishing in Africa.

Methodology

In the celebrated book *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (1997), Paul Tiyambe Zeleza raised numerous questions on scholarship and knowledge production in the geopolitics of an uneven world. Equally ingenious and pertinent to our study is his brilliant attempt at mapping out 'the trends and shifts in the production of knowledge on Africa... [by examining] the spatial and institutional locations of the leading Africanist academic productions in English and the national and gender identities of those who produce, categorise, disseminate, and safeguard this particular form of knowledge' (p.46).

Zeleza's findings of Africa and Africans' marginality have far-reaching implications for African research. Among other things it showed that journal production in Africa is linked to the status of African research and researchers within and outside Africa. A discussion of one invariably leads to an analysis of the other. More important still, Zeleza's interrogation also deliberately prods us to ask further questions. What do these journals publish? What fields disciplines or subjects get into print? Under what epistemological footing can we group such articles? What is the dominant language(s), etc?

In an attempt to explore some of these questions, we looked at the content of four multidisciplinary journals on Africa in the social sciences and humanities. These journals were chosen within certain criteria to maximise the potential of the results of our findings in relation to the research objectives, to tap areas of common characteristics i.e. similarity, and to reduce elements or factors that could damage or unwittingly bias the finding. The criteria were as follows:

- An Africa-centred journal
- Multidisciplinary in editorial policy. To gauge a pattern of themes and disciplines, all articles submitted must in theory and practice have equal chance of selection. The chances of bias in a niche journal catering to a specific discipline will be much greater.
- Bilingual. Accept and publish articles in English and French, the two main languages currently dominating social sciences and humanities on Africa.
- Quarterly. Four issues in a given year.

- Outstanding and consistent enough to be cited in main bibliographic databases.
- All journals selected must be listed in one particular bibliography database. This is to ensure that margins of errors in the compilation of this database are relatively the same for all the journals. The shortcomings of the database, though not the fault of the researcher, are likely to prejudice particular journals if taken from different sources.
- All journals must have published articles within the focus period of the study (1980-1999).

Using the criteria, we selected *Africa Development* based in Dakar, Senegal; *Cahiers d'études africaines,* in Paris, France; *Canadian Journal of African Studies* in Canada, and *Journal of Modern African Studies,* London, UK. The geographical location gives Africa (1), Europe (2) and North America (1). We selected the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences compiled by BIDS for the British Library of Political and Economic Science.

Secondly, we grouped the articles (no book reviews were included) from each journal into four periodical time frames (1980-84, 1985-89, 1990-94 and 1995-99)[4]. This periodical categorisation is an attempt to imitate contemporary research production, publication and dissemination mechanisms. On the average in the social sciences and humanities, it takes from two to three years to plan and conduct research work that is more likely to merit what most scholarly journals will regard as a contribution to a discourse. It also takes from a minimum of 18 months to two years for the results of that research work to be reviewed, revised and published.

The data from each set were analysed to determine (1) the pattern of the subject area and focus of the articles; (2) the proportion of African and non-African authorship; and (3) subject area and focus of African and non-African authorship. The components of the data were, title of article, name of author(s), language, page numbers, publication year, volume and issue number, abstract (where provided), key words, and geographic descriptors.

We acknowledge that trying to determine patterns in a discipline as wide as the social sciences and humanities can be problematic. Areas of study are intricately linked and contain multiple prongs. Articles on our list were no exception. For instance, one article on economic policy may be looking at how this policy is also reconstructing gender roles as well as influencing migration at the same time. And of course, these journals are multidisciplinary in editorial policy. However, excellence in any field entails specialisation and focus in a core discipline or subject. Yes, added advantage and richness if a researcher can criss-cross boundaries, but some boundaries are likely to be closer to the core than some others. Hence, some areas will be main themes and some areas will be sub-themes, peripheries or even anecdotes. Articles tackling issues common to a particular topic were grouped together, but were not allowed to

disappear. A typical grouping is demography, migration, population growth and urbanisation under one umbrella. We believe data could be easily managed or classified under main area themes and pertinent for this research. Nevertheless, we also try to de-problematise the issue, by counting multiple-focussed articles under all the main areas they occur.

We will now analyse the preliminary results[5] of this research. We will endeavour to link this exploration briefly to the geopolitics of knowledge production on Africa in the last two decades and today. An analysis devoid of this factor risked being sterile. We will try to test the validity and substance of previous and current debates on the output of researchers on Africa. Secondly, such an analysis will be linear if not related to recent development in publishing and information dissemination in the world today.

Contemporary Issues in Knowledge Production and Dissemination on Africa and Publishing in an Information Age

The Marginality of African Researchers

Zeleza's 1997 study of five English-speaking Africanist journals in the social sciences between 1982 and 1992 shows that African authors simply do not get published in these journals compared to their counterparts in the North. The problem is more acute if Africa-based African authors are separated from non Africa-based African authors. The study we conducted covered four journals between 1980 and 1999 from both English- and French-speaking countries. The same story still very much applies. Between 1980 and 1984, African authors published in the three non African- based journals in our study were as follows: *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* CEA (16%), *Canadian Journal of African Studies* CJAS (19%), and *Journal of Modern African Studies* JMAS (22%). Figures for 1995-1999 show an increase for all the journals: CEA (21%), CJAS[6] (30%) and JMAS[7] (26%). Very marginal compared with *Africa Development* (AD) that had 96% of African authors for the same period.

Despite the slight increase, there is a strong argument (as the huge number of scholars with rejection slips from these journals would want to make), that the premise on which these journals base their editorial selection decisions is questionable. 'Africa' features prominently in the title and focus of these journals,[8] yet scholars originating from the continent find it difficult to be published in them.

Journal editors the world over are wont to emphasise the sanctity of editorial selection and, from an author's point of view, deselection processes, a policy that rightly distinguishes it from just any other medium of publication. Peer review and editorial control are crucial to ensuring that scholarly publishing reflects and lives up to its appellation: scholarly. It is not journalism or creative writing, and strives to distance itself from any of the aforementioned genres. When we think of scholarly publishing, we think of 'standard' and authority.

The OED defines the former as 'a definite level of excellence, attainment, wealth, or the like, or a definite degree of any quality viewed as a prescribed object of endeavour or as the measure of what is adequate for some purpose'.

But can we also pepper this idealism with pinches of reality? Can we deconstruct and decontextualise publishing from its surroundings? Probably we may easily have done so in times past, when academia walled itself from mundanities like state repression or influence, or global capital and its intoxicating penchant for money-making. That the decision of what constitutes 'a definite level of excellence' can be undertaken in complete unbiased fairness, away from its historicism, still baffles some of us.

Undoubtedly, journal editors, peer reviewers and publishers are not yet Martians. Equally very credible, they harbour biases, passions, weakness as well brilliance and ingenuity. The choice of selection may be because the author quotes the 'right' sources, toes the 'right' line, or as banal as writes charming correspondence. It may not always be so that the number of articles from African authors are substandard, unimaginative, contain dated literature reviews and bibliography (which may not be due to laziness but to lack of access) (see Hargen 1988; Matocha 1993; Mkandawire 1989, 1996; Prah 1998; Zeleza 1997).

The African Scholarly Journal and Research Autonomy: A classic tale of unpraised prophets?

Thandika Mkandawire (1998) traces the genesis and evolution of the focus, leanings and preoccupations of research undertaken or promoted by African social science institutions, in this case, CODESRIA. Though he acknowledges that African research institutions had to contend with the forces of the historical condition of Africa and its people, they still strove for 'the creation of an autonomous space of research ...to reflect on the social development processes on the continent' (p. 13).

He goes on further:

> One feature of the unequal relations we [African scholars] were involved in is that the ignorance about each would necessarily have to be asymmetric. While scholars in the North can afford not to know our scholarship, we cannot. They can afford to have anecdotal knowledge about us, we cannot. Indeed, as citation demonstrates, they can publish vast amounts of material without reference to our scholarship but we cannot (Ibid.).

It is interesting to note that, *Africa Development,* one single CODESRIA journal, has published more African authors than all the combined three non Africa-based journals in our study.

It seems plausible that the focus of research by Africans may be different from others. Although we can not preclude that intellectual independence can be very relative under the baggage of research grants and funding limitations, in our study we found that there is indeed a marked difference. From 1990 to 1994, articles focusing specifically on structural adjustment programmes

constitute only about 1% in CEA, 3% in CJAS[9] in 7% in JMAS and 18% in AD. Within the same period, articles on education make up 0% in CEA, 3% in CJAS, less than 1% in JMAS and 11% in AD. We can see the level of focus given to a very crucial part of the development of African economies during that period.

From 1995 to 1999, articles falling into the discipline of Cultural Studies constitute 5% in AD, 6% in JMAS, 13% in CJAS and 48% in CEA. It is noteworthy to note that out of the CEA devotion to the topic, African researchers made up 22%, more than the entire African authors of 21% for all the subject areas for that journal during the period. These results are illustrative of a marked division in focus. Whether the difference in areas of special interest includes novel and independent tools of analysis or methodology is an issue worth pursuing further. For now, we would link this alterity with current issues affecting publishing today.

The Imminent Death of Journal Publishing, as We Know It

Current trends in publishing suggest that seismic transformations are ongoing and have taken place in the world of information production and dissemination. It will be understandable if some of us start yawning at the mention of such a common concept now. But if we acknowledge that the Internet technology[10] came into popular use very recently (for some it has not, but that is another story), we should try to understand that it has left us spellbound. It has destabilised the way we think about communication, information, text, images, business, etc. 'Access to communications (in a real sense, to the future) is constricted by geography, gender, income and language' (Smith and Naim 2000: 43). Publishing with its bag of unusual peculiarities of course has not been left out. The Internet is being heralded as the greatest invention since Guttenberg. A look at some of the trends will be instructive.

1. Early this year, the horror fiction writer, Stephen King, released a novella, *Riding the Bullet,* exclusively on the Internet. Within the first one week, more than 500, 000 fans downloaded the book for just $2.50. By the second week the code protecting the material from being pirated or read by those who have not paid had been broken.
2. In 1999, the Institute of Physics based in the UK and a formidable academic publisher with an incredibly wide range of successful print journals created the New Journal of Physics, completely online, i.e. electronic in all its procedures: manuscript submission, acknowledgement, peer review, revision editing, design etc. online. Authors that get published pay about 500 US dollars. Because downloading and accessing the journal is free, the journal site is one of the most successful sites with thousands of hits daily.

3. Tom Green recently in a forum[11], cited the following predictions by Mike Shatzkin: (a) most consumers will switch to an electronic format within two decades; (b) the expensive printed item will be vanquished by digital reading material; and (c) the first set of people to embrace electronic books will be professionals such as accountants, teachers and learners.
4. A group of Ohio University and college libraries struck a deal with Reed Elsevier, the Anglo-Dutch conglomerate, 'to obtain electronic versions of more than 1000 of the most used research journals published by Reed Elsevier, at an annual cost of $6.3 million. OhioLINK prices the cost of the same journals in print from, if subscribed to by all participating libraries, at $46 million'. (Reported in the newsletter, OhioLINK, October 1997, cited in Tomlins 1998: 12.)

Each of the trends poignantly captures what IT has done to publishing. The ramifications and implications of each example are far-reaching, if not colossal. Publishing on the Internet has evoked the images and symbolism of the Wild, Wild, West with its trappings of senses of unlimited possibilities juxtaposed with apocalyptic doom. Karen Hunter (1998:6), describing electronic academic publishing, says:

> It is romantic, challenging and enticing to the adventurous. Opportunities call to both the individual and the corporate entrepreneur. There is territory to be grabbed and with the settlement of that territory, a chance to change the balance of power. It is also much more difficult and dangerous than might be anticipated at the start.

Journal publishing in the North or in the South or in Mars, if we get there, must be seen in a new light; management, production, subscription wise etc. Librarians, that crucial constituency for academic publishers, are become more and more incapable to pay for print journals, even if they are free gifts (Jenkins 1996; Germain 1996). Journals must be online, free or paid for upfront in aggregates. Journal publishers in Africa, already cash-strapped and famished, must start thinking, and seriously too. They might be pulping their print journal issues in the next few years.

Successful scholarship will be further dependent on access to an incredibly gigantic array of literature on the particular discourse being researched on. Most projections, something becoming more impossible in the digital age though, estimate that the bulk of this literature will be online. A researcher without access to the literature will simply cease to exist, intellectually. The rate of online connectivity in Africa and the developing world is still way far behind others (Adam 1999). And when it is available it is controlled by conditions similar to book reading and literacy. Although there is a faint interest from the North to drastically reduce the Internet gap between the developed and the developing worlds (Fleury 1999), the projects are still rather young to judge their effectiveness and whether this interest can cope with the jet-like speed of IT.

The concept of and relationship between author, publisher, and distributor have changed. The publishing industry is being made to rethink its traditional concept of sole effective and efficient purveyor of adding value to a text or piece of information (Mark Bide 2000)[12] Author can be publisher and distributor, while the distributor can now go directly to the author.

One can say that the *New Journal of Physics*' idea of providing knowledge (though quite debatable, you have to have access to a computer and telephone line) free generates exciting possibilities for researchers from the developing world. Copyright (another sorry victim of IT, at least for now) would have blocked access to such material. But when authors have to pay to be published, there is also a kind of segregation of those who are allowed to have a voice. More so when in the West, the fee is likely to be paid for by the physicist's employer or regarded as an investment to recover when that big promotion or job arrives.

Conclusion

Academic publishing in Africa developed to offer an avenue for Africans to contribute their voices to the compendium of human voices, to be part of the richness of humanity and human endeavour. It evolved out of the understanding that we should not expect that others can and should be relied upon to make the utterance on our behalf. They must have to come from us. The book or journal in whatever medium it will be today or tomorrow will represent our voice. The book embodies what Walter Bgoya (1996a) describes as the 'house of the spirits' and the publisher 'the builder of the house of the spirits'.

Scholarship in Africa must think of carving and consolidating niches to survive. Autonomy of research and publication will ensure that there is a continued need, for example, for a librarian to stock our journal. Researchers can afford to ignore African researchers, especially if we are only hollow renditions or mimics of Western scholarship (Prah 1998). The reality is that no journal publisher in Africa today has the clout or the industry network of even small publishers in the North. For the near future, it is likely that it will continue to be more difficult, demanding and tasking to publish in Africa, compared with the North.

Regional co-operation may be a possibility. Latin American and Caribbean countries have paved the way in strategies to swim against the tide in a lopsided world. Knowing the difficulty of disseminating the result of scientific research produced in their countries to the developed world, a network of regional and national resource centres have set up the LATINDEX as a collection of scientific knowledge produced in these countries for interested researchers the world over to access. Its directory and web page provide information on 6,817 scientific journal titles from the region. An effective African directory will be of immense value.

But to accomplish and survive in a constantly tenuous world, strategic planning and cold facts may not be enough. We need a burning commitment to change our environment. In the words of Tade Akin Aina (1998):

> It seems that the time has come for us to reclaim our vision in our politics and economic and social life. Given the changing context, these voices [Africans] demand not only the recognition of the hard truths that have been part of our history and contemporary experience of nation building and social and economic development, but also the difficult challenges that we face in today's globalized world. All of these are of course based on our hope and collective self-confidence in our capacity as peoples and nations to confront difficulties, overcome crises and build a humane future (p.1).

Notes

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
2. However, some scholars in other parts of the world e.g. the UK may insist that this is an American peculiarity and journals exert a greater influence in the social sciences and humanities.
3. Not all journals published in Africa are listed, but most of the active ones are. AJSDC reviews the list yearly, sending renewal forms to publishers and editors. Any publisher in Africa that has received correspondences from AJSDC will testify to their persistence and resilience, they have a knack of bombarding publishers with renewals till they respond.
4. However, the database used did fall short of the time frame in specific periods e.g. gaps in certain issue numbers, for all of the journals in specific periods. We are trying to eliminate the error margin by matching the database with verifications from the physical copies of the journals. This tasking and laborious process is still ongoing.
5. The next stage of this research will involve another crucial variable like the gender of the authors and results of the data control.
6. Less data for 1999.
7. Less data for December 1999.
8. There is evidence from going through what has been published that some of the journals do accept articles not focusing specifically on Africa or 'African studies'. For instance CJAS has a list of articles with particular reference to Canada, e.g. on Quebec and CEA publishes articles on the Caribbean, though some may argue that this still falls within the range of African Studies of the Diaspora.
9. Less data for 1994.
10. A colleague of mine once mocked me for referring to the Internet as a technology. This mockery by the way took place in 1998. The argument is that if we don't refer to the radio today as a technology, we better recognise that Internet today is like a radio set.
11. Discussions at a forum held at the International Centre for Publishing Studies, Oxford Brookes, England, 24 May 2000.
12. Notes from a lecture delivered by Mark Bide at the International Centre for Publishing Studies, Oxford Brookes, England, May 2000.

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